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Dear Comrade,

Welcome to the SWP’s Internal Bulletin 3 for our forthcoming conference. I hope you will read and consider the submissions.

**Take part!**
We want conference to be a democratic event in which comrades can fully participate. Every registered member with an email address on our system receives this and subsequent bulletins by email. But branches should also think about those comrades who do not have email, or require a printed copy.

Printed versions of this bulletin can be ordered from the National Office at £1.50 each (the price rise is due to the size of recent IBs). Email your order to charlie@swp.org.uk or ring 020 7819 1170. Payment needs to be made in advance by card or cheque.

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

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

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

The Central Committee and the Rebuilding the Party faction have agreed a set of rules for speaking times etc at aggregates.

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

This method is democratic, transparent, flexible and open to the input of delegates. It means that the very latest developments and the insights and arguments that appear in the debate can be reflected in the party’s decisions.

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

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

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

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

The deadline for motions has now passed. Motions received are in this bulletin. The procedure for amendments is:

- All amendments must be in two weeks before conference - 9am on Friday 29 November 2013. They must be passed by at least one properly-organised meeting of an SWP branch, or fraction, or district, or aggregate or the NC or the CC. Motions must be circulated well in advance (at least seven days) to allow comrades time to consider them.

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

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

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

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

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

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**Childcare**

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

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

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

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

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

**Access**

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

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

**Charlie Kimber, SWP national secretary**
This is the provisional list of the 82 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. Adam C (Harlow)
2. Amy G (Cambridge)
3. Andrew “Ozzy” O (Cambridge)
4. Angela McC (Glasgow)
5. Anindya B (East London)
6. Anna O (Central London)
7. Barry P (Bradford)
8. Becky G (Portsmouth)
9. Beth G (Merseyside)
10. Brian R (East London)
11. Bunny L (Kent)
12. Candy U (Central London)
13. Carlo M (Dundee)
14. Celia H (Manchester)
15. Chaz S (Walthamstow)
16. Colin W (Hackney)
17. Dan S (Norwich)
18. Dean H (Waltham Forest)
19. Eileen S (East London)
20. Estelle C (South London)
21. Francesca M (West London)
22. Gary McF (North London)
23. Geoff D (Birmingham)
24. Hannah D (Central London)
25. Helen S (Birmingham)
26. Huw W (Bristol)
27. Iain F (Glasgow)
28. Ian A (Manchester)
29. Ian B (Waltham Forest)
30. Jenny S (North London)
32. Jim W (Central London)
33. John C (Ipswich)
34. John McI (East London)
35. John R (Hackney)
36. Jon W (Portsmouth)
37. Jonny J (East London)
38. Kate H (SE London)
39. Keir McK (Glasgow)
40. Laura J (Walthamstow)
41. Lewis N (Brighton)
42. Liz K (Leeds)
43. Liz W (Central London)
44. Mark C (North London)
45. Mark D (SE London)
46. Mark K (Manchester)
47. Margaret W (Glasgow)
48. Marianne O (Cardiff)
49. Martin E (Manchester)
50. Mary P (South London)
51. Maxine B (Sheffield)
52. Megan T (Walthamstow)
53. Mick F (Barnsley)
54. Nahella A (Manchester)
55. Neil McA (Bolton)
56. Niaza A (Manchester)
57. Pat S (Central London)
58. Paul B (Leeds)
59. Paul McGill (East London)
60. Penny G (Edinburgh)
61. Phil T (North London)
62. Phil T (Sheffield)
63. Ray M (North London)
64. Rhetta M (Manchester Central)
65. Rob F (Newham)
66. Rob M (North London)
67. Roddy S (East London)
68. Sabby S (Central London)
69. Sai E (North London)
70. Sasha S (Hackney East)
71. Sally K (Leeds)
72. Shaun D (Hackney)
73. Sheila McG (East London)
74. Simon H (North London)
75. Simon M (Huddersfield)
76. Siobhan H (Walthamstow)
77. Steve W (Edinburgh)
78. Talat A (Edinburgh)
79. Terry S (North London)
80. Tomas T-E (Cardiff)
81. Willie B (Edinburgh)
82. Xanthe W (South London)
This bulletin contains some articles which make accusations about comrades’ alleged behaviour, views and actions. The articles are the responsibility of the authors and publication does not imply agreement by the SWP Central Committee.

A REPLY TO THE FACTION

Central Committee

A tale of two parties

It’s a strange life being an SWP member at the minute. Outside, the class struggle has reached a complex stage. It is dominated by the increasingly pronounced vacillations of the trade union bureaucracy, caught between pressure from their members to begin to reverse an unprecedented squeeze on living standards and their own fear of confrontation with the bosses.

The outcome can be disappointing (the latest decisions of the CWU and NUT leaderships) or plain disastrous (the Grangemouth debacle), and we face difficult strategic and tactical choices.

All the same, there’s plenty happening for us to relate to – as we generally do, with a large degree of success.

Inside, a suffocating and rancorous internal debate is nearing its climax. Many comrades must have glanced through IB2 with an increasing sense of despair at the immense detail and bitterness with which the differences that have developed over the past year are being pursued. They must ask themselves whether or not there is any way out of this private hell.

The Central Committee (CC) is confident that there is.

It has sought, first, to continue to push the party outwards into the struggle, secondly, to bring the internal differences onto the terrain of the political issues that we believe are at play in the crisis, and, thirdly, to address what was legitimate in the grievances around the two complaints against M.

These grievances have of course been used to justify the existence of a permanent faction inside the party since January.

Most recently, in the motion for conference that we circulated in late October we have responded in what we think is the appropriate way to the faction’s demand for an apology to the two complainants, W and X.

Through these steps we believe that we have laid the basis for reuniting the whole party, including the comrades in the faction.

A destructive logic

Regrettably the faction have taken another view. On the one hand, they focus exclusively on the issues surrounding the Disputes Committee (DC) and the need for a ”reckoning” – i.e retribution, embracing the removal of some or all of the present CC. On the other hand, they largely disdain to engage on the political arguments, dismissing the stress placed on movementism, for example, by Charlies Kimber and Alex Callinicos in their two ISJ articles and in our document in IB2, as a cynical ploy.

It is, of course, the comrades’ right to seek to change the leadership. But how can they justify taking up in their latest email to the party a case where a woman expressed online her dissatisfaction with how a complaint she made had been handled by the DC? Her complaint was dealt with informally by the DC, initially when Pat from Euston (now of course a leader of the faction) still chaired the committee. The CC, concerned by what the woman claimed, asked for the DC for a report, which is also being presented to the National Committee. There will of course be a much fuller report on the case at conference. To throw in this case, completely unrelated to those that have caused such controversy, smacks of rank opportunism.

But focusing on the DC and seeking to maximise a sense of moral outrage around the two complaints (and anything else that can, however inappropriately, be swept together with them) is what the faction has been reduced to. As we have pointed out before, this method serves to avoid confronting the considerable political differences that exist within the faction and also to hold the faction together. Sustaining the sense of outrage depends on the creation of what have been called “factoids” – statements that are in fact untrue but that are repeated so often that they come to be accepted as unquestionably true. The traditional media have been responsible for many factoids, but the creation of factoids has been greatly eased by the development of the Internet.

Factoids have played a big role in our present crisis. A small example from IB2. Ian from Enfield writes: “on the present CC not a single member has any significant experience of workplace organisation.” In fact, this is quite untrue. Four of us have helped organise strikes in previous workplaces, two more took part in the public sector strikes of 2011, and (as Ian grudgingly concedes) among the four comrades we are proposing should be added to the CC are two with considerable experience as trade union activists. Yet versions of this factoid are regularly repeated, in order to support the faction’s narrative of a leadership that is out of touch and knows nothing of the “real world”.

A much more important factoid has been at the centre of our present crisis – that the leading organs of the SWP knowingly covered up rape and sexual harassment. This is a lie that we reject with anger and contempt. But its endless repetition by some supporters of the faction and by various hostile elements on the Internet has done the party enormous damage.

The faction in its present form plays fast and loose with this factoid. It formally dissociates itself from the rape apology slanders, but it casts a blind eye at those of its supporters (Dave from Euston, for example) who spread them. Leading representatives of the faction are, furthermore, quite happy to imply that the factoid is true.

A good example is provided by Hannah from Euston in her lengthy, self-justifying article in IB2. This is full of misrepresentations, which reflect the slightly tricky position in which she finds herself. Hannah was involved in the W case from the start in July 2010, but it was only in January this year, after she had been voted off the CC, that she came out in open opposition. How can she explain her previous role and keep the support of those in the faction who believe in the factoid?

The difficulties Hannah gets herself into are clear when she discusses her role, together with Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos, in informally mediating between W and M in July 2010. Apart from a specific falsehood (challenged in IB2), she makes two points. The first is that she thinks in retrospect that the attempt at mediation was “a major mistake” and that DC should have been formally or informally involved from the start. But this is entirely uncontroversial, since her fellow mediators write: “These efforts were made in good faith, but they took place outside the party’s formal structures. This was a recipe for distrust and misunderstanding, and helped to ensure that sides were rapidly taken over the September 2012 complaint.” (Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos, “Can We Move Forward?”, International Socialism 140, http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php?id=932&issue=140)

So, if we’re all agreed on this, what is the point of dividing the party about it? Surely the most important thing is to learn from the mistake, which is the purpose of the report on the review body into disciplinary procedures.

Since this report has received broad support in the party, surely a basis therefore exists for reuniting the party? To avoid these conclusions, Hannah has to fall back on insinuations that a moral atrocity has been committed. She writes of W: “The events she described in 2010 remained consistent with the account she raised later, even if the language she used to describe events changed later.” The implication was that rape was alleged then (Dave from Euston has explicitly made the same claim). But this is quite untrue. Whatever the flaws of the 2010 mediation, the slightest suggestion of rape would have led to the case’s immediate referral to the DC then.

In insisting that no allegation of rape
was made in 2010, we are in no way denying (as some have claimed we do) W’s absolute right to make the complaint of rape that she did in September 2012. We understand that victims often change their view of what has happened to them; this is one reason why the support complainants receive from party bodies is so important. As the DC has explained, this understanding informed their approach to W’s complaint. But the fact remains there was no cover up of rape allegations in 2010, or indeed subsequently.

Suggesting otherwise makes it harder to arrive at any political resolution. Accusing the leadership of the kind of moral atrocity that the faction implies took place means that anything short of total victory is unacceptable. If the party really were rotten enough to cover up rape, then nothing short of root-and-branch reform would do.

If that is rejected, what is left but exit? The faction has consistently sought to justify its existence by saying that it is keeping people from resigning. But the strategy it has chosen to pursue, and indeed to radicalise makes it likely that many of its supporters will leave after conference. Since the party is not the corrupt institution that the faction likes to insinuate it is, the danger is that what remains the most important organization on the British revolutionary left will lose more valuable comrades.

Is the Central Committee divided?

The faction has also claimed, with increasing stridency, that the CC is concealing major divisions within its own ranks. Thus Jonathan from Oxford makes a series of personal accusations against individual CC members that he announces that he “knows” and that other CC members “know”.

It is embarrassing to see a comrade of Jonathan’s standing and experience reduced to retailing grossly inaccurate gossip. When challenged to substantiate his claims, he has defended himself as an “investigative journalist”. But he seems to have forgotten Bernstein and Woodward didn’t uncover the Watergate scandal by uncritically passing on hearsay.

The faction itself offers a more general version of the same strategy. Witness its email of 27 October:

The CC has been divided all year, with hardline supporters of the former national secretary opposing attempts to promptly hear the second complaint or fix the problems with our disputes procedures ... a secret faction on the leadership presses ever harder in a sectarian direction, while the remainder of the CC vacillates.

We reject these claims. Let’s examine them step by step. First of all, what about the “hardline supporters of the former national secretary”? There are some SWP members who feel strongly that M has been victimised and who, for example, criticise the steps that the CC took to ensure the second complaint was heard. They are entitled to their opinion and to argue for it in the preconference and conference discussions.

But there is no evidence that many comrades are motivated by such an attitude in the stance they take in the current debates inside the party. In any case, the CC has, from the very beginning of this crisis, set its face against defending any individual for their own sake.

Then there is assertion that the alleged divisions on the CC express the influence of a larger sectarian tendency inside the party. Hannah, for example, cites the “Statement for Our Revolutionary Party” signed by a number of comrades and published in IB1 as the work of “a sectarian and conservapedia rump intent on driving anyone who raises criticisms of [the] dispute out of the organisation”.

Notice that Hannah, like the rest of the faction, is redefining sectarianism. In the Marxist tradition, sectarianism has always been understood about the relationship (or lack of relationship) between a revolutionary organisation and the broader working-class movement.

For example, Marx wrote: “The sect seeks its raison d’être and its point d’honneur not in what it has in common with the class movement, but in the particular shibboleth distinguishing it from that movement.”

Is there any evidence of the SWP becoming a sect in this sense? Of course, there is a danger in a crisis such as the present one – particularly because of the public attacks on the party – that we might retreat into the bunker. Moreover, the intense and debilitating polarisation in some districts can have an internalising effect on all concerned.

But the truth is that we haven’t as a party moved in a sectarian direction. This is thanks in part to the strong counter-pressure exerted by the much-reviled CC, but much more fundamentally because of comrades’ strong workplace and community roots and of the strong interventionist tradition of the SWP. The party has continued to steer outwards – notably around the national and local People’s Assemblies but also in the various industrial disputes that have been happening. In Unite against Fascism we continue to work with people considerably to our right – something that has come under public attack from some elements of the faction.

So why does Hannah think the comrades she is attacking are “sectarian”? The answer is that the comrades who signed the “Statement for Our Revolutionary Party” think the CC hasn’t been, as they put it, sufficiently “resolute” in dealing with the faction. This has, in the main, nothing to do with these comrades’ views on the two complaints, but reflects the fact they oppose permanent factionalism and detest the way in which the faction have been flagrantly breaching the rules of democratic centralism.

It also has nothing to do with how the comrades concerned relate the wider movement. Most holding this opinion have excellent records as activists in their workplaces and communities. It is characteristically self-serving of the faction to make hostility to them the litmus test of sectarianism.

In any case, far from giving way to the pressures to take disciplinary action against the faction, which were particularly intense around Marxism 2013, the CC has sought to solve the differences inside the party through political debate and the reform of our disciplinary procedures. There has been no significant disagreement among us over this strategy. But we also all agree with the large majority of the party that the present situation of permanent factionalism is intolerable. It cannot be allowed to continue after conference.

So have there been disagreements and arguments within the CC? Of course there have. It would beggar belief if, in the face of an intense and severe pressure, the leadership hadn’t differed among themselves. Have we, as the faction claims, been concealing important disagreements? Not only have we not, but, when the divisions became unmanageable in the leadup to the January 2013 conference, we took them to the party.

Hannah, in her Walter Mitty account of her role in the development of the crisis, claims that she “fought alongside a minority of CC members to convince the CC to steer a different course”. The facts are rather different. After announcing when the DC reported on the first complaint that she did not support the report, she remained largely silent on the subject for the subsequent two months. Along with the other two ex-CC members now in the faction she supported the expulsion of the so-called “Facebook Four” (ex-fulltimers who organised a secret faction) and agreed that it would be impossible to allow W to address conference.

As Hannah tacitly conceded, it was the then majority of the CC who decided to force the larger differences into the open at the beginning of January by adopting the CC’s statement “For an Interventionist Party” and, when the minority opposed it, moving a different slate for the CC. If Hannah had had her way, we would have carried on papering over the cracks.

Since the January 2013 conference the CC has faced a series of difficult decisions that have required intensive analysis and discussion. In arguing through these decisions, we have always arrived at a conclusion around which we have been able to unite. Much hearsay has gathered around the decision to ensure the second complaint, by X. The problem that we confronted here was that the controversy over the first complaint had left the entire disputes process badly damaged, with its legitimacy rejected by a significant section of the party.

X herself at the January conference announced her intention of waiting till the DC had been reformed till making a formal
IMMIGRATION: RESISTING THE SCAPEGOATING
Central Committee

Immigration is today one of the central issues in British politics.

The tone of the mainstream political discussion is summed up by home secretary Theresa May who described the government’s proposed Immigration Bill, currently being rushed through parliament, as an attempt to create a “hostile environment” for so-called “illegal” migrants.

The bill will significantly undermine the right to appeal of those facing deportation, effectively remove the “right to family life” from British law, fine landlords who do not check the immigration status of potential tenants £3,000, and force staff at the DVLA and banks to act as border guards towards customers. The effect will not simply be to cause greater hardship among migrants; it will also raise the level of racism across society.

Facing widespread disquiet over austerity the coalition government has every interest in scapegoating the most vulnerable. In doing so, they are able to take advantage of a climate of establishment racism that had built up over recent years, reflected in a series of attacks on multiculturalism by David Cameron and others, the rise in Islamophobia that accompanied the “war on terror”, and the persistent scare stories about asylum seekers and immigrants from the much of the media.

The rise of UKIP, which has in recent years consistently campaigned to win votes by attacking immigration, has put further pressure on the political establishment from the right. This pressure is likely to intensify in the run-up to the European Elections in spring 2014.

The Labour Party’s official response has been miserable. Labour’s shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, argued that the Immigration Bill, though containing measures that Labour welcomed, did not go far enough in preventing immigrants undercutting British workers’ wages. Ed Miliband insists that his party’s supposed “softness” on immigration explains its defeat in the most recent general election. In his cabinet reshuffle, along with removing various Blairite MPs, accompanied by a rhetorical shift to the left on social issues such as housing and energy bills, he also removed Diane Abbott, the most high profile critic of attacks on immigrants in the shadow cabinet.

Just 18 MPs voted against the Immigration Bill at its second reading, with Labour’s official position being to abstain.
The national response

Three broad initiatives that we are involved in will challenge the political consensus over immigration.

The one likely to galvanise the broadest support is the national Stand Up To Racism demonstration set for 22 March 2014, which will be supported by MPs including Diane Abbott, the trade union movement and various anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations, including Unite Against Fascism which played a key role in pulling the various organisations together.

The demonstration is the result of a call for a Europe-wide day of protest by the Greek anti-fascist coalition Keerfa for protests against fascism, racism and attacks on migrants. It falls on the weekend of UN International Day Against Racial Discrimination and will take place exactly two months before the European elections.

The protest is called around very broad slogans: opposing fascism, xenophobia, attacks on immigrants and racism more generally. A large mobilisation will help to bolster the anti-racist forces in the run-up to the European elections and will provide an antidote to the barrage of anti-migrant rhetoric likely to accompany them. Every district should organise to attend and bring people to the demonstration. We must make this a key priority for the left nationally in 2014.

The second initiative is the Movement Against Xenophobia (MAX) campaign. This has so far drawn together 68 pro-immigrant organisations, including many of the main NGOs and charities, including the Joint Council for Welfare of Immigrants, Migrant Rights Network, Refugee Action, and so on, some trade unions and other migrant advocacy organisations. The SWP supports it and sits on its steering committee. MAX has focussed on opposing the immigration bill, for instance by organising a demonstration on the morning of the bill’s second reading in parliament and by lobbying MPs to vote against it. It has also produced useful information challenging the bill and rebutting some of the myths on immigration.

In the coming months it will also campaign around the European elections and will probably hold a conference in early 2014. It will join the 22 March mobilisation. Comrades who are involved in local campaigns around immigration should ensure they are affiliated to MAX and we should support its initiatives. We should also ensure that trade union branches affiliate.

The third initiative is the Stand Up To UKIP campaign. Because UKIP is not a fascist organisation, even if it might happen to attract individual fascists, it cannot be confronted in the same way as the street mobilisations of the English Defence League or even the electoral campaigns of Eurofascist type organisations such as the British National Party. We do not, for example, no-platform UKIP. Nonetheless, many trade unionists, anti-racists and others are appalled by the rise of this virulently right-wing organisation. Stand Up To UKIP will provide material challenging the policies of UKIP, hold meetings in key areas and will provide a framework for those wanting to oppose it.

These three campaigns are broad initiatives that every member of the party should know about, be involved in and raise with those they work alongside. Needless to say, Unite Against Fascism, which we wrote about in a previous bulletin, remains central to challenging the EDL and British National Party, or any new fascist organisations that emerge in the coming period.

Austerity campaigning and the unions

There are other areas where we need to raise the issue of immigration. The first is in existing campaigns over austerity, including meetings of the People’s Assembly, anti-Bedroom Tax campaigns and meetings of bodies such as Unite the Resistance. Every time there is such a gathering we should ensure that there is a comrade prepared to raise the question of immigration, either from the platform or from the floor, and explain why it is tied up with the battle over austerity. We cannot assume that those fighting over issues such as the Bedroom Tax agree with us over scapegoating.

Second, we have to raise this question in the trade unions. We cannot take for granted that the unions will always have the correct position. Witness the arguments over slogans such as “British jobs for British workers” over recent years.

We have to be pro-active in fighting for a pro-immigrant stance in the unions, including fighting for the unions to organise migrant workers and to reject divisive slogans. In every union we should be moving union motions to defend immigrants and to support the broad initiatives outlined above.

We should also encourage them to produce material setting out the facts on immigration. Comrades in Cambridgeshire took an excellent initiative through their trades council, voting to produce a factsheet distributed to trade union members undermining the arguments that migrants take jobs or undermine services. At the national meeting of trades councils earlier this year, producing such material was voted through as policy. We should replicate this in other areas.

The Party’s response

Alongside the broad campaigns, we should also ensure that the party’s politics on this issue are out in the open. We are part of a small minority on the left prepared to put forwards a hard and principled position on immigration and against border controls.

In recent years we have produced two editions of Charlie Kimber’s pamphlet on immigration making these arguments and providing readers with the basic arguments on immigration to counter the myths. We regularly run articles in our publications along similar lines. There is an audience for these ideas. Each time we do a petition on immigrants, though we might face opposition, we also discover people who are overjoyed to see an organisation articulating things that few dare to say in the current climate.

In addition, there will be particular attacks that we have to be able to respond to. Over the summer the government launched a crackdown on immigration.

In the course of weeks, vans were sent around areas of London bearing the slogan “Go home or face arrest” and, in various parts of the country, police and Border Agency staff racially profiled and harassed people at transport hubs. There will be further attacks of this kinds and we have to respond quickly.

When a UK Border Agency vehicle made the mistake of parking outside a meeting of Southall Black Sisters, a well-known anti-racist group in London, members of the organisation chased the Border Agency staff around the area in a magnificent impromptu protest. The SWP also played a role in responding. After police were found harassing people at a station in the London borough of Waltham Forest, comrades used their network around Unite Against Fascism to prepare a response if the Border Agency returned to their local station.

In Glasgow, when an activist photographed “Go home or face arrest” posters in the Border Agency office, comrades rapidly helped organise a protest outside. A few weeks later the government announced that it would not be extending this scheme to other offices. In 2014, every branch of the SWP must have a plan in place to respond to situations like these.

Knowing the territory

In order to do this effectively, we have to know, in each area, what local campaigns exist around immigration and asylum.

Often there will be campaigns explicitly around immigration detention or around deportation of refugees. In addition, religious organisations now play a centrally important front-line role.

When people arrive in Britain they often seek out community organisations, including churches and similar institutions. It is also quite common for such organisations to provide for refugees rendered destitute by the changes in immigration law.

The SWP cannot do large-scale support work or legal representation for refugees as we have neither the resources nor the expertise.

But comrades need to know who they can talk to about this issue on the ground. And when there are refugees who are prepared to work with us over deportations
or detention, to fight these in an open and political manner, we should certainly be involved in such campaigns.

Such struggles are important in giving a human face to the issues and often galvanise widespread support from communities. We should also continue to organising campaigns where private companies such as G4S and Serco are involved in the detention and deportation of refugees.

Finally, each district should send at least one member to the meetings of the party’s Asylum and Immigration Fraction, which has, over the past couple of years, sought to strengthen and coordinate some of our activity in this area. This cannot be seen as an optional extra. Every district must now have a strategy around anti-racism and opposition to scapegoating.

PUTTING OUR MESSAGE ACROSS
Central Committee

The party’s publications are a vital part of presenting its politics, winning people to the SWP and developing a correct analysis of the world. They are also one of the forums for debate and discussion inside the party.

Socialist Worker
The paper is our most important publication and plays a crucial role in the party. It is vital for members but also for connecting with layers of workers, students, activists and campaigners outside the party. There is no substitute for a revolutionary newspaper and how we use it as an organiser.

Selling Socialist Worker, whether at work or college or to fellow activists in campaigns, is a way of identifying those around us who can be won to our politics. They might buy the paper on one issue, say an anti-Tory front page, but then will read about defending migrants or the Arab revolutions. One teacher in London has increased her sale at work by five copies after selling to new people on the basis of the Black History month features, which they used in their classes. They enjoyed the paper as a whole so much they now want it every week.

The article by Sadie (Socialist Worker and Southwark) in IB2 is well worth re-reading for its clear explanation of the paper’s role.

During the last year the paper has consistently provided material to educate, organise and give confidence to those fighting austerity. It has agitated against racism and fascism (particularly in the period after the killing of Lee Rigby) and built for the 29 September demonstration in Manchester. The strikes and protests it covers give workers in struggle a voice in the paper. For example the Hovis strikers loved the centre page spread on their working lives and their dispute against zero hours and agency contracts.

It doesn’t simply give the latest news on worker’s struggles but offers a way forward in the fight — debating the strategy of the union leaders and campaigning for rank and file organisation. The paper campaigned for Jerry Hicks for Unite general secretary, agitated and organised against the bedroom tax, highlighted the sell-off of Royal Mail, brought exclusive news and opinion from Egypt, South Africa, Greece and other countries — and much more.

Socialist Worker has been there at the start of stories that can run for years whether it’s justice for Stephen Lawrence or the blacklisting scandal. Socialist Worker was first to break the detailed story of how the Marikana miners were murdered by police last year, now new evidence and the ongoing enquiry entirely confirm that exclusive.

This year even the Tories had to accept the significance of the unsolved murder of private investigator Daniel Morgan in 1987, a case Socialist Worker has highlighted for some years as central to the issue of police and press corruption. Theresa May has finally announced the appointment of an independent panel to look into the case and the investigation.

The new Socialist Worker website launched earlier this year has had a great reception. It has been designed to be responsive to whatever device it’s being read on so is much more accessible for those who read it on mobiles or tablets. There is greater flexibility for using photos and video clips that people send in from disputes and campaigns.

If Socialist Worker did not exist it would leave a big gap for the whole movement. For example, the response to Margaret Thatcher’s death was excellent and welcomed by many people outside the SWP as well as by the members. The front page went viral online and the sales that week soared. Even the mainstream press had to recognise its impact with the Independent newspaper featuring a page on the Thatcher issue and what the paper stands for.

The task now is to boost the sales. That’s not easy. We live in a world of rolling television coverage, internet news and opinion, blogs and free newspapers. It’s not automatic that someone who becomes active in their union or a campaign or as a student will start reading and buying a left-wing newspaper.

We have to fight to sell the paper and to win regular readers.

The street sales will continue to be our campaigning showcase in any area, but consistent sales to individuals that lead towards activity and recruitment are very important.

The branch leadership should carefully discuss with each comrade (and with each other!) how to push sales, and there should be regular reports to the branch on progress.

As we wrote in IB2, “Socialist Worker is central to our political engagement and intervention. We need to make a serious push around it. In the New Year we will be asking every branch to do a stocktake of where it sells and what chances there are for new sales. We want every member to ask themselves how they can sell one or two more papers a week... we also want our members to be selling the paper in their workplace. Each branch must use the paper to build up a periphery of people they relate to in their local area and we need to ensure that every member of the SWP has copies of SW to sell. We want to use SW to help root us more deeply in the working class.

“Selling Socialist Worker can help locate the best militants, those people who want to fight and are most sympathetic to our arguments. Reading Socialist Worker regularly can help draw many more people into a closer relationship with the SWP.”

The branch paper organiser is a vital post. We will hold a national meeting for paper organisers early in 2014.

Socialist Review
Socialist Review has maintained a very high standard throughout the year, zeroing in on key issues, featuring standout articles, and also providing a forum for debate.

The recent article by Yasser Munif on Manjib in Syria provided exclusive information about the reality of Syria today and the challenges facing revolutionaries. It was picked up in several other countries as a genuine contribution to the debates about the way forward. Earlier in the year there were key articles on Egypt, Turkey and domestic questions such as Thatcher’s legacy, the People’s Assembly and the state of the trade union struggle.

The feature about Maxine Peake and Shelley’s Masque of Anarchy was one example of how articles can mix culture and politics.

It has carried a series of debates on issues such as Leninism, and pop-up unions.

We should continue to encourage every comrade to read the Review and make sure each new issue is discussed politically in the branch meeting. There may be particular individuals we can think of who can be approached about particular articles in order to get them buying the Review.

International Socialism journal
The article by Camilla from the journal in this IB is a very useful report and guide to the journal’s work. There is no need to repeat it here. As well as providing crucial analysis and theoretical discussion, the
journal has recently been the most important public forum for debate about issues in the movement and inside the party. We believe this outward-looking orientation should continue.

**Online discussion and debate**

This year we have had several articles on the International Socialism website that are extensions to, or replies to, articles in the print edition. The review has also carried debates. Of course the main forums for debate in the party should be at our meetings, our publications, our national committee and party councils, our internal bulletins and conference. We believe discussion works best when it involves comrades listening to each other and learning from one another’s experiences.

The internet has opened up new possibilities for serious debate. But at the same time many comrades will rightly feel that the experience of the last year has left them anxious about how such debate unfolds. We certainly don’t want to produce a forum that is unaccountable and divisive.

We believe there should be an SW Debate area on the SWP website where people who want to reply to articles in our publications or raise important theoretical issues should be able to do so. For example, if comrades wanted to reply to, or add to, the recent discussion in the review between Mark Thomas and Ed Rooksby on left strategy, there is no reason why they should not do so online.

This is a fairly modest aim: it’s not a proposal for an “SWP Facebook” or for a free for all. It would not be a place for 50 word comments or jibes about other people. The site would be moderated, and it would be a space for serious discussion and responses to articles. In some cases the moderator might refer submissions to the relevant publications who could decide to print them.

We should discuss this so we make sure that any such debate forum genuinely enhances our work.

**SWSS meetings: ideological poles of attraction**

SWSS meetings as ideological poles of attraction have proved very successful. In places like Sussex University and Glasgow meetings on topics from Malcolm X to Fracking, Syria to Immigration and fighting racism, have regularly attracted between 30-40 students, and often more. Glasgow’s meeting on “Sexism and Raunch Culture” drew over 45 students.

Titles such as “What could a socialist revolution look like?” and “How has the working class changed?” have also proved popular. In most places at least 10 to 20 students are attending SWSS meetings each week.

And the discussions have been fantastic. Meetings have been vibrant and fast paced as students ask questions, put forward their own views and come back on others. The issues addressed are not abstract. The meeting at Sussex Uni on “Malcolm X and the fight against racism” with Weyman Bennett ended up with a sharp debate about strategy in the anti fascist movement. Students who had been arrested at the Tower Hamlets anti EDL demo wanted to discuss how best to fight fascism; what do we mean by mass mobilisations? Are these more militant than a small minority breaking off? Everyone, including the speaker, has come away from pretty much every SWSS meeting buzzing, stimulated by the discussion, having had some questions answers and others prompting more debate after in the bar or café.

From these meetings we have been able to recruit to the SWP and build up a core of students who are working with us on campus. At Glasgow uni, comrades built the local say it loud meeting in the district, bringing many students and recruiting 5 to the SWP.

We need to continue this strategy by continuing to plan in meetings. The audience is there but to build a successful meeting means posterering all over campus, holding SWSS campaigning stalls, emailing, texting and calling contacts. We have to both continue to push out when building the meetings as each title will attract new and different students but at the same time recruit and develop a core who see SWSS as their society and the SWP as their party. As part of this process we aim to hold a student mini Marxism event sometime after Christmas.

**Building the resistance**

As we said in IB1 the impact of neoliberalism on campuses continues to shape the experience on campus, but is not generalised. Often it takes the form of local campaigns against the effects of privatisation and corporatisation. There have been some fantastic campaigns in response.

The anti privatisation campaign at Sussex Uni has continued from last year with big campaign meetings and rallies and protests. Involvement in this has meant that comrades have drawn a large periphery around them. At Manchester Uni a campaign has been launched against the corporate re development of part of the campus resulting in the closure of the very popular veggie café there. At Teeside Uni, comrades are involved in trying to launch a campaign to stop cuts to childcare for lecturers and postgrads.

The strike by UCU, Unison and Unite members in HE gave a real focus for students to both support the action but also build wider action. Although strikes in HE have the potential to divide students from lecturers and university workers, by arguing that the strikes are about defence of education students were able to win support from many others.

In advance of the strike SWSS used the statement agreed with a number of NUS members to build support by getting signatures. Many posted on FB photos from meetings with support placards.

At Sussex Uni the anti privatisation campaign group took up building support for the strike. They organised an outdoor rally two days before the strike at which members of UCU, Unison and Unite all came to speak to students. This was followed by a march round campus that ended up with an Emergency General Meeting of 180 students where sup-
port for the strike was voted on. The next day students occupied a building in support of the strike, stayed overnight and came out to join the picket lines en masse. There were occupations at a number of other universities. At other places students joined picket lines, took SWSS members along and attended strike rallies.

With another two days of strike action likely to be announced, SWSS groups need to plan for how to build support. From organising joint union campaign meetings, to rallies on the day, from more occupations to going en masse to picket lines, each SWSS group needs to plan how to push out and involve more students.

At the same time we need to be keeping aware of any potential campaigns on each different campus.

The Student Assembly against Austerity

This initiative followed from the very successful Peoples Assembly movement and drew a respectable 150 students from over 50 different institutions. It drew together many different left organisations on campus.

From the student office we argued against a sectarian approach to the student assembly, SWSS members helped build the Assembly and a number of comrades spoke from the platform in the workshops.

In addition student comrades were part of the discussion in each work shop about the way forward for campaigns such as anti racism and against cuts to education. There are plans for future assemblies and a day of action called over the privatisation of the student loan book on Nov 20th. We will continue to build student assembly initiatives.

Unite Against Fascism

We have laid the basis for a good number of UAF University groups and many SWSS and UAF members attended the recent successful trip to Auschwitz.

Many of them raised money to attend and will be doing report back meetings. Some of these have been sponsored by Uni departments and student unions. The NUS black students officer and other sabbaticals also attended the trip.

Another trip to Auschwitz is being planned for the spring term. We will continue to build UAF and the fight against racism on the campuses including the 22 March demonstration against racist scapegoating, the campaign to Stand up to UKIP and LMHR gigs in this and the next term.

Nothing is automatic. We will have to continue to prioritise and put resources into our student work, in order to rebuild on campuses across the country. However, our approach so far proves it is possible to win students if we approach building SWSS and the SWP in a highly ideological and political, but non sectarian way.

REVOLUTION AND COUNTER REVOLUTION

Central Committee

1. Introduction

The Arab revolutions look very different today to the early weeks of 2011 when mass protests and workers’ strikes brought down the dictators of decades in only days.

Now a military appointed government rules in Egypt which for the moment appears to enjoy popular support. It has overseen massacres of over 1,000 protestors since it took power after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood president Mohammed Mursi on 3 July this year.

The state clampdown and setbacks for the revolution since 3 July include new laws against protests, military arrests of civilians and draconian controls including a curfew which has made revolutionary Cairo a ghost city after 9pm.

Elsewhere popular revolt appears stalled. In Syria President Assad’s regime remains entrenched and the struggle to bring it down has descended into a bloody conflict in which over 100,000 have been killed and over 2 million have become refugees. Aid agencies estimate that as many as 9 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian aid. The deprivation and suffering is symbolised by the return of polio among children although it had been eradicated in the country 14 years ago.

All these developments shows the importance of our understanding of revolution as a process, not an event. This process can see retreats and bitter defeats as well as advances. It is not simply a series of incremental changes ever onwards and upwards until socialism.

2. Egypt

During the 18 days that brought down Hosni Mubarak the Financial Times looked at the scale of the international impact a revolution in the country would have written, “Egypt matters”. And Egypt does matter, not just because of its size—the population is over 80 million—it holds the greatest political, economic and cultural influence in the region.

In a sign of just how dramatic events have been today two Egyptian presidents, Mubarak and Morsi, are in prison. Mursi was toppled in July this year after only one year in office after the first legal elections.

The old allies of Mubarak in the west had shown they were willing to work with Mursi. They saw the Brotherhood’s leadership dominated by businessmen dedicated to the neo liberal project, and Mursi showed he was committed to cooperating with the west on international treaties, most importantly on Israel. The US decided he was a face of the revolution they should cultivate and so military funding continued through Mursi’s rule.

This position fed into Western media coverage which referred to Morsi’s toppling as simply a military coup. But such an analysis of what happened this year ignores the contradictions that produced the current military regime.

On 30 June, the anniversary of Mursi’s election, 17 million took to the streets demanding his down fall. Led by a new coalition “Rebel”, which began with a petition drive, it may have been the biggest single protest in world history. It brought out people who had not yet been involved in the revolutionary process and showed the potential for the revolution to widen and deepen.

Mursi’s position was untenable and he fell and the military moved fast to appoint its own new government. The tragedy was that there was not a strong enough organisation of revolutionary forces that could offer an alternative to Morsi and the military. In fact it is now clear that in the days before the demonstrations state forces had already begun a process of hijacking the mass movement so as to facilitate their capture of power. Remnants of the old regime, “feloul”, were also found to have mobilised around the petition campaign to harness popular dissatisfaction with Mursi to pursue their own project to gain back control.

The military then posed themselves as the saviours of the revolution claiming they were taking it back from the grip of the now hated Mursi and Brotherhood. This has so far been successful at diverting the immense power of the masses from continuing a revolt that might have gone further than merely deposing Mursi to winning more fundamental change.

As the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) put in a statement to its members after 3 July, “The primary goal of the military was return of the millions who filled and controlled the streets to their homes in the shortest time possible, and to stop the movement at the limit of overthrowing the head of the regime and getting rid of him.”

So the military take over cannot be judged as a coup without reference to the social revolt against Mursi’s rule that made it possible. The military did not defeat or crush the revolt, for the moment they have managed to co-opt it. And this social revolt was not simply the 30 June protests, these were the culmination of months of rising struggle which terrified those trying to limit the gains of the revolution.

Mursi certainly didn’t deliver for ordinary people. But he also didn’t deliver social peace for a ruling class intent on seizing back the initiative.

The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights and Democracy Index Report Centre for International Development. May 2013 stated that during “The five months preceding June 30 Egypt witnessed the largest level of protests and strikes across
the globe. In these five months Egypt saw more strikes and protests than in the whole of 2012 despite that year witnessing more protests that the entire previous decade."

The slogan the masses used against Mubarak, “The people demand the downfall of the regime” was used on the streets against Mursi. This level of bitterness against Mursi and the Brotherhood meant that there were few protests against the subsequent brutal clampdown of their supporters.

Liberal and even some of the left have come behind the army and its crackdown on the Brotherhood. The liberal National Salvation Front (NSF) alliance said after one attack on a Brotherhood protest, “Today Egypt raised its head up high… The National Salvation Front salutes the police and army forces.”

The RS have stood out in opposition to the military’s repression while maintaining their rejection of Mursi. They along with a minority of other revolutionary forces who have the same position, including the 6 April movement, have come together to form a united front, the Revolutionary Front (RF).

This has organised protests against the army and is a way of pulling together those who have no illusions in the army representing the interest of the revolution and want to see the struggle continue.

The strength of the Egyptian revolution has been the critical role played by the organised working class. The military chiefs recognise the danger posed by the growing workers’ movement to their rule. Their strategy of containment and cooptation of the revolution led them to bring in to government an independent trade union leader, Kamal Abu Aita, as labour minister.

They wanted to give the impression that they took the concerns of workers seriously while hoping to use him to stunt and hold back workers’ struggles. Sadly Kamal Abu Aita has acted just as they hoped. He has issued declarations that workers should not strike to allow “national reconstruction”.

But this appointment has not placated everyone, nor are the new labour minister’s entreaties always accepted by workers who expect to see their demands addressed. As Socialist Worker reported last month a textile worker articulated this on a demonstration against the military government’s clampdown on protests when he said “Kamal Abu Aita is the one who taught us how to organise a protest outside the labour ministry. Now he is acting exactly like those in the office before him. He is denouncing all of us who want to fight.”

The rising living costs, harsh working conditions and low wages remain a driver for future struggles. Public sector workers have been promised the minimum wage per month will rise from 700 to 1,200 Egyptian pounds in January (£63 to £108). This will still leave millions working and living on a lot less. The military may have won the latest battle to portray themselves as the true face of the revolution working for the interests of the Egyptian masses, but the real material problems that were an important ingredient of the revolution for “bread, freedom and social justice” remain unsolved.

3. Syria

The revolution in Syria has generated much debate on the left in Britain. Some who saw the regime of Bashar al Assad as an anti-imperialist force in the region have been critical of the revolt for playing into hands of western interests by fighting the bring Assad down.

As Syrian revolutionaries, both in SWP publications and at Marxism 2013, have pointed out it is a mistake to look at the struggle in Syria simply through the prism of geopolitics. It originated and was driven by the same social demands and aspirations as the other Arab revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

Assad’s success at hanging onto power and the sheer brutality of his response to the revolt has led to it becoming a bloody drawn out conflict which appears to have little connection to the mass protests with which it began. And of course the West has a very real interest in every revolt in the region and has looked for ways to reassert its influence where and whenever it can.

Inside Syria today the multiple expressions and organisations of opposition to Assad show very different faces of the revolution. Military groups said to be allied to Al Qaeda are growing in strength, at the same time the Free Syrian Army fighters who are part of popular resistance and grew out of defence of their communities against the state’s violence continue to resist.

Those Syrian representatives who work with the west at the numerous summits, are in the main cut off from the day to day privations and struggles of the revolution. They, alongside the west, want to have a regime that replaces Assad that will not fundamentally challenge the status quo.

The contradictions of the West’s position were exposed when the Assad regime was accused of using chemical weapons. The proposal to intervene militarily in Syria was, as ever, spun as a humanitarian intervention to defend Syrian citizens.

The prospect of a new war faced immediate popular opposition. In Britain the Stop the War Coalition protests reflected the depth and strength of anti war sentiment, the fruit of years of organising and campaigning against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Also the experience of intervention in Libya and the aftermath of instability and violence it left meant that it couldn’t be used as evidence of a successful intervention.

Many also see through the hypocrisy of Western politicians purporting to be intervening on the side of people fighting for freedom and democracy while at the same time supporting the tyrants of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

David Cameron lost the vote to attack Syria in parliament and was stunned. His defeat had an immediate impact. Barack Obama decided he would need to go to Congress to win backing for military intervention. But despite an all out campaign to win backing for military intervention there was a real danger he would be defeated.

The US ruling class faced a dilemma. They never wanted to get embroiled in another Middle East war that might not be easier to extricate themselves from. They talked tough on Syria but held back from action. But at the same time Obama had made the use of chemical weapons “a red line” so not to respond would make the US look weak on the international stage. If you want to maintain your role as global bully you occasionally have to deliver on your threats.

In the end the US was saved by the intervention of Assad’s ally Russia with a plan to engage Assad in a program to rid Syria of chemical weapons. This face-saver meant that Obama did not have to launch an unpopular war and override a possible vote against war in congress, yet it could still be spun as keeping Assad in check.

Whatever the machinations at the international meetings or in Western governments millions of Syrians are paying a heavy price for the resilience of Assad’s regime in the face of nearly three years of revolt.

4. Role of state

One stark lesson has been played out in these events, that it that revolutionaries cannot simply lay hold of state apparatus whose ultimate purpose is to maintain the power of the ruling class.

The Muslim Brotherhood suffered decades of repression, torture and imprisonment at the hands of the Mubarak state. When they finally had their moment in power they used those same forces against their opponents to try and crush the very revolution that had brought him to power. Now they are once again the victims of that same state as it openly reasserts its control.

Many Egyptians say they did not make a revolution just to have another dictatorial regime in power with different faces. Now in some cases they are even the same faces. Several old Mubarak ministers form the current government. There is no hiding the fact that this is the old state fighting to legitimise taking back control of Egyptian society.

The state apparatus in Egypt wasn’t broken by the 18 days, or even the last three years. It is described as a vast spider’s web with its reach into every part of Egyptian society. Unusually the army even has outright financial interests, controlling around 40 percent of the economy.

The welcome new regime got from...
the dictators of the Gulf shows they see it as retribution by elements of the old order. They have promised to fund the regime if the IMF and EU don’t deliver loans that the Mursi government had been trying to arrange.

The RS has pointed out that the extent of liberal support for the military regime has even extended to the Gulf state’s support for it. “The Nasserist and head of the Egyptian Popular Current, Hamdeen Sabbahy, praised Saudi’s role as the provider and confirmed his support of the regime’s actions against protesters. On his private Twitter account Sabbahy wrote ‘A salute to the stance taken by Saudi and the Emirates in support of Egypt.’”

“This King, this arch-enemy of the Egyptian revolution, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Washington and Tel Aviv became a hero in these people’s eyes!”

The health of the economy is still a major factor. The IMF had demanded austerity and cuts in food and fuel subsidies in return for loans. Mursi announced such cuts a year ago and retracted them almost immediately. He was fearful of the social upheaval such attacks would cause from millions of impoverished Egyptians.

But this meant he left the problem of Egypt’s collapsing economy unsolved. Each year the foreign currency reserves have become ever more depleted, money that is used to import amongst other things basic foodstuffs.

Neither the IMF or the Gulf ruling elites care about the price of bread for the Egyptian poor. They are only interested in protecting the wealth and power of the ruling elites even if they use the rhetoric of freedom and democracy.

5. Democracy
Since January 2011 millions have been involved in struggles on a scale they could never have imagined just months before. They have learned lessons, they have seen the Scaf military government, taken part in their first legal elections and thrown out the elected president because he didn’t deliver.

This shows a higher form of political consciousness than those who fetishise elections and denounce the Egyptian masses for not being able to make “democracy” work. In reality when the revolution mobilising millions of people in their own interests it is the height of democracy.

Even in what are dark days for the revolution in Egypt the dynamic of this struggle is not frozen, the military has enjoyed popular support before and lost it. The potential for future struggles remains, people have tasted freedom and have high hopes about what their future can be.

International solidarity has a role to play. The Mena Solidarity campaign has made important links between trade unionists and workers in Britain and Egypt and other countries in the region—the PCS, UCU and NUT are national affiliates. The campaign is both a way of raising the profile of Arab workers’ struggles in the labour movement here in Britain but showing all those who resist that they have support internationally. A model motion and affiliation details are on the website. MENA shows its importance in mobilising solidarity when Haitham Mohamiedain was seized by the military.

There is also the danger of further repression against revolutionaries who have led in struggles if the army deepens their offensive. Comrades need to be ready to mobilise and organise solidarity to defend revolutionaries in Egypt if they are targeted by the military.

These first three years of revolution have seen momentous changes, but it’s important to remember that these historic struggles are still only in their opening chapters. We are witnessing events that have unleashed the enormous energy of the masses. But these have still not fulfilled the aspirations of the millions who risked their lives in the struggle.

### ELECTIONS: HOW CAN THE LEFT BE EFFECTIVE?

**Central Committee**

The starting point for any discussion about elections is that there continues to be a debate about political representation inside the working class despite Labour’s return to opposition.

The continuation of Tory policies during New Labour’s year and the open embrace of US-led imperialist wars created a deep crisis of political representation among a significant section of Labour’s base. Between 1997 and 2010 Labour lost 5 million votes. Labour’s share of the vote in 2010 collapsed to just 29 percent, its second worst performance since 1918. This was paralleled by a collapse in the party’s membership which plummeted from 400,000 in 1997 to a historic low of 156,000 by the end of 2009.

In was in this context that a number of initiatives were taken to create an electoral challenge to Labour from the left. Although all of these projects ultimately ran into the sand, they were able to make some significant gains at their height.

So, for example, the Socialist Alliance’s 230 candidates in the 2002 local elections won an average of 3.5 percent of the vote but in places like Hackney, Wigan and Walsall that increased to over 20 percent in some wards. In 2003 Michael Lavalette was elected as a Socialist Alliance councillor in Preston.

The Scottish Socialist Party was able to win 6 seats in the Scottish parliament.

In England, Respect which emerged out of the anti-war movement, won an MP in east London in the 2005 general election and came second in Birmingham Sparkbrook. In 2006 Respect got 15 councillors in Tower Hamlets and took 26 percent of the vote in neighbouring Newham.

#### Limited revival of Labour
Since the 2010 general election and Labour’s return to opposition there has been a limited revival in Labour’s support. Labour is currently polling at around 10 percentage points higher than its 2010 share of the vote. This would suggest that around 3 million people have shifted back towards Labour, a far from negligible figure though not enough to provide Labour with a decisive lead 18 months before a general election.

Labour’s membership has also increased, probably for the first time since 1997. It stood at around 193,000 by the end of 2010 (though falling back slightly to 187,537 in the last set of official figures to be released). However, the overall current membership boost is shallower than the one Labour enjoyed in the period that preceded its 1997 election victory. Then membership rose dramatically from around 265,000 to 405,000.

Ed Miliband has taken one or two steps away from the legacy of New Labour – most notably by distancing himself from the Iraq war. His recent commitment to repeal the Bedroom tax and to freeze energy prices for 20 months have also boosted Labour. But Labour’s overall commitment to austerity, symbolised by its commitment to the spending plans announced by the Coalition for the first year of a Labour government in 2015–16, remains. So does its pandering to anti-immigrant myths and willingness to match the Tories’ assaults on those on benefits.

#### Tensions with the unions
The row over the role of Unite in the selection of a new Labour parliamentary candidate for Falkirk West has led to deepening tensions between Miliband and a significant section of the trade union bureaucracy.

Miliband’s move to call a special conference in March to re-negotiate the relationship between Labour and the unions (to “mend not end” the union link, as he puts it) involves an attempt to create a more individual relationship between Labour and its supporters among trade unionists, one that will be less mediated by the trade union bureaucracy.

Regardless of how big a threat to the union bureaucracy’s ability to exercise
influence within the Labour Party, some union leaders, including Paul Kenny of the GMB and Dave Prentis of Unison, have expressed bitterness at the attack on the legitimacy of the unions’ right to a collective political voice.

Reports from the TUC in September make it clear that there is a rumbling discussion about the unions’ relationship to Labour that reaches right to the top of the bureaucracy. This concerns whether Unite, currently attempting to sponsor a revival of the Labour left as part of its drive to shift Labour’s policies further left, will at some point break from Labour and set up a new electoral project. And while there is little sign of the being a serious prospect, the very the fact there is a debate at all in places where once backing for Labour was simply an accepted certainty is significant.

We should participate in this debate in the unions, including by putting motions in our branches and regions etc around the question of political representation. We should try and take this debate into our national union conferences.

Space to the left of Labour

George Galloway’s stunning victory for Respect in last year’s Bradford West parliamentary by-election, with a majority of over 10,000 in what had been a Labour safe seat, underlined the continued potential for a left of Labour electoral project, especially where it can galvanise sufficient social weight. Unfortunately, Galloway’s subsequent comments about Julian Assange and rape stopped any potential for Respect to achieve a new lease of life as a national project.

One response to this failure was the call by Ken Loach and others for the establishment of Left Unity, especially in the light of the success at the polls of a number of radical left formations across Europe, above all Syriza in Greece.

The 10,000 people who signed Loach’s statement showed that the desire for a new left party has a real resonance. Left Unity is currently in the process of formally founding itself, with a conference at the end of November.

Though in principle the SWP might have considered joining Left Unity, it is not a federal body that parties can join as a group. Furthermore it is clear that a substantial section of those shaping the project are critical of the role of the revolutionary left in previous left political projects and would oppose us joining LU at this point.

Left Unity is as yet untested as a sectional force and it remains unclear whether it will be able to make real gains in the absence of being rooted in any major social forces – Galloway, whatever his faults, was a former Labour MP and has achieved electoral breakthroughs through his anti-imperialist record, and so far no significant section the organised working class has moved towards Left Unity.

We should maintain a dialogue with Left Unity and look for an electoral pact to avoid standing against Left Unity in next year’s local elections.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition

We are currently part of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). The main driving forces of TUSC are the Socialist Party in alliance with the RMT union. Though some TUSC results are comparable to those of the Socialist Alliance and some have been encouraging, too many have been disappointing.

This in part reflects the Socialist Party’s approach of standing at every available opportunity.

Our method is different. We have a more selective method where the type of campaign we want is based on a good, locally-rooted candidate, with a serious, active campaign and a realistic chance of a credible vote.

While this is unlikely to lead to any big breakthroughs at the moment, it helps to demonstrate both that a potential for a left of Labour project continues and that the SWP maintains a serious approach to such initiatives today and in the future.

One advantage of TUSC is that it has a federal structure that essentially allows it constituent parts, including the SWP, to run and shape their own local electoral campaigns. This is an opportunity we should continue to take up.

If Labour returns to office in 2015 and continues austerity, then the potential for a left of Labour challenge may be on a much larger scale than currently and that means we have to take what opportunities exist today.

And while elections are for us far from the decisive arena of the class struggle, they can play a role in building workers confidence that there is an alternative to austerity, war and neoliberalism, and provide a pole of attraction for new layers of activists to organise together.

Towards 2014

There will be local elections across England in May 2014. Unlike the predominantly County Council elections in May this year, which were a particularly fertile terrain for Ukip, next year’s elections are in the major urban centres and are a much more favourable ground for a left of Labour challenge.

This includes all 32 London councils, all 36 Metropolitan boroughs, 76 district authorities and 20 Unitary authorities. In the London boroughs every council seat will be up for re-election, elsewhere generally a third of the seats will be. We should be aiming to stand a number of comrades under the TUSC banner.

There are also elections to the European parliament in May 2014. European elections present particular challenges given the sheer size of the constituencies involved (the whole of London is one seat, for example). Some on the left have decided to stand as No2EU – the grouping initiated by Bob Crow of the RMT union for the last European elections in 2009. The CC does not believe that the SWP should participate.

The major priority for us in the European elections will be UAF’s campaign to kick BNP leader Nick Griffin out from his seat in the North West and Andrew Brons, the former BNP member, from his seat in Yorkshire and Humberside. We should also be part of campaigning against Ukip which will use the European elections to push its anti-immigrant rhetoric.

The Socialist Workers Party’s financial situation has been quite strained over the past 12 months. This has not prevented us from finding the money to continue to participate fully in the struggles that have emerged or to function as an organisation. This reflects the resilience of the commitment of comrades to the party. We have continued to be an effective and vibrant force in the working class movement. But we should not be complacent about finance. Underlying the financial problems are political issues we need to address.

The decrease in income over the past year is in large part due to a decline in membership fees because of members leaving or lowering their subs in the course of the internal crisis suffered by the party.

Careful control of our expenditure has, so far, allowed us to cover this decline. However, in the long-term, without a substantial increase in the number of subs-paying members, the party cannot continue to intervene as effectively as it does.

Not only that, but we also need to have the scope to expand our activity and relate to any future rise in the level of struggle, and we would certainly like to have district organisers in place in more areas.

There is scope for strengthening our finances in a way that will also strengthen the party politically.

A subs and re-registration drive in the opening months of 2014 will therefore be a priority for every branch of the SWP. We want to establish as the norm that party members pay subs to the organisation.
Where it comes from, where it goes

Here is a breakdown of income over the past 12 months:

![Income Breakdown Graph]

As is clear from the graph, membership subs remain by far the biggest source of party income. The second biggest source of income is sales of our publications, through both individual sales and subscriptions.

This breaks down into sales of Socialist Worker (73 percent of the total publications income), Socialist Review (15 percent), International Socialism (11 percent), with the rest being made up by various pamphlets and other sales.

The biggest change from previous years is the relative decline in Marxism ticket sales income, which we would expect to form at least as big a portion of income as that deriving from the appeal.

Attendance was lower due to the impact of the internal battles in the SWP, and a boycott of the event by sections of the left. Unfortunately the venue costs were somewhat higher than last year, leaving us with a considerable shortfall.

Here is a breakdown of expenditure for the past 12 months, which is reasonably similar to in previous years:

![Expenditure Breakdown Graph]

Subs base

The central issue we face is the fate of our subs base. In the first ten years of the 2000s our real, inflation-adjusted income from members’ subs, always our most important source of income, fell by at least a third. It then stabilised. The stabilisation reflected both the renewed commitment to branch building and recruitment, and a series of subs drives that began to drive up the subs base.

However, in most districts the stabilisation or, in some cases, increase in subs paid to the party was primarily the result of those who were already paying raising their subs.

The success in expanding the number of subs payers has been real in districts that have run the most effective subs drives. But in general success in this area has been modest and certainly uneven, with some districts seeing a continued decline in subs-paying members.

We can see the national pattern if we focus just on members who pay by Direct Debit at the start of each year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number paying by Direct Debit in January of that year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2,137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have cited the Direct Debit figures because they are the most regular form of payment, the easiest to count and the most precise.

There are currently approximately 350 additional members who pay by standing orders or by cash, though not always on a strict monthly basis. This has fallen by about 100 since 2010. Overall, in the three years up to the start of 2013, the number paying subs stayed more or less stable. However, in the first ten months of 2013 it fell by about 300, reflecting the loss of members suffered by the party and our internal conflict.

What is to be done?

Is there scope for expanding the subs base? We think there is.

Every serious membership organisation, quite regardless of its politics, expects its members to pay subs. The SWP does not have a moralistic position on money; sometimes members have to cancel their subs due to financial distress. We understand too that people’s financial situations, and therefore the amount they can pay, varies.

We also favour open recruitment, where we ask people who are relatively new to our politics to join the party, and often it takes time to win those members to the level of commitment of the more experienced ones. Nonetheless, we are an activist organisation whose members generally have a high degree of commitment to our politics. Every member should therefore be asked to pay.

There are several areas where we could boost our subs base.

First, there are large numbers of members whose subs have been cancelled, often for temporary financial reasons, or through banking errors, rather than because people have broken with us politically. Sometimes they do not realise they are not paying.

In total, we have 1,762 registered members who had a direct debit in the past, which is now cancelled. Some of these are actively involved with the party’s structures.

Astonishingly, at the January 2012 party conference about one-quarter of the delegates set to attend were not paying subs, either because they had been cancelled or they had not yet begun paying.

Obviously, this in part reflects the desire of districts to send newer members to conference, who might not yet have sorted out their membership fees. But it reflects a wider problem. We have to fight to get members back on Direct Debits where they are cancelled. Only through doing so can we establish whether there is a political issue that needs to be discussed with them.

Second, a number of comrades have reduced their subs, not because they disagreed with the notion of building a revolutionary party but because they disagreed with specific policies and decisions taken by the party or its leadership.

That is true of the recent debates in the party, but in fact as a method it pre-dates 2013. This practice should not be allowed to become the norm.

Comrades are entitled to hold minority positions in the SWP over tactical issues or over particular decisions. The complex nature of the period means this is more likely to be the case now than in the past. But withholding money is a dishonest way of expressing these disagreements—because it impedes the capacity of the party to test the decisions made in practice and hence resolve the debates one way or another. Comrades who have cut their subs for such reasons should be asked to restore them in early 2014.

Third, we have a number of members who have never won to paying subs. These can often be members paying an important role in districts or in key unions. For example, since 1 January 2010, we have recruited (and retained as registered members) 50 Unison members, 33 Unite members, 28 school teaching union members, 11 CWU members and 11 UCU members who have never paid subs.

The fractions for the relevant unions should play a role in chasing up these members and ensuring they are involved in the work of the various unions. This will strengthen both our work in the unions and our subs base.

In addition, there is a layer of people who have been won to the party but are still...
paying only a nominal level of subs. It is great to get people who join the party to pay £5 or £10 straight away, but after time they have to be asked to increase.

For instance, we currently have 200 NUT members with live Direct Debits to the party. The average monthly payment is £46. But this includes 32 of our teacher members who pay £10 a month or less, most of whom have been in the party for at least four years. Some may have quite legitimate reasons, for example if they are doing teacher training. But many need to be asked to raise their subs to a higher level.

The subs drive must address these issues. Every branch and fraction must in the new year have someone responsible for contacting members. During the subs drive:

- We have to discuss with every member the role they can play in the work of the party as a pre-requisite to asking them for money. Money for us is part of, and flows from, a political commitment to the SWP.
- Those who are paying subs must be asked if they can increase them, especially if they are comrades in work who are paying at a low level. Students, and unemployed and retired members, should be asked to pay between £5 and £10 a month.
- Those who have cancelled their Direct Debit must be asked to restart, even if initially on a lower level.
- Those who have never paid subs must be asked to do so, even if we initially only get them onto a nominal sub. This is part of the process of involving them in the life of the SWP. They can be asked to increase their subs as they become more involved.
- Those who do not want to pay subs and do not wish to be in the SWP should be removed from the membership lists, though they may still be important branch contacts who might, for instance, get the paper each week or come to public meetings.

We should check we hold correct information about people and correct the details accordingly. If people have moved away and we have no contact details for them, the national office should be informed after all reasonable efforts to track them down have failed. (Reasonable efforts mean not simply phoning them and emailing them, but also visiting their home.)

- New recruits should always be asked to pay something to the SWP, preferably by direct debit. If they cannot pay in this manner, someone from the branch must be responsible for collecting cash payments from them each week or month and periodically phoning these payments through to the SWP.

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**FACING FUTURE BATTLES TOGETHER**

Multiple signatories

(see below for full list)

The comrades who are signatories to this statement, whilst we may differ on some important issues, believe that the common position below is a platform for uniting the party, taking it forward and ensuring disagreements can be expressed without crises, splits or permanent factions.

The outcome of the current crisis in the SWP and our coming conference will be determined by the question: ‘What kind of party are we trying to build?’ Throughout the last year it often feels as if comrades are talking past each other. The solution to this is not ‘diplomatic’ but political. The question posed above implies a choice; one we must make as a party, and as individual comrades.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the consequences of our decision. No one would claim that the SWP is the final, perfected form of the revolutionary party. A mass revolutionary party will take shape through the struggles of millions, the combination of organisations, the formation of new parties, and new divisions.

However, we know from history that the fate of revolution cannot be left to future struggles alone. The test for revolutionaries lies in our ability to build class resistance and revolutionary organisation in the concrete conditions of the present. Democratic centralism is a relationship between the party and class that is put to the test in struggle in the real world. This is what enables the SWP to ‘punch above our weight’. The importance of the task should not be understated. The consequences of past failures continue to haunt us.

For over four decades the SWP has played a critical role in industrial struggles, in the fight against fascism and racism in Britain, in the trade unions, in the anti-war movement, in campaigning for women’s liberation and against LGBT oppression and in the student movement.

Over the last year the party has sustained this record. The balance sheet includes the cumulative defeats inflicted on the EDL, culminating in the recent departure of its leaders, and our involvement in the immensely successful campaign against the Bedroom Tax. In both cases, we have shown that it is possible to unite community and trade union campaigns. Not least, we have achieved modest but real success in continuing to build Unite the Resistance as a vehicle to rebuild the left in the trade unions and beyond. The SWP has also built an international tendency, with our sister organisations in Greece and Egypt currently deeply involved in vast social upheavals.

It is perhaps also worth noting that no comrade ‘benefits’ materially from being a member of the SWP. Indeed many have been victimised or have shunned routes that would compromise them politically. Individuals have made huge sacrifices and invested time, energy and in many cases, much of their lives, to fighting for their class and building a party in often difficult and hostile conditions.

The form the debate takes is therefore important. Discussion, however forceful, needs to be conducted politically. To deliver ultimatums or to abuse and mock can only preclude genuine debate. Much more fundamental however, is the political terrain upon which we arrive at our decisions. We wish to outline four principles in determining that terrain.

- First, we must address the wider political arguments upon which to answer the question “What kind of party?”. We cannot restrict the debate to the issues arising from the disputes committee or internal democracy, nor separate them from the wider discussion. This is not to dismiss their importance but it does mean we all need to address why the disputes committee acted as a catalyst for deepening political divisions.
- Second, if we are to be able to address political differences we have to establish a means of addressing the concerns raised by the DC case.
- Third, political discussion on a wide range of questions will not close at conference. A united party will only be possible if these debates can develop without factional division.
- Fourth, given the character of current divisions within the organisation and the consequences of conference decisions for the future of the SWP, those decisions will necessarily entail a choice as to the kind of party we are to be. That outcome will not only be shaped by *what* we decide but also by how those decisions are reached and then accepted by all members.

As a result of the crisis in the organisation, we now face a debate over party structure, party democracy and the role of leadership in the organisation. Debates on our understanding of Leninism, with claims and counter claims as to what constitutes the ‘real’ IS tradition, have become central precisely because they touch on this question.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, many on the left, including former revolutionaries and indeed some comrades within our own organisation, drew the conclusion that the Leninist party was outmoded and that as a tradition it was deficient on a wide range of fronts. A theoretical re-examination of revolutionary organisation was accompanied by debates on the changing nature of struggle, class structure and working class organisation; the potential of building a left in the Labour Party; the relationship between oppression and exploitation, and new modes of resistance.
At the January and March 2013 conferences, comrades who argued that the divisions in the party had a wider political dynamic than the disputes case alone, however important the latter, were heavily criticised by a minority. They were accused of raising 'straw men' and attempting to divert debate from the real issues.

It has nevertheless become increasingly evident that very real and wide-ranging political differences divide the party majority and the current opposition. As a party we will need to continue to debate these questions long after conference. This is because they reflect the continuing pressures and dynamic of party development over a very long period of low industrial struggle, punctuated by the rise of mass movements against war, the market and austerity, and the inevitable challenges that arise in attempting to forge united front activity.

So firstly, we cannot decide on the future leadership of the party, or the type of party we are to become, on the basis of looking at the disputes committee case in isolation. Our decisions will have consequences for the party, for the left in Britain, for future class struggle and for the IS tendency. Our decisions must be informed by previous experience and by our understanding of how we apply Leninism in the 21st century. We all have a responsibility to address these questions and argue them out.

Secondly, however, the DC dispute cannot be dismissed as an irrelevance or just a sleight of hand.

As Alex and Charlie have written in the ISJ, no one in the SWP leadership thinks that, with the benefit of hindsight, they would address the issue in exactly the same way; hence the importance of the DC review recommendations and conference discussion on these issues.

At conference we will need to agree on a way forward both in addressing the political divisions within the party and the issues arising from the dispute. This is not in order to find a 'diplomatic' solution but precisely because the wider political issues became focussed on the issues raised by the DC dispute itself and because those issues demand resolution of themselves.

We should not pre-empt the debate by raising the bar too high that any resolution becomes impossible or by presenting ultimatums prior to discussion. There is a need to agree a basis for moving forward in respect of the disputes case we believe that the following are necessary steps in that process:

- The spirit and substance of the disputes review body findings should be accepted (recognizing there may be discussion on amendments)
- That the disputes panel’s findings on the second complaint be accepted, including the CC apology already made.
- Acknowledgement of the previous agreement on all sides that the first case cannot be re-opened. We believe that any ultimatum, or demand for a form of “apology”, that effectively reopens the first case should be rejected.

Third, a number of arguments have emerged in the course of the factional debate: the impact of ‘neoliberalism’: how we relate to social movements; the question of oppression; how we relate to the trade union bureaucracy, the united front, the People’s Assembly and Left Unity; the orientation of UF; the role of the revolutionary paper and social media.

A common thread in many of the debates is a tendency to combine pessimism about the ability of workers to achieve a breakthrough with a drift towards voluntarism (e.g. support for pop-up unionism and the breakaway at the Tower Hamlets UAF demo) or at least hostility to any criticism of such a trend.

This is linked to an exaggeration of neoliberalism’s impact in weakening working class confidence and organisation. Inevitably, this has consequences for arguments over party democracy, structures and the role of political leadership - accentuated by an ideology to arguments and arguments on a left where reformism and movementism are dominant.

Whether or not comrades agree with this analysis, disagreement is not in itself cause for separation or splits. These are debates that need to be conducted within a comradely atmosphere in party branches and publications, and most importantly tested in struggle and measured against our success in building an interventionist party.

These debates are not only legitimate - they are absolutely necessary.

Finally, we have to address the impact of an institutionalised, permanent factionalism that has developed over the last year and the implications this has for the decisions we now need to make on party democracy and leadership.

The faction claims that without its formation, there would have been no movement over the question of the dispute. It is clearly the case that the crisis in the party led to an acknowledged need to review the disputes process and to a hearing of the second complaint. But the impact of a permanent faction has been divisive. Its existence, along with the behaviour of some of its supporters, has entrenched hostility and suspicion and reinforced walls on all sides.

However, the existence of a permanent faction has a far more fundamental impact on the party. Apart from a refusal to recognise democratic decisions by the majority, its continued existence - factional blogs, committees, meetings etc. would if they continued, lead to a de facto permanent change in party structures and in the kind of democratic centralist party we have established. Unless a national conference decides to implement permanent factions within our structure, all factional activity after national conference must cease and political dialogue be conducted within the agreed structures of the party.

Our long-standing opposition to permanent factional structures has been vindicated over the last year. The disclosure just before Marx 2013 of the continued existence of a secret faction angered many comrades, especially after the assurance given at the end of the special conference that the faction would disband. The effect has been to cement divisions over a wide range of questions, as every issue becomes viewed through a factional prism.

This has affected the entire organisation. Inevitably, however, it is in the logic of a permanent faction that factional loyalty takes precedence over reflective debate; internal questions increasingly take priority over outside party intervention; the roots underlying our political divisions are evaded or laid at the door of an innate ‘undemocratic, authoritarian’ tendency on the part of the leadership and their “loyal”, misguided, unthinking followers. Some of the responses to the recent ISJ are a case in point. Such a political culture undermines any genuine democracy or accountability; it also prevents us from testing democratic decisions in practice or assessing the effectiveness of party leadership bodies.

It is clear both that very real political differences exist within the opposition, and that these have been submerged in the cause of factional unity. Real debate within the faction is almost entirely absent from view, leading to a gross narrowing of the debate with the majority and a refusal to address any issue upon which the faction disagrees internally. This is a prescription for cynicism, demoralisation and an exit route from revolutionary politics.

We believe it is possible to unite and to continue to debate a range of vital political questions and to develop the forums and mechanisms for doing so within the party’s structures. We believe it is necessary for every member to debate the political issues that divide us while at the same time moving to resolve the issues that arose from the disputes case. We cannot afford a Mexican standoff that prevents us from addressing the issues we face as a whole.

To conclude, the choice we cannot evade is the kind of party we are to be. If the majority decision at conference on this question is not one that everyone feels they can accept then it may be that different strategies and perspectives need to be put to the test in another organisational form. Even in this event it is important that any parting of the ways takes place on the basis of a clear political analysis of what form of organisation we need in the current conditions of class struggle.

The adaptation to movementism and the rapid move to the right by comrades who previously evaded such political questions, leaving the party to join Counterfire, the ISG or the ISN, should serve as a warning. These splits have weakened and undermined the whole left by increas-
ing fragmentation in a period where there is an increasing mood and urgency for unity. Any new split, or the exit of large numbers of members, will cause further damage, with serious consequences both here in Britain and internationally. Nonetheless, ultimately it will be whether our perspective as a party stands up to the test of struggle that will determine success or failure.

Our history as an organisation is one in which theory and practice are inseparable. Our understanding of the Marxist tradition is one which demands that theoretical analysis engages the real world; in doing so we have time and again found ourselves challenging prevailing ideas and orthodoxies, not least those prevailing on the left itself. Our test has always been intervention in the class struggle. We are not observers or it is the strongest weapon individual. We have always looked to build the greatest possible degree of resistance on the part of workers and the oppressed.

Our record over the past year – particularly in light of the internal crisis - holds every promise that we can continue to intervene successfully in the outside world and play a critical political role as a revolutionary organisation in the future. We have begun to rebuild SWSS in the universities, and continue to recruit new members in the unions and elsewhere. We believe that the building of a Leninist party remains the strongest guarantee of achieving mass revolutionary organisation in the future and building resistance to austerity, racism, oppression of women and imperialist adventures in the present. We also believe it is the strongest weapon individual comrades hold in making their aspiration to change the world a reality.

Rob, Brian and Roddy (Newham), Sheila. Paul (Tower Hamlets), Gareth, Helen and John (Hackney East), Sally, Ian (Walthamstow), Jess (Lewisham), Jan and Paul (Brixton), Neale and Nicola (Southwark), Ellen (Croydon), Suzanne, Sean, Rob (Islington), Jane (Euston), Liz (Camden), Nick (Ealing), Simon, Gary (Tottenham), Sue and Dave (Hornsey & Wood Green), Kate (Goldsmiths SWSS, Lewisham), Fran (Kingston SWSS, Kingston), Jane (St Albans), Lewis and Patrick (Sussex SWSS, Brighton), Mel (Dorset South), Huw (Bristol Stokes Croft), Tomas (Cardiff SWSS, Cardiff), Yusuf (Cambridge), Doug (Birmingham Stirchley), Cath (Leicester), George (Barnsley), Karen (Bolton Central), Liz (Leeds Harehills), James (Chesterfield), Dave (Sheffield South), Bea (Sheffield North), Tom (Sheffield SWSS, Sheffield), Simon (Manchester City Centre), Andrew and Sally (Wakefield), Pete (Leeds), Talat (Edinburgh), Barrie (Glasgow South), Angela, Iain, Charlotte and Keir (Glasgow North), Ian (Aberdeen)

**THE ISJ: A THEORETICAL JOURNAL AND A PARTY PUBLICATION**

**Camilla (ISJ)**

The ISJ style guide states that: “The aim of International Socialism journal is to put across theoretical, analytical and historical arguments that meet the highest criteria of scientific rigour”. The journal provides an opportunity to develop extended arguments and to engage with theoretical debates in much more detail than would be possible in the paper. As with academic publications we cannot guarantee publication and expect writers to follow style guidelines including providing references for sources. The aim at least is to produce a professional looking journal with high quality of written content for which I have to thank the front cover designers, the two proofreaders and everyone that helps out with typesetting.

The journal is one of the major journals on the left in Britain. We send it out to 1,128 subscribers in the UK and 270 subscribers internationally (as of 25/10/13). Although subscription rates have historically been higher, this is still substantial for a small left-wing publication. There is also scope for increasing subscription rates both within the party by encouraging more members to sign up and among others outside the party by intervening in events and doing advert swaps with other publications.

Many of our sister organisations in other parts of the world also take copies of the journal to sell to their members and articles have been translated into various languages including Spanish, French and German. We have recently had requests from publications in Sweden, China and the US to reprint our articles.

None of this is intended to put off newer/less experienced writers and we have recently had some very good articles by people who have never written for the journal before.

Everyone is welcome to propose writing something – and often new contributors start by doing a book review to gain experience before trying an article.

The advantage of being a quarterly journal is that we can often offer writers longer deadlines than the paper or the review. We also have a large editorial board with a range of expertise whose role is to assist the editor in planning the content of the journal. In my personal experience, many of them are happy to help with constructive feedback on first drafts.

It is worth noting that three of the writers in the most recent ISJ (140), including the author of the lead article, are not SWP members.

But we are also a party publication. The journal puts forward our ideas not because we enjoy taking part in academic debates for their own sake but because these are the ideas we need to understand the world around us and to try to change it. It sometimes means discussing and defending the ideas and tradition of the IS/SWP specifically as well as socialism in general.

Every branch should have copies of each issue of the journal on stalls, in branch meetings and in public meetings and wider events where we intervene. Where branches have pushed journal sales it has been successful with some selling seven or eight copies.

Like our other publications some of the articles in the journal reflect debates within our organisation and on the left. At our special conference on 10 March a large majority of delegates agreed that, “underlying many of the recent debates in and around the party lies a series of vital political questions where we need to seek urgently to assert, develop and win our political tradition”:

a) The changing nature of the working class.
b) Lenin’s conception of the party and its relevance in the 21st century.
c) Oppression and capitalism.
d) The trade union bureaucracy and the rank and file.
e) The radical left, the united front and the SWP.
f) The role of students and intellectuals in revolutionary struggle.
g) The value of new electronic media in the ideological and organisational work of a revolutionary party.

The ISJ positioned itself as an “obvious venue for these debates” (see Analysis, IS 138, p17). The journal committed itself to acting as a forum for debates including discussions of the SWP itself so it should come as no surprise to some comrades involved in the journal that it published an article by Charlie and Alex on this subject.

Both this and John Molyneux’s short article in the same issue attracted controversy. Replies to both have been published online, along with an article by Sean Vernell that offers his own take on current debates about the state of the working class.

While the journal website is not the right venue for internal party discussion, we will continue to use it both to pursue debates and to publish articles that, because of the volume of articles that are submitted to journal, haven’t made it into the print edition but still deserve to be read.

**Day school**

The ISJ day school on Work, Class and Resistance planned for Saturday 8 February is also part of the journal’s commitment to debate the changing nature of the working
class. It aims to bring together academics and activists to discuss theories of class, look at how the working class might have changed and what this means for working class organisation. Comrades should book a place and think about who they can bring along.

DEVELOPING THE FIGHT AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA IN THE UNIONS

Michael (Tottenham), Debs (Liverpool), Sue (Hornsey & Wood Green), Nick (Norwich)

In the first two IBs there were few examples of how revolutionaries have taken up the fight against oppression in the unions. We would like to give an overview of how the union’s policies to the left and has been necessary to establish a more general understanding of how the fight against homophobia and racism can be linked. We have also been central in locating the fight against homophobia within the general argument that our class needs to defend education against Gove’s policies.

In the years since the abolition of Section 28 there has been a revival of interest in the NUT in shaping policy against homophobia and a number of initiatives have been taken up within the union that have revitalised this struggle. SWP comrades have played an important, active role in taking this forward. This has included the development of LGBT equality policy, getting the NUT to be a prominent, visible presence on regional Prides, linking the fight against homophobia to campaigns against the BNP and the EDL and leading the union to join initiatives like Love Music Hate Racism/Homophobia.

Some of us also attended TUC organised meetings about the organisation of Pride after the disastrous 2012 march to argue for a protest/community based Pride march.

Our comrades in Wakefield NUT have organised a groundbreaking Equality conferences which have involved students as well as adults in the activities of the day and have also included the Roma community. We have also understood the importance of working with others within the structures of the union, especially when we have been through a historic period where a reserved place has been created on the NUT executive for an LGBT elected representative.

Many comrades have been central to promoting LGBT History Month in their schools. Transphobia and homophobia in schools is a political question and placing ourselves at the forefront of the resistance is an example of what we mean by political trade unionism. We have found a resonance on this amongst people we work with and have been able to shift the atmosphere inside schools and gain respect for our politics.

In some schools this has led to students identifying as LGBT. In one East London school when LGBT students ran an assembly, Muslim girls wearing the veil hugged them at the end, showing their empathy and solidarity.

These sorts of organised events during February LGBT History Month can help smash established stereotypes. In Hackney comrade, Nick have won the local NUT Association to organising an Equalities event that will also look at what schools can do around the question of sexist attitudes towards girls, which is coming back on to the agenda amongst people working in education.

Throughout this period SWP members have also linked the fight against oppression with the changes that have been made by the Gove project to dismantle state education, establish a reactionary, backward looking curriculum and worsen conditions for teachers and weaken union organisation. So, the issue of Performance Related Pay is a way to drive down the teachers’ salaries bill, but it is also a homophobe’s charter for discrimination.

The creation of academies and free schools and the breaking of local authority control in some areas has meant that it is more likely that some schools can be openly homophobic in their policies. This year the Humanist Society founded from their research that 46 schools had adopted policies echoing Section 28 mentioning their opposition to ‘the promotion of homosexuality’, a disproportionate number being academies. Our comrades are building the campaign to oppose this.

However, it has also meant having to take consistent positions against some of the problematic attitudes to be found amongst some LGBT activists.

For example, the motion at NUT conference five years ago condemned countries like Jamaica and Zimbabwe for their homophobia while failing to mention the influence of colonialism, imperialism and the influence of Britain, resulting in a position that was dangerously close to racism. It is hard to imagine a motion like that being put today within the NUT.

Over the last five years some SWP members have taken positions on the NUT LGBT Advisory Committee guiding policy, some have been involved in the development of an LGBT based curricu-

lum in the organisation School’s Out, some comrades have organised and built local Prides involving the union in a fundamental way and all comrades have spoken at conference, often proposing or seconding the LGBT motion.

One of our comrades debated the importance of coming out at school with the LGBT executive member at NUT conference in Liverpool this year in front of a packed venue showcasing the union’s commitment to equality. Other comrades led the discussion. There is a high respect for the SWP within the union on our opposition to homophobia.

Sometimes, our work has helped the NUT play a leading role within the LGBT movement. In 2011 London Pride was led by the NUT/Love Music Hate Homophobia float as a result of our influence, with chants linking the fight against the attack on teachers’ pensions and pay with the fight against homophobia. This was important in the context of an increasingly corporate Pride.

When the young teacher, Lucy Meadows died this year after the pressures created by the transphobic vilification of the national press, SWP comrades, both LGBT and non-LGBT, were crucial in setting up a vigil/rally in her hometown of Accrington.

It was brilliant to have the NUT national banner on a demonstration against transphobic oppression. This year we are supporting and amending a conference motion commemorating Lucy Meadows and opposing the appalling return of Section 28 style policies in some schools at NUT LGBT conference.

However, it is not always automatic that those who are oppressed recognise and fight the oppression of others.

At TUC LGBT workers’ conference this year SWP LGBT comrades were the only delegates to actively oppose an islamophobic FBU motion on the Arab Revolutions that condemned all Islamic states as homophobic.

An amendment written by an SWP UCU transgender female comrade, proposed by an SWP lesbian UCU comrade and supported by an SWP gay male NUT comrade put an anti-racist/anti-homophobic position.

Our revolutionary politics on oppression stood out both in theory and practice. While we lost the motion, a number of black and Asian delegates bought the paper and spoke to us during conference and at London Pride the next day saying how much they agreed with our position and how troubled and uneasy they were by the positions on race taken by some white, LGBT trade unionists.

While this is a modest example, it shows the important difference our politics can make.

In the future we should think about how it is possible to co-ordinate LGBT work across unions, share experiences
and develop strategies more specifically. We should develop greater links between the fight against women’s oppression and racism with the fight against homophobia within our unions through cross-union initiatives, promoting Equality training days and in the general campaigning we do.

This is important for all comrades whether LGBT or not. This might also involve transforming the prominence of LGBT History Month within the union movement so that it appears in the way that Black History Month is now recognised: as a respected, widely supported event in the political and cultural calendar.

During the last year comrades have taken different positions over the divisions within the SWP. Some have sometimes signed factional statements, some have opposed them, some have taken no position.

But what has been clear is that no other party exists where a tradition and understanding of the need for a revolutionary transformation of society is put into effective practice with the aim of ridding us once and for all of LGBT oppression, while comrades are simultaneously the best fighters against prejudice and discrimination in the everyday reality of work.

We have not dealt with LGBT work as a single issue, but tried to link the arguments against all oppression with the class struggle of our union. We should be proud of our tradition within the unions on fighting for LGBT liberation.

**SAY IT LOUD – A HISTORY OF FIGHTING RACISM THAT SHOULD MAKE US PROUD**

**Brian (Newham)**

## The ramping up of racism

There can be little doubt that racism will be at the front and centre of mainstream politics in Britain in the run-up to the next European and Westminster elections. On one level of course this is a statement of the bleeding obvious. The bosses always seek to reinforce their rule by dividing workers and there is a long and disreputable history of electoral politicians reaching for the race card in the rush for votes.

There is a however a very specific reason why we can anticipate a particularly toxic atmosphere over the next couple of years. In short, the rise to prominence of UKIP has dragged the centre of mainstream politics sharply to the right. At the Eastleigh by-election in February, UKIP won nearly 29 percent of the votes and beat the Tories into third place.

This was then consolidated in the county council elections in the spring when they averaged 26 percent. This success was based upon a spiteful campaign which scapegoated Romanians and Bulgarians who, it was claimed are simply waiting in their millions at the border, ready to swarm into Britain when immigration controls are lifted at the beginning of 2014.

It was in the immediate aftermath of this that David Cameron delivered a widely trailed speech about immigration in which he set out his determination to crack down on the “something for nothing society”. The measures announced then have since been drafted into an immigration bill which is explicitly intended to “create a hostile environment for illegal migrants”.

### Islamoiphobia

In addition, barely a day passes without a fresh attack upon Muslim communities. In recent weeks for example, Cabinet minister Kenneth Clarke has railed against women wearing “bags over their faces”.

There have been demands for the burqa to be banned following the disappearance of a supposed terror suspect and a Muslim free school had been threatened with closure for supposedly floating equality laws. The atmosphere of incessant Isaloiphobia has also led to more sinister developments. Since the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in May there has been a sharp increase in violence against Muslim communities.

### Fighting the backlash

It is critically important that we play a leading role in challenging this racist backlash. Our new book on Marxism and the fight against racism is timely because it addresses the issues that we are likely to be confronted with in the coming period. It is called Say It Loud for a number of reasons.

It is of course the title of a song written by the black American soul singer James Brown at the height of the civil rights and black power struggles of the 1960s. This is however the least important reason why we chose it. Far more importantly, as the book’s sub-title suggests, it aims to set out a clear Marxist explanation of the roots of racism in capitalism and its key role today as a means of dividing the working class.

The book was initially conceived as a response to the characterisation of the August 2011 riots as “criminality pure and simple”. It was argued that those riots demonstrated that multiculturalism has failed, gang culture is rampant and, most outrageously, that Enoch Powell was right when he forecast that mass immigration would eventually lead to “Rivers of Blood”. As we discussed the proposed chapters however it became a much broader project. In order to rebut those vile claims we needed to take a longer view.

In short therefore Say It Loud is a history of racism but also a chronicle of resistance, of black and white unity and collective action. Moreover it is a history of struggle which our comrades and our party have been centrally involved in. IS members stood against the stream and opposed Powell’s racism in the docks in 1968; SWP members set up the ANL; Roger Huddle and Red Saunders wrote the letter that launched Rock Against Racism; The Stop the War Coalition organised the biggest demonstration in this country’s history.

These are not idle or exaggerated boasts. The pictures that we include in the book illustrate the story. SWP members can be seen leading the successful campaign to bring back Abdul and Ade Onibiyi. Blair Peach who was bludgeoned to death by the Special Patrol Group was our comrade. We were on the frontline driving the fascist off the streets of Welling in 1993 and East London over the past three years. This is an impressive history of anti-racist activity which we should showcase.

The book has been launched at a series of rallies around the country which have been timed to coincide with Black History Month. Where comrades have been imaginative, leafletting widely, sending out press releases, arranging radio interviews and incorporating music and visual displays, they have been successful.

The meetings have been well attended, we have sold lots of books and recruited people to the party. In Tottenham for example where Mark Duggan’s aunt Carol spoke alongside Weyman Bennett and Gary McFarlane, 100 people attended, 42 of whom were non members and 9 people joined. My own branch in Newham booked a screen at Stratford Picturehouse and played film clips, and music as well as projecting a slideshow of photos from the book. It was a huge gamble for a predominantly white and venerable branch but paid off handsomely with around 70 people attending.

One comrade alone built a meeting at his college in Oxford that attracted around 35 people, twice as many as came to the city wide meeting which was held in the corner of an upstairs room in a dark and dinghy pub. Another comrade put on two small but lively lunchtime meetings attended by predominantly black FE students at his college in South London. 18 attended the meeting at Goldsmiths College, 100 came to the Sheffield rally with 4 people joining and 5 students joined at the Glasgow rally.

The level of discussion at most meetings has been very good. I have been enormously impressed by comrades’ knowledge of the local history of racism and resistance in cities such as Glasgow and Manchester, but also by their involvement in campaigns. At a number of the rallies the party speakers have been joined by people we have supported in justice and anti deportation campaigns.
Looking ahead
This knowledge and experience will be invaluable in the years ahead when we will be confronting the opportunism and capitulation of the mainstream parties as well as the overt racism of UKIP; the BNP and whatever becomes of the EDL.

The real challenge for us is to recruit and develop a new cadre who are committed to our politics. Most of the meetings could have been bigger and all could have been blacker and younger. If we are to rise to the challenge of the next few years the profile of the party needs to change and we will need to sink roots in new areas.

There are serious battles to come but we know that unity is not automatic. We do not view the working class through rose tinted spectacles but, instead, understand the material conditions that can lead white - and indeed some black and Asian workers - to accept racist arguments.

Comrades campaigning against the bedroom tax have reported instances of people on the doorstep suggesting that Muslims have been claiming exemptions on the basis that spare rooms are being used as prayer rooms. More broadly, immigration frequently tops the list of voters concerns. This is hardly surprising given the constant media barrage.

The immigration bill is a blatant attempt to stoke up these concerns by scapegoating ‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘overstayers’. It is intended to turn nurses, doctors, teachers, other public servants and even landlords into immigration officers, snooping and snitching on migrant workers. Alongside the Universal Credit, the bedroom tax and public sector pension and pay cuts, it is the latest nasty record in fighting racism and fascism. It is a book about hope and the list of voters concerns. This is hardly surprising given the constant media barrage.

We have weathered a stormy time inside our organisation, yet have preserved our capacity to engage in the wider struggle. Nevertheless, that intervention has been weakened, and we must seek to address the causes at our forthcoming Conference.

All of those who are not already set on departing the organisation because of emerging or discovered political differences, or outrage at the perceived mishandling of issues, will agree that the ending of factionalism in the organisation is a condition for us maximising our impact on the direction of the wider struggle. Yet ‘ending factionalism’ could be achieved in a variety of ways.

It could be done procedurally, since permanent factions are not part of our organisation’s tradition, and are outside the terms of our Party constitution.

It could be done by majority diktat, or in the form of a call for unity, if the majority of Conference delegates so decide.

Alternatively, it could be done politically by winning party members across current factional divides to a common vision, and to a renewed commitment to our organisation as a necessary means to achieve that vision.

The two motions at the end of this article take a political approach to ending factionalism. The first addresses a potential problem in the representation of different views at the Conference. The second addresses the issue of rebalancing the relationship in the organisation between ‘the leadership’ and the membership.

We are well aware that by the time this bulletin appears, voting in many aggregates will have closed, and the die will already been cast in terms of the selection of some conference delegations.

Yet we have included the motion on Conference Delegations which was put to the North London and Sussex District Aggregates, as a reminder to all comrades who have been elected that the Party’s constitution explicitly charges them with using their own political judgment when they vote at Conference.

They have not been ‘mandated’ to follow a line agreed in advance. They are not bound by ‘loyalty’ to any particular faction, or the current Central Committee, but should make their decisions based on an independent assessment of the best way to strengthen the Party’s ability to intervene in the class struggle.

We include this short motion to emphasise that excluding comrades from Conference who have valuable experience to share from their work in their trade unions, student unions, campaigns and the Party’s local organisation, simply because they support the faction or are critical of the CC, will, in our view, weaken rather than strengthen our organisation, and make ending factionalism more difficult. We are not arguing in favour of reserving places at conference for specific individuals, nor for proportional representation. Neither of these is part of our tradition; and neither would cohere the organisation. They would have the tendency to entrench existing factions.

Rather, we are saying that voting for or against comrades as delegates to Conference, solely on the basis of their factional affiliation, or their perceived support or criticism of the CC, without taking into account the wider relevance of their political activity, is the wrong course of action. In particular, if we want most of these comrades to remain ‘in the room’ with us after conference, then a good number of them have to actually be ‘in the room’ with us at the conference.

What is surely uncontentious amongst those not seeking to damage the Party, either through a split on the one hand, or a misguided process of anti-faction ‘purification’, on the other, is the view that our current organisational structures were not adequate to the task of dealing with the issues raised in the course of the recent disputes. We are thus not seeking to lay blame at the door of this or that individual or group but rather looking to see how the structure of our organisation might be usefully altered in order to make any repetition less likely.

We are, in effect, refusing the terms of the continuum offered by the extremes of the faction and the ‘loyalists’. Our proposal makes the Party leadership much more responsive (and accountable) to Party cadres across the UK, and in different interventions, and it makes the cadres responsible for agonising over Party policies and their implementation rather than simply following the lead of the CC. It is proposing a significant shift in the organisational balance, while preserving our interpretation of democratic centralism. It seeks to offer a proposal around which both sides can cohere, whatever their remaining differences.

The motion does not propose any dramatic reorganisation. It does, however, propose an important rebalancing of the relationships between the Party’s structural components, while defending our tradition of democratic centralism.

In particular, it seeks:
• To emphasize the importance of geographical branches as the sites for debate

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PROPOSALS ON CONFERENCE DELEGATIONS AND PARTY ORGANISATION

Anne and Mark (Islington), Adrian, Lynne and Phil (Tottenham), Tom (Brighton)

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The second motion, on party organisation can be found in the motions section of this bulletin. It was passed by the Sussex Aggregate.
and coordination and the integration of members through a review of the role of branches and making them the sites for the election of Conference delegates:

- To charge the members of the NC with a more intensive double role of feeding back local experience to each other and to the CC, and to carry the CC/NC position on implementation of the perspectives to Districts and branches.

In our organisation, we do not have ‘followers’ who are led by our leadership. We are all leaders but each has a different breadth of experience and different capacities, and will thus have different functions in the organisation, which may change over time.

Nor do we assume that the leading members of the organisation have a special insight into the development of society and its contradictions.

That is why we do not have a loyalty to our ‘leading members’ in the form of a blind faith in their capacities. Their capacities can only be a complex relationship between our capacities and their individual talents.

They do, of course as CC members, have access to a wider picture of the difficulties than do those of us who are focussed on our union or district or branch activities. That is an advantage. They are not, however, themselves confronting those difficulties immediately in workplaces or campaigns, and that is a weakness.

That is why a democratic centralist organisation of leaders depends on a dialectical relationship between the organisation’s ‘leading members’ and all of its other leaders (the members in their local struggles). The mediation in that relationship is via our National Conference, and, crucially between conferences, via our National Committee.

Neither the aim nor the outcome of such constitutional changes as are proposed here could be to prevent the eruption of political disagreement. Indeed, political disagreement inside a democratic centralist organisation is its lifeblood. What they can achieve is a mechanism through which all sides in a debate are satisfied that the debate has been conducted, and positions represented, properly and adequately even if some remain dissatisfied with the majority outcome.

Most importantly, the changes proposed here are built on an understanding of ‘revolutionary leadership’ that is part of our tradition, and is thus different from the bourgeois or anarchist deployment of the term ‘leadership’. For us, leadership is what every member of the Party offers. We are leaders in every area of our lives - workplaces, our residential areas, in trade unions and in campaigns.

As an organisation of leaders we also elect our own leaders to carry through policy decisions of our conference, and without any expectation that the policies or their implementation will not include mistaken assessments. Because we are all leaders, we know about mistakes. We make them! A leader who has never made a misjudgement has never really led anything.

The key lesson to learn from the mess we’ve created over the last 18 months is not about the political failings of individuals, but about the structures and processes and patterns within the organisation which got in the way of remedying those failings. Understood like this, we can build an organisation which coheres across current divisions, and can even transform itself. With changes such as we are proposing, it is even possible that the organisation can emerge stronger than it was before this crisis.

Motion on Conference delegations

This aggregate recognises that full debate at SWP Annual Conference on issues currently confronting the Party is a necessary step towards bringing factional organisation to an end at the conclusion of Conference.

We note the benefit of wide representation of members’ different views at Conference, and encourage those present to cast their votes for delegates with a view to electing a balanced delegation which represents all major views and currents within the District, as well as ensuring broad representation of the Party’s local experience in the trade unions and student unions, united front campaigns and our organisational work.

BIRMINGHAM WITHOUT THE SWP?

Birmingham district

“When we discuss Leninism and when we critically re-examine our own practice, as we should, our own failures, also I hope our own achievements, we have to understand that the stakes are very high, and that in having these debates, we shouldn’t jeopardise what we have achieved because it is quite precious.” Alex Callinicos, Leninism in the 21st Century, Marxism 2013.

This article has been passed at our Birmingham aggregate for submission to IB3. It has been written as a reminder of how precious our organisation is, and in particular, we reflect on our achievements in Birmingham where we live, work and study to advance the cause of revolutionary socialism drawing on a selection of experiences across the district.

People’s Assembly

The successful launch of the People’s Assembly led to several planning meetings for a Birmingham People’s Assembly. This was a difficult process as the big unions in the Midlands are very right wing and expressed no interest, leaving the group too influenced by the hard left and in danger of internal squabbles. Unusually the SWP has found itself working alongside the CP to make sure that the People’s Assembly in Birmingham stays on track.

However the launch rally in October saw 250 people attend with a big delegation from UNITE, signficant representation from all the major unions and a group of Benefit Justice campaigners. The event was funded by a number of union branches and eventually underwritten by UNITE. Our comrades were able to speak both from the platform, and the floor, as representatives of workers in struggle and to call for the struggles to be coordinated. At the meeting we recruited a bedroom tax campaigners and a key DPAC activist who have both been working alongside us.

The People’s Assembly has called a protest for 5th November and will form a committee which will hopefully involve both representation from the major unions, local campaigns and SWP members who have been at the forefront of building the People’s Assembly.

Bedroom tax

This year the Birmingham Benefits Justice Campaign launched in March, with a meeting of around 60 people. The steering group involving the Labour party, DPAC, non-aligned activists, Green party, BATC, SWP & the SP. We have held 2 successful marches – one in April and one for Stephanie Bottrill. We have also held 2 successful lobbies of council – both involving tenants from the Ladywood and Druids Heath areas of Birmingham. There was a tenants’ delegation to the Manchester demonstration and we have held regular campaign stalls and petitioning at: the Bullring, Ladywood, Druids Heath, Kings Heath and Shard End. We have also had good coverage in local press, for example in the Birmingham Mail newspaper and local radio.

We tried in a number of places to set up groups: Ladywood, Highgate, Shard End, Druids Heath and the Brandwood estate. Not all were successful. The format that worked best was mass leafletting, advertising a local meeting, a local stall or two, and careful following up of the contacts we met.

We generated plenty of ideas for action, though tenants always had plenty of ideas of their own. This worked well in Druids Heath, for example, where there is now a group of tenants, one of whom has joined the party. We have held 3 meetings and are now planning to set up a public meeting there and have invited local councillors.

The recent sleep over involving Benefit Justice members and new people had some
impact because some of them came to our meeting on Racism and Resistance and to the People’s Assembly and the LMHR gig. For example, Robert came to the launch meeting in March, has been on the steering group since then and active in the campaign. He spoke at UTR and the People’s Assembly. He has now joined the party. Vicky has been very active in Druids Heath, spoke at People’s Assembly and has also joined the party.

A new member, Esther, who joined at the start of year, has been very active in Benefit Justice which has really pulled her into the party. Other comrades have got back involved with party activity through the bedroom tax campaign.

NUT fraction

Despite the internal difficulties in the Party this year, comrades have played an essential role in the local teaching trade union movement.

The culmination of this was seen at the regional strike demonstration and rally in Birmingham on 1st October. Comrades played an important role in ensuring that there was a march, that it was high profile, in leading chanting on the demo and in speaking at the strike rally of thousands (as an NUT member – see http://uniteresist.org/?p=4490).

We helped to ensure a big and successful strike whilst making a powerful, and well received, argument for more action. This would not have been possible without our roots in the class struggle. The news coverage of the strike demo and march saw the Socialist Worker ‘Gove Out’ placard prominent on national and local news coverage. Comrades, both teaching and non-teaching, sold 130 papers on the rally and recruited 1 to the party.

We have ensured that Birmingham NUT has supported prominent campaigns including the Unite the Resistance events, Birmingham Benefits Justice, Unite Against Fascism, arranging transport to the TUC NHS demo, the Primary Charter, the People’s Assembly launch rally in Birmingham and more to name just a few things.

Of course we need to continually push out and ensure all teaching comrades are selling the paper and looking to recruit. Where we have acted as a party rather than just a collection of individuals we have punched well above our weight. And we have been able to do this by attempting to organise as a Party teachers fraction within the West Midlands. There is still a huge amount to build on, but without an active SWP the teachers movement in Birmingham would be in a worse place.

PCS fraction – a workplace experience

In the PCS we have a number of comrades in the same office, and 2 on the local branch committee. When the PCS consultation was held over the summer we ran the widest consultation in the branch and won staff in our office to calling for an escalation of the action.

We subsequently passed a motion through the branch calling for strike action to be restarted and coordinated with the new round of action that had started. At branch meetings we sell around 5 papers and the branch voted to support the recent Unite the Resistance conference, and Birmingham People’s Assembly launch.

In our office we helped to make sure that every member of staff who wanted to take Eid was allowed it. This was after an initial refusal by management. Our white atheist union reps won respect for standing alongside Muslim staff. There has also been a rebellion against incorrect processes in the office that were leading to excessive sanctioning. Our comrades have played an important role in this rebellion.

We are not yet good enough at selling SW to our workmates but as a result of our work took both the H&S rep and branch secretary to Marxism, took people to the first firefighters picket line and regularly take a PCS member to SWP public meetings.

Unite the Resistance

In June we held a Unite the Resistance (Utr) conference in Birmingham which was attended by 108 people. It was an important step forward for us in several ways:

- Many of the people at the conference were brought by comrades from their workplaces or campaigns, the best ‘organic’ event we had held of this kind for some time.
- Also we formed a Utr West Midlands committee in which the SWP are a minority, with a Labour Councillor, BFAWU regional sec, Birmingham NUT activist, DPAC activist and UCU activist amongst the non-members.
- We were able to call a protest at Sports Direct as a result of this work. The committee was formed just days before the national People’s Assembly meeting and this, combined with the reduction in the struggle over the summer, left West Midlands Utr a little rudderless. Nonetheless it is becoming clearer how Utr can coexist with the People’s Assembly as Utr is able to take up issues like solidarity for struggles that the People’s Assembly may find more complicated.

Handsworth branch and our anti cuts campaigns

Handsworth Against the Cuts (as a local group of Birmingham Against the Cuts) has made a series of interventions over the last year focusing on saving Handsworth Library, Play and Leisure centres and Laurel Road community centre, all of which are under threat of privatisation and ultimately possible closure.

We have spoken at staff training sessions about trade unions and the fightback, been on local radio, supported and encouraged staff on the day of joint strike action and established a productive relationship with the union reps (due in no small part to local comrades being well known in Unison).

We have gathered thousands of signatures on the petitions, had art and banner making sessions for young people, organised leafleting sessions and brought user groups to lobby and disrupt councillors district and ward committees.

Our public meetings have been well attended (45 and 60). At the most recent meeting we had local Labour party members, relevant trade unionists and several user groups (including the chair of the local police who denounced the cuts!).

We have even attended some of the grindingly tedious and heavily rigged ‘consultation’ sessions the council have run, making noise interventions as well. We have ensured we are engaged with the broader anti cuts movement in Birmingham.

One upshot of this is that local councillors have publicly promised that the Leisure Centre will remain under council control and will be receiving a lump of money to operate as a ‘Health and Wellbeing Centre’. It is vital that pressure continues on councillors to try to keep them to their word. We will be hosting a discussion and ideas session for all users of the Laurel Road Community Centre about the campaign there.

Comrades are playing a part in preventing the broader anti cuts movement being drawn down a cul-de-sac with a sectarian anti cuts formation in the city – although we remain open to working with any of the anti cuts campaigns.

We also have to resist the pull inside HATC towards sectarianism, arguing to continue a relationship with Labour party activists and councillors.

It is easier to get councillors to feel pressure if they’re in a room full of people and more people will probably come to a meeting if they are present.

Doing this doesn’t mean we have to water down our politics. We have reflected the anger and frustration felt by people.

But many, if not most, people in the meetings could relate to the idea that, at the very least, the rich should be taxed more heavily to pay for public services, that Labour should be standing up against cuts, and that grassroots fighting and campaigning can get results.

We need to keep an eye on the basic details about what we do in the anti cuts movement – i.e. building the party out of it, attendance, sale of SW, who speaks, what we want said, what arguments may need to be raised at the organising meetings. Doing so will strengthen both the party and the movement.
Kings Heath branch
We have also kept up consistent activity in our shopping centre Kings Heath, the issues that have made people really angry and led to good paper sales (some weeks over 20). For example the proposals to downgrade the local Post Office, the Bedroom Tax, and Syria.

From these sales we are building up a network of contacts who want to read the paper. Join in activity and hopefully join the party. Branch and district meetings have been well organised and bigger than last year. In spite of the internal debates that have been going on we have managed to keep building in the class.

Student work
A successfully organised Freshers’ Fayre at Birmingham City University (BCU) where we pushed hard for an official stall with the student union, led to 59 students joining SWSS, two joining the party and 114 joining UAF.

Eight students attended our District public meeting for Black History month and we have since held 2 SWSS meetings on “Does the media control our minds?” and “Why we support the Palestinians.”

More students attended the LMHR/HH gig and plans are underway to work with other students on other campuses with our party branches.

Stalls at Matthew Boulton have resulted in a handful of students joining SWSS and dozens of contacts, but we are still finding ways to link them with the BCU students in the neighbouring campus.

Despite not having recognition at Birmingham University we have a handful of contacts which we are building a relationship with from the sales at the railway station and outside the freshers fayre.

Anti-racist and anti-fascist work
The SWP’s anti-racist and anti-fascist united front strategy has been criticised in recent months. The following example attempts to illustrate how patient and painstaking work by comrades in the Birmingham district is beginning to pay off and that this criticism is unwarranted. There is no starting point of course, however a significant place to of this campaign was the election of a broad based UAF committee, united in our methods of both confronting and exposing the EDL for what they were but also uniting all the component strands of the class necessary to mobilise. This included rank and file activists from trade unions but also a labour councillor. This was not only a tribute to the respect and credibility of our work, but was a qualitative shift forward.

In preparation for the demonstration comrades systematically visited every single bar along Broad Street to argue the case against allowing the EDL to muster there before their demonstration. All except Bar Risa agreed not to host the EDL. The bar staff and manager of Bar Risa itself in Birmingham were reluctant to allow them to drink there which allowed us to arrange for GMB to visit the workplace in order to unionise it.

However, significant pressure from the police on the senior management of this bar changed their minds and led to an unfortunate decision to allow them to congregate at the venue ahead of the static protest.

In addition, we acted swiftly to contact the management and recording company of the Manic Street Preachers when we learned that they were using the Manic’s anti-fascist song ‘If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next’ as a backdrop to their promotional video for this demonstration.

The promotional video was subsequently withdrawn from the EDL website and there were comments and press releases issued by the Manics and UAF condemning the use of this song. The Manics also threatened legal action against the EDL for using their song.

Clearly the police and some councillors had been trying to demonise the UAF counter-demonstration for weeks by discouraging Muslim youth from attending. There was also a systematic attempt by the police to racially profile the Muslim youth at the end of the demonstration and a Labour councillor we have been working with intervened to help them on the day. Despite this state interference, the UAF demonstration was the largest that the city had had in many years with a turnout of over 400 people inside and outside the square.

This fell short of the numbers from Birmingham we would need to overwhelmingly defeat the EDL national demonstration.

But the critical value, in practice, of this specific united front strategy was that it was helping us to build relationships with key activists in the trade union movement, the left of the Labour party and around the students and the Muslim youth.

Contrast this with the squaddist tactic employed by other elements present on the day and it was clear that they were not able to do this.

Learning the lessons of the UAF demo, we felt it was vital to begin to sink roots locally and build stronger relationships and links within the community. A successful intervention by the party working alongside students and the trade unions at Matthew Boulton College soon followed. The banning of the Niqab on site was overturned and the Principal resigned. A key factor was the potential size of a demonstration which had been called by Muslimapride on facebook, but rather than just back it formally, our comrades also promoted the pro-choice arguments amongst the college students, thus shifting the balance away from the pro-ban arguments visiting the college every day.

We were also responsible for a number of positions and statements in solidarity from NUT, UCU, UAF and other groups. Our clear political arguments amongst those involved in this loose campaign, gave us a greater profile. A consequence of this was that a number of activists later worked alongside us in anti-racist activity.

The SWP’s ‘Racism, Resistance & Revolution’ conference was a successful re-launch Love Music Hate Racism and Love Music Hate Homophobia across the city and to build UAF / LMHR on the university campuses.

A successfully organised Freshers’ Fayre at Birmingham City University (BCU) where we pushed hard for an official stall with the student union, led to 59 students joining SWSS with two joining the party and 114 joining UAF.

Three university societies agreed to help us to build our first planned LMHR/HH launch event in October. Eight of the BCU students we met on the day came to the party’s ‘Racism, Resistance & Revolution’ event and two joined the party.

They recommended an event to us, which two of us attended and it enabled us to identify three very talented and politicised poets who were prepared to perform at the LMHR/LMHH event. In fact, we gained an audience among young people in the city and dozens of contact details that evening.

We understood that the LMHR / HH event could be used to re-launch both campaigns in the city at a reasonably sized venue to begin with and include local acts that had some following in the city.

Politically, it was important to seize the opportunity to link together some of the strands of class struggle across the city and we decided to have the event at the end of the Birmingham People’s Assembly at an LGBT bar just across the road. We felt that the event was a success (over 100 people came to the event) linking the events with the slogan: ‘No to Austerity! No to Division’.

It was a good starting point for our campaign for a number of reasons. Firstly it brought together gay, straight, black, white and Asian activists, young and old, men and women under one roof to celebrate multiculturalism.

Secondly it marked a change in the type of LGBT nights on offer in the city because
it injected a serious political element to the event – something that had not been noticeable on the LGBT scene for decades. Finally, there was a qualitative shift in attitudes towards gay people by some of the people at the event who consciously understood how the people they were mixing with were being discriminated against in other ways.

For example, two of the acts that we spoke to said that they had never even thought of playing at an LGBT venue before and that their struggles were closely tied to those of the LGBT community.

We would like to continue to build relationships with all the contacts we now have from staging this event and use this success as a model for future events in the city.

We already have an opening for LMHH/HR at the Schools’ OUT launch event for LGBT history month, linking our industrial NUT fraction work with our work with young people and a political campaign in the city to combat division and bullying.

The next major event for LMHR/HH and UAF will be around the international day of anti-fascism on the 22nd March next year and also to help comrades in our region who are building for an LMHR carnival in Dudley in the spring.

Anti racism public meeting
Having successfully pushed out in a number of areas in united front work it became clear that we had developed a new audience for the party, but we didn’t have a strategy to try to recruit them. To overcome this we set about building the SWP public meeting on anti-racism in the same methodical way that we were building the united fronts.

The public meeting had 50 people at it, very good for a Birmingham SWP meeting. There were 15 non-members including bedroom tax campaigners and 8 students, 2 of whom joined the party. A leading local PCS member who attended is now considering joining the party. This meeting injected some much needed party into the district.

Champions of the oppressed
These politics thread through our interventions but there a few additional points which should be made.

Our intervention over the anti-abortion vigils outside the Edgbaston clinic earlier this year was a good initiative. Several comrades, men and women, were involved and we worked together with members of the women’s group at the nearby university. This was a protest against the intimidation of women attending the clinic for advice or a termination. We confronted the bigots and it was also a chance to discuss our politics with others on the demonstration.

Our work with disabled activists and disability campaigns has been a thread throughout UTR, the bedroom tax, the people’s assembly and our anti-fascist work.

Our political arguments over austerity and the government’s attacks are not just about ensuring disabled people are at the forefront of united front campaigns. By linking these struggles with the wider fight against austerity and division, prominent activists have either joined the party or have continued to work alongside us.

Without the SWP there would not be a consistent ‘Pride is a Protest!’ contingent at Birmingham Pride, an event which is commercially led and has year on year marginalised community involvement, let alone any politics.

Some years ago, SW students held a march when the commercial organisers had called it off. Since then, we have pulled together a significant bloc of students, trade unionists and activists in the parade. Last year, we successfully combined this with Birmingham Against the Cuts.

This year we led a bloc of a few hundred and initiated a joint event at the Birmingham LGBT centre, with over 80 people attending a debate on the toxic legacy of Section 28 and provided a workshop on tackling homo/bi/trans phobia in schools. This was mainly attended by students and teachers but was sponsored by NUT, GMB and PCS.

The LHMH/HR launch gig is a launch pad to further ongoing work with the LGBT people of colour group, the LGBT centre and the Schools Out LGBT history month launch in November.

In summary
This article is not written to suggest that Birmingham SWP is the most effective unit of the party, or to claim we are the only resistance in our city. Neither statement would be true.

We are however certain that the 250 strong Birmingham People’s Assembly would not have been so successful without us. The UAF demonstrations against the EDL would not have been successful without a united front strategy.

There would have been no mechanism to ‘unite the resistance’ of rank and file activists in the city.

There would be no case (that was heard) to link and escalate action, nor an explanation as to why it was not happening.

There would be no coherent politics to both maximise participation in resistance, nor relay and organise a socialist alternative for those taking part.

There would have been no coherent approach to working with and against the trade union bureaucracy (or those to the right of us) but always being by the side of those who resist.

There would be no politics at Birmingham Pride, no picket of the bigots and no material link of the oppressed with the organised working class.

These achievements are the culmination of the work of a democratic centralist, interventionist, living and breathing party which not only stands on the shoulders of giants but has its eyes wide open to the possibilities in the struggle.

This article has been written to expose some of the lies propagated by the faction – that the SWP is ‘toxic’, ‘sectarian’, or as one person compared it to on the faction blog, a ‘corpse’.

Without the SWP many of the movements and events we have described would at best be weaker, and at worst non-existent.

Yet whilst most comrades in Birmingham have continued to build the resistance we have had to do so with the constant draining effect of public attacks on our party by people who call themselves members of the SWP.

In truth there have been very few factional fights in Birmingham since March, but this may be because the faction members have played very little role in the movements or the party.

What is the alternative for a revolutionary?

“Some form of sectarian variant... joining the alphabet soup of far left sects in the name of the movement adapting to some form of left reformism. Those are the alternatives to sustaining the kind of far left project that we have been building over the past few decades...”

Alex Callinicos, Marxism 2013, Leninism in the 21st Century

The opportunism or sectarianism rife amongst the small groups or individuals, which are present in Birmingham are all too clear to see.

We will continue to build the resistance to capitalism and fight to create a party capable of leading a revolution.

We will not tolerate the continuation of this damaging factional activity in our party.

We invite the faction members to accept the outcome of the SWP conference, disband in reality not just on paper, and get back involved in building the SWP.
COMMON GROUND, MOVEMENTISM, CARTS AND HORSES

Ian (Bury & Prestwich)

It is common ground across the party that the issues around the dispute cannot be treated in isolation and that the crisis has both thrown up a wide range of important questions and debates and has shone a light on weaknesses in the party that have been building up over a number of years.2

It is common ground across the party that the factional divisions of the past year have been very damaging.

Nobody is more aware of this than those of us who were in the minority and for whom the factional struggle has therefore been fought uphill. It is common ground across the party that we need to bring this factional struggle to a conclusion. The debate is about what political basis the struggle should be concluded on and how we get there.

Movementism, shmovementism

Central to the CC’s explanation for the scale of the party crisis has been the notion of “movementism”. This isn’t a helpful term. There isn’t a common understanding of what it actually means:

• Most comrades are using it to mean political accommodation to other forces within social movements not based in the workplace.
• In IB2 the CC define it as “the substitution of movements for the role traditionally accorded by Marxists to the struggles of workers — along with voluntarism more generally” – which I take to mean (if we ignore the implied dubious assumption that movements are not struggles of workers) dropping the centrality of the workplace.

Both are real issues, but the term movementism has confused rather than clarified the real and distinct (albeit related) dangers for revolutionaries.

In any engagement with wider forces, revolutionaries face the twin dangers of sectarianism (standing aside from struggles on the grounds of political differences with other forces involved) and political accommodation to those forces (failing to raise disagreements, to argue our corner or to build revolutionary organisation within those struggles). These dangers are what Paul likened to “Scylla and Charybdis” in IB1.

A third danger, inherent in a situation where the level of industrial struggle is low, is that revolutionaries move away from seeing the central role of the working class (and specifically the workplace) in the struggle for socialism, moving to despair or the search for short-cuts through other social forces.

The fourth danger is to react against this trend by slipping into a crude workerism or what Lenin termed “economism”. The workplace is key, but workers’ struggles do take place outside the workplace too, and do happen over issues other than economic exploitation.

The SWP was right to see the ANL and UAF as key at certain times, even though these movements were mainly outside the workplace. The SWP was right to see the fight against the Poll Tax as central, even when our success in rooting it in the workplace was limited. The SWP was right to see the anti-war movement as central, though we were wrong to politically accommodate to it, to dissolve branches and to almost drop our workplace orientation.

All these dangers should be ABC for revolutionary socialists. Constant re-examination of the shifting relative importance of each danger and how we best steer between them in each area of our work must be a constant debate in any effective revolutionary organisation. Key to avoiding these dangers is political clarity about what the correct relationship between revolutionaries and other forces should be in each situation.

One problem with much of the talk about “movementism” is that it is used more as a term of abuse rather than to provide political clarity, blurring as it does two important dangers (accommodation and dropping the centrality of the workplace) and ignoring the others (sectarianism and economism).

The choice of term is particularly unhelpful given that (sadly) we are still in a period where industrial struggle is low so social movements (e.g. Bedroom tax, People’s Assembly) remain very important for us. Some comrades, hearing an attack on “movementism”, interpreted this as a call to stand aside from the movement – sectarianism.

Let us be clear. Debating the relative priority we should give to different aspects of the class struggle, including social movements and electoral work, is absolutely legitimate (indeed, essential) for revolutionaries.

It is wrong to misrepresent an argument (even a wrong one) that this or that movement should be a priority as an abandonment of the centrality of the working class or accommodation. It only becomes that if we fail to argue our politics or build revolutionary- ary organisation within the movement or we fail to attempt to link the movement to workplaces.

Our efforts to argue against those who would politically accommodate to movements or abandon working class self- emancipation is weakened when we throw such allegations around like confetti. Doing so mis-educates members and creates a dangerous taboo against debates that are essential to the functioning of the party.

Immunity?

A major problem with the conduct of debates in the party in recent years has been the pretence that pressures only affect certain groups or individuals (those we don’t agree with). The pressures of accommodation and sectarianism have material roots and they apply to all revolutionaries, and recognising this (rather than finger-wagging at others) is the first step to resisting these pressures. Nobody is immune – mistakes have to be identified, fought and corrected.

The crisis in the party around Respect provides a powerful example, and one we are in danger of repeating. It is now widely accepted that that crisis arose because members of the CC were playing key leadership roles in movements (Stop the War, Respect) and were politically accommodating to them.

There were no proper friction structures in place to allow our approach to be brought out, and the decline in support amongst comrades with concerns were reluctant to raise them and were marginalised if they did.

The result was not just that German and Rees accommodated to the movement. Due to their position on the CC and comrades’ failure to challenge their approach, they pulled the party as a whole in that direction, contributing to the weaknesses in the party that all sides in the current debate now recognise. The whole CC was responsible for these mistakes, and all of us who were in the party at the time were responsible for not doing enough to challenge them.

A section of the cadre of the party, with the (mostly covert) support of sections of the leadership, eventually fought to bring the issues out into the open.

But the approach of the CC at the time was to resolve the crisis organisationally, not politically. Those who backed Rees & German were isolated and driven out, but we had to fight hard to get the Democracy Commission, which at least attempted to create space for more debate and accountability.

A minority of us argued at the time (and since) that this organisational approach was inadequate, and that there were deeper political issues to address – that we hadn’t made a serious analysis of the balance of class forces for years and that as a result we lacked an effective map and compass to steer between accommodation and sectarianism and we were neglecting opportunities, particularly in the workplaces; and that we needed to use the experiences (good and bad) of the Socialist Alliance, Respect, the SSP and internationally to develop a better theoretical framework for electoral work.

Some of us have been arguing consistently against what the CC now calls “movementism” for a number of years. It is great that this debate is finally coming into the mainstream of the party, as illustrated by Alex & Charlie’s flawed ISJ piece.3

2 See, for example, the piece from faction member Jim in IB1 and the CC article “The fever and the cure” in IB2.

But it just won’t do to pretend that only faction members are subject to pressures from the movement – this pretence represents a continuation of ducking debates, so preventing accountability and political learning and stoking up further crises for the future.

Why so defensive?

It is now plain that the comrades who asked for reform of disputes procedures immediately after the first case were right, and that the CC were wrong to suppress their request so that delegates were denied the democratic right to consider it at the January conference.

Had the CC acted differently, the vast majority of the damage we have suffered could have been avoided. We all make mistakes. The point is to identify, correct and learn from them as quickly as possible.

What is puzzling many comrades is how our CC have been so consistently “behind the curve” of the crisis. A number of possible explanations have been kicking around:

1. Even though it is the right thing to do, it takes more strength and confidence to face up to a mistake than it does to duck and dive and try to manoeuvre out of a crisis. Our current CC (through no fault of their own) didn’t have the same experience and political authority of that 20 years ago.
2. Some of the CC opposed the necessary moves.
3. Close ties with MS made CC members amongst the slowest to consider effective action.
4. The low level of class struggle in recent decades has led to a pattern of “substitutionism” in the class and in the party (union officials doing what shop stewards should, stewards dealing with issues legally rather than mobilising members, SWP full timers doing what activists should, activists doing what members should).

Substitutionism leads to greater reliance on a few people, and to focus upwards (seeing the officials as the union, or the CC as the party).

Substitutionism means over-reliance on key individuals and gives defending them an excessive priority. As I wrote in IB3 2012 (before the Facebook 4 case exploded):

“... 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’.”

It would be useful for comrades to hear the CC’s own views on the role these or other explanations played, as it will be important to improve our ability to correct mistakes promptly in future.

The cart and the horse

It takes at least two sides to have a fight. There are people on all sides of the current crisis who have said and done things I disagree with. I am well aware I have said and done things that many comrades disagree with, and that many comrades disagree within things they wrongly believe I have said and done.

But there has been an interesting asymmetry in how the debates have been conducted.

IDOOP and the RIP faction focussed on trying to resolve the crisis around the disputes and the need to improve our political culture so that concerns could be raised, discussed and resolved without such delays, acrimony and damage. Both have been open about the fact that they include comrades with different views on pretty much all other questions.

Such differences have not been hidden – SWP members who happen to be in the faction have written as individuals and groups on all manner of questions. Faction members have generally attempted to engage in open debate as SWP members on all the wider issues, rather than taking positions as a faction. Similarly, faction members have generally not seized on oddball comments or individuals on the other side of the debate and tried to claim that every non-faction member thinks the same unless they make disassociating themselves their central task. Instead of trying to discredit those who argue against us by tarring them all with the brush provided by some of their off-message allies, we have sought to tease out the political differences on the central points.

The CC has adopted a radically different approach. It has sought to focus on a variety of other important issues such as Leninism, movementism and tried to pretend that the dividing lines in the faction fight coincide with dividing lines on these questions. It is pretty obvious that they do not.

The CC has seized on comments from individuals inside and outside the party, views which clearly aren’t shared by all or most faction members (e.g. Seymour, Renton, Jones, Rosen). Sometimes, as with Dave Renton, his views4 (which were already sloppily formulated and inadequately challenged a right wing argument) were grossly misrepresented. In other cases, as with Mike Rosen, views were simply falsely attributed to him.5

At times it has felt like two unconnected monologues. It is as if the faction is arguing it was a mistake to support Droylsden FC rather than Manchester United in a match, while the CC are arguing that all Manchester United supporters prefer lager to orange juice because they saw one person having a can at the match.

Nobody is denying that arguments around accommodation, sectarianism, the centrality of the working class, organising in the workplace, Leninism etc are important. Faction members are so keen to have these debates that many have written articles about these questions. But trying to have these debates is harder in the middle of a faction fight where the dividing lines are over other questions.

A group of comrades is emerging who oppose the faction and who seem to see a further split as inevitable, but want it to be on a clear political basis, based on views of the type of party we need. This puts the cart before the horse. The current factional divisions are not primarily based on views about the type of party we need. If they succeed in splitting the party on current factional lines, they will drive out comrades who they agree with, and keep comrades they disagree with. This is not a recipe for a united SWP going forward, but for further divisions and crises.

The current lines of division in the party are based on how we resolve the problems with the dispute cases. The opposition argued that the disputes processes had not been fit for purpose, a position now shared by the DC panel in the second case, by a majority of the CC and by most comrades. If you have a chip pan fire, the first thing to do is to turn off the stove. Shouting at the pan, denying there is a fire or adjusting the central heating are not good responses.

Step one to resolving the crisis is to resolve the issues around the dispute. This has to be done at the December conference.

Most comrades accept that we will need to continue to debate the important arguments about other issues long after conference, outside a factional atmosphere.

The problem is that the approach currently proposed by the CC will not be enough to turn off the heat, prevent any more damage to the party and create the space for the wider debates to take place. The reason for this is simple.

Though the party wouldn’t now have to move much further to make a proper apology to the two women or to reform our disputes procedures, the political reasons for this progress are still being concealed from members. The CC talks about “mistakes”; but won’t say what it thinks they are. A leadership that won’t politically argue for its position is no leadership at all.

The results of this lack of leadership are catastrophic for any attempt to reunite the party. Just look at my own district – Manchester. Such has been the level of bullying and ostracism that there is now only one branch (mine) where faction members are able to fully participate.

This isn’t just a question of personal

4 http://livesrunning.wordpress.com/2013/06/18/teachers/
5 http://michaelrosenblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/swp-untruth-about-me-from-callinicos.html
behaviour, it is a political question. Manchester currently has five NC members. At the September NC, opposition supporters backed the CC against a minority who only wanted the DC review document to go to the party after ripping the guts from it,6 and who opposed publishing it on the party website at all. Three of the Manchester NC members were in this minority. At our aggregate, one of them argued for an apology for MS. How could this be appropriate after he has left the party, avoiding democratic accountability over the second case (where the finding was that there was a case to answer)?

Another NC member told the aggregate that the finding of the DC on the first case was “no case to answer” on the charges of rape and sexual harassment. Apart from being factually untrue, this is a sexist position. If a woman comes forward and says she was raped or sexually harassed, there is a case to answer. Thankfully, whatever its faults, our DC did not take this position or produce this finding.

If the party is to reunite in practice, with comrades able to work together irrespective of what views they took in the past, the leadership not only has a responsibility to argue against the ostracism and bullying, but to challenge the political errors that underlie it. When a leading comrade can make false and sexist remarks at an aggregate, in front of two CC members, and the national secretary does not come back on them, we have a problem.

This really is accommodation – to sexism, not the movement. If the CC cannot argue openly what was wrong with the disputes procedures and why an apology (or even mere regret!) is necessary, they have no hope of winning this backward minority to the party’s politics or preventing them misleading wider sections of the party.

Clear political positions from our leadership on the specific mistakes around the disputes and the political reasons for actions to address them are the prerequisite for the party’s recovery. This isn’t about demanding a pound of flesh – in reality it is the only way the air can be cleared to allow comrades to work together properly again on a principled basis and to win allies in the wider movement back to a healthy relationship with us.

We need to come out of conference with a party leadership which takes a principled stance against sexism in the party rather than accommodating to it to protect a voting block.

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**THE PULL OF MOVEMENTISM – FANTASY OR REALITY?**

**Iain** (Glasgow North)

‘What a curious thing that such an incredibly powerful phenomenon remained undetected within the party for over two years, only coming to light as a side effect of the CC’s attempt to account for its own role in the dispute crisis’.

Thus the Faction’s ISJ Board members response to the CC’s argument that the departure of so many of our students is due in large part to the pull of movementism. Like so much of that article, the comment is heavy on sarcasm, light on analysis. It is also wrong.

Fully two and a half years ago, some forty student members of the Party in Glasgow left the Party to form the International Socialist Group.

While the loss of so many promising young comrades was a matter of great sadness, it was not entirely unexpected.

Despite having been in the Party for some time, more experienced members had been aware for some time (and from well before the current disputes case) that within the group there was little sense of identification either with the Party – what is sometimes called ‘Party pride’ - or its theoretical traditions.

In terms of theory, for example, David Harvey was almost universally preferred to Chris Harman, who was seen as rather crude, while politically, the group was extremely soft with political differences seldom argued out.

That same political softness was reflected in their political practice with a leading student running for the presidency of the students’ association at Glasgow University failing to identify himself as an SWP member and refusing to raise the issue of NUS affiliation because if he did, he explained to this writer, ‘the right-wing would eat us alive’.

As their subsequent political trajectory has shown, there was a very definite political explanation for the break, albeit that this is now clearer than it was then. Since the split the ISG has flirted from campaign to campaign.

First there was the Coalition of Resistance. Initially very big meetings (200 plus) in the absence of any perspective or direction quickly dwindled to a few dozen and COR now seems to have disappeared.

Then they latched onto a local campaign against the closure of a day centre in the East End of Glasgow which they quickly abandoned, to the disgust and anger of local activists.

More recently, they have thrown themselves into the Radical Independence Campaign. Here too they have been involved in organising some large events (including an 800 strong conference in 2012) but again have effectively liquidated themselves into RIC, with the result that the political running is now being made by other left groups.

ISG members appear on demonstrations as individuals (no placards, no leaflets, no papers), and do not attempt to shape or give direction to these movements and events (not helped by the fact that they have abandoned any form of publication, relying instead on social media).

This is movementism with a vengeance. What is now clear, however, is that far from being an aberration, the Glasgow experience was a precursor of what was to happen nationally in the SWP two years later.

And like leading members in Scotland 30 months ago who are now central to the faction, far from challenging that movementism or seeking to explore its political roots, the faction panders to it.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the ISG appears to be going into meltdown. According to one its leading student activists who resigned this year on the back of what he describes as ‘a string of resignations’, reasons for this include the leadership’s lack of accountability as well as its failure to deal in any way at all with issues of alleged rape and sexual harassment. In an Open Letter on his Facebook page, he writes:

“Over the past year it has become apparent that the ISG has no real strategy or direction, other than hedging all of its bets on independence. This may also relate to the lack of collective decision making and lack of open and facilitated ideological debate within the organisation.

Alongside liberation issues the ISG has no involvement, or any desired involvement, in real working class politics and it could even be said exhibits a disdain towards working class culture”.

This is where movementism leads. And this is why despite the protestations of the faction, the need to defend the Leninist model of the Party is more important than ever.

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6 See the amendment from Mark & Rhetta in IB1, amongst others
TEESIDE
SWP BRANCH:
REVERSING THE
DECLINE
Jack and Andrew (Teesside)

Jack:
At the beginning of 2013, Teesside SWP branch was in a very precarious place. With no SWSS group at the university to bring in a new layer of activists who could provide fresh energy, and only two active members, we were in real danger of the branch falling away to nothing after the work put into it over the preceding years.

At the start of the University term after the summer, however, this quickly changed. Setting up a stall on campus during Freshers’ it quickly became obvious that we were the only political group to bother with the university, despite a number of them existing locally in one way or another.

After a week of intense activity, organised by myself with only one other long-standing party member and a new sign up to help out when they could, it appeared that we’d managed to completely turn the tables.

By the end of the week we had five new party sign ups and a plethora of new SWSS sign ups. I think I can safely say that we’d managed to save Teesside Branch. This sudden turn around didn’t come from nowhere, however.

Initially, we merged the Branch and SWSS. As there were only two solid activists on Teesside, splitting our time between the student society on campus and work on building the Party Branch was no doubt a major factor in the irrevocable decline we were facing.

Merging the two not only allowed us to focus our time on the primary goal of building a single group, inclusive of both the students at the university and workers in the local area, it also allowed us to focus on answering any general questions that people new to political activity on the left would have, why we focus our activity on the working class, why Marx etc. as well as giving us time to build for a single larger meeting each week as opposed to two meetings.

While I certainly don’t see this as a model to apply to the rest of the Party, it ensured we were able to cement ourselves as the student society that pushes both the SU and the student body at large into political action.

While the HE Strike on Thursday 31st October was small compared to most areas (as is much of the political activity on Teesside) it was certainly more vocal than it would have been without SWSS on campus building for it and trying to get as many students along to the picket lines as possible to show solidarity.

We are also actively engaged in organising a campaign to save the Childcare services on campus, an issue that affects a large number of students and lecturers.

This led us to quickly solve our next major issue, only two solid activists. Thanks to how many people who signed up to the Party and SWSS (with regular meetings numbering fifteen or more) we were able to ask people to get involved whenever they could.

With a new Paper Organiser and Books Stall Organiser, we were able to spread as much of the work between as many comrades as possible, allowing us to focus on building for ever bigger meetings both here on campus (holding a SWSS stall twice a week on Tuesdays and Wednesdays) and in the local area (with our weekly paper sales on Saturdays as well as through involvement in local Trade Unions, campaigns and groups such as the Teesside People’s Assembly).

All in all, Teesside has seen nothing short of a total reverse in direction in regards to the level of Party activity and involvement.

We now play a major role in the politics of Teesside University, making sure that the SU is challenged over issues such as near-on condemning the HE strike and closing the crèche and we are quickly coming into our own in the local area, pushing forward anti-cuts groups such as the local PA and helping other campaign groups to get set-up.

It has been thanks to the very hard work and effort of a small number of Comrades. Showing that when we pull together, we can achieve a lot more than we expected.

Andrew (recent recruit on Teesside):
I had worked around the Teesside branch of the SWP for quite some time after meeting Jack B. and Liam A. on paper sales in Middlesbrough Town Centre.

I originally became involved with the Left locally through a group called Teesside Solidarity Movement.

However this was a group of people who were already well established in their political beliefs on the left and had become more of a talking shop than the group of activists I was looking to involve myself with.

It did however bring me into more contact with Jack B. and Liam A. I saw them as real activists within the TSM and realised they were the kind of people that I really wanted to be involved in working with.

I worked with them on the stalls during Teesside University Freshers’ Fair which helped me to learn more about the party’s policies and views while explaining them to others.

I decided I had found a group whose views I believed in and were extremely active in the various struggles locally and nationally. This triggered me into filling in a sign up form and joining the party.

And since then I have tried to involve myself in everything the party has done locally and whatever I can in our national struggles.

BUILDING THE ‘SAY IT LOUD’ MEETING IN LEICESTER
Sally, Jackie, Cath and Dave (Leicester)

It’s been a tough year for many comrades in the party. The outside world is no escape. In Leicester our branch members have faced redundancy, service closures and the constant threat of public sector cuts, also unions who seem to be inadequate for the fights we face. I am sure we are similar to many branches around the country.

This could lead to lead to depression, conservatism and inactivity. This contribution is to say to all the branches out there, if we can do it, so can you.

November 7th Leicester had the biggest Socialist Worker public meeting that many of us can remember. It was between 40-50 people. This may not sound too exciting. But it was not only the numbers but the make-up of the people who attended the meeting. There were 15 members and 25-35 non-members. The discrepancy in numbers is because so many people came into the meeting once it had started we didn’t have the room to sign everyone in. We did sign in 25 non-members so we know it was at least that.

The majority of non-members were from the Leicester African Caribbean community, in addition to a number of African Asylum Seekers. The non-member audience was mostly young. But there were some respected older community members too.

Most surprising was the 2 mothers who were organising a benefit for the disenfranchised black youth-due to a number of deaths of black people in the community. They wanted to fight against the system and they came to the meeting to advertise their meeting called ‘Enough is Enough’! The meeting reflected real anger-but it also reflected a real thirst for the real black history-the history of racism, resistance and revolution. I am convinced the audience would have listened to Ken Olende for many hours more! This was proved further by the sale of 9 Say It Loud books, books on revolution, Bristol Bus workers etc.

Leadership
So how did we do it? Firstly, you need a comrade who takes it on, and makes it their own. In our branch Sally booked the speaker, pushed for the meeting and helped organise the flyers etc to get things going.

Sally got the inspiration from a Marxism meeting by Brian Richardson. In a discussion about the under representation of black people in the party. Brian raised the ‘Say it Loud’ book launch-and suggested planning the meetings to co-incide with Black history month. It also helped that we
had the right venue—the African Caribbean centre—in the heart of Leicesters diverse communities.

Working as a branch – getting the message out there

Sally consistently raised how we were going to build for the public meeting – this led to comrades agreeing to activity to build the event which included:
• Mass leafleting both universities in weeks up to the meeting, including talking to people in the canteens etc
• Handing out leaflets at Saturday sales, and leaflets circulated at branch meetings
• Leafleting student black history event
• Displaying posters and leaflets in cafes. Fast food places, shops, supermarkets
• Leafleting the Asylum Seeker day centre

We believe one of the reasons for the numbers may have been if comrades took leaflets, posters and blue tac and literally put a poster in every telephone box, launderette, newsagent, supermarket and café in the Highfields area of Leicester with big black and Asian community. Not one shop or café said we couldn’t put up posters or leave leaflets.

This was a real eye opener for some of our more conservative elements. We think this created an atmosphere that this meeting was important, and worth going to. This was consciously targeting cafes, shop and fast food places outside of the city centre where different communities lived. We did this a number of times.

In addition to this all comrades were emailed and reminder texts were sent to individuals.

Press release

Another big boost to the build-up of the meeting was a result of our press release. One comrade updated our press contacts accumulated over many events and sent out a press release about the public meeting and book launch. Again it helped that it was Black history month.

One of the results of this was that on the Sunday before the event Brian Richardson was interviewed on a local African Caribbean music show. The interview was lively and informative, and we got a good bit of coverage in the local black and Asian community. Not one shop or café said we couldn’t put up posters or leave leaflets.

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In addition to this all comrades were emailed and reminder texts were sent to individuals.

Publicity for next meetings

We also had a postcard with the image from the student event and on the back we put stickers on with the next few meetings. This meant everyone had information about what the branch will be discussing next.

Finally... we had a leaflet for our next public meeting: ‘Is the Education system failing black kids?’ It is around Brian Richardson’s book and he has agreed to speak.

And we recruited two people.

To conclude – there are definitely things we could have done better – we were so shocked by the turn out we forgot to do a collection. At one point we couldn’t find the recruitment forms, the room was so rammed people were nearly sitting on the bookstall. Also we didn’t get the meeting organised in time to be included in the Black History month timetable.

However, despite all this the meeting was a resounding success. And it confirmed our belief that far from the SWP becoming a damaged brand that needed to be ditched- it continues to maintain its long fought for position – in the real world – not in ‘troll cyberland, ‘as a revolutionary organisation punching above its weight’ And excuse the pun but continues to be a ‘contender’ in the struggle to change the world.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Ken, Carol, Roger and Sarah (Brent & Harrow), Suzanne (Islington), Martin (Manchester City Centre), Steve (Medway), Peter (Camden), Greg (Lewisham), Bobby (Southampton), John and Fergus (Hornsey & Wood Green), Nick, John and Hazel (Ealing), Mike (Leeds City Centre), Laura (Wakefield), Simon (Leeds Harehills), Judy (Bury & Prestwich), Niaz (Euston), Nancy, Jonathan, Kate and Sophie (Oxford), Pete (Edinburgh), Richard (Hackney East)

In his introduction to the party’s 2010 reprint of the Communist Manifesto Alex Callinicos states that “the most serious threat facing humankind comes from the growing danger of chaotic climate change”.

He continues: “The competitive logic of capitalism thus threatens the very survival of humankind”. Since 2010 the overwhelming evidence from climate scientists and the leading authorities on climate change not only supports Alex’s statement but considerably augments it. We face the possibility of a world-historic catastrophe of survival-threatening proportions. It goes without saying that capitalism’s greatest threat to humanity is of the greatest importance to a revolutionary party.

The following gives an outline of the current position in relation to climate change and the climate movement, and indicates what party members have been doing and can do in the coming period to rise to this challenge.

The scenario is not all doom and gloom, and it is certainly not our intention to moralise comrades into a greater engagement with climate issues. The prospects for building a powerful and potentially mass climate movement are brighter than they have been for some years, and the contribution of the party through its involvement in the One Million Climate Jobs campaign against Climate Change (CCC) and the One Million Climate Jobs campaign has already been considerable.

We believe that the suggestions put forward below will not only strengthen that movement but offer significant opportunities for building the SWP and its influence on what is likely to become a growing area of political resistance with the escalation of protests against fracking and the Coalition government’s “dash for gas”. Nonetheless, the world has a very limited window of opportunity to make the necessary changes to the way we generate and use energy, and the urgency of the situation must inform our thinking.

The scale of the climate crisis

The recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change should lay to rest any credible doubts that global warming is happening, is already affecting the world’s weather patterns, and is the result of human activity – primarily, but not exclusively, the unrestricted burning of fossil fuels.

The world today is approaching one degree warmer than it was under pre-industrial conditions and on current performance there seems little possibility that global temperatures will stay within the relatively “safe” limit of a two degree increase. At some point after that positive feedback loops will kick-in and plunge the planet into catastrophic and unstoppable climate destabilisation.

Already, as satellite photographs show, the Arctic ice cap is melting at an alarming rate, and current measurements suggest that there will be no Arctic sea ice in the summer months from 2016. This year, for the first time in something like four million years, the saturation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has exceeded 400 parts per million and, even more worryingly, plumes of methane have begun to erupt from the North Atlantic.
Although we can’t be certain that all of the extreme weather events experienced in recent years are the result of human-induced climate change, it seems very probable that most of them are. In other words, we are already experiencing some of the conditions that Chris Harman anticipated in an article in Socialist Review in 2007: “New weather patterns will affect the crops we rely on for food. The likelihood of storms and droughts will increase. Ice caps will melt. Rising sea levels threaten to flood low lying regions such as the Nile Delta, Bangladesh and parts of Florida (and eventually central London and Manhattan).”

Some climate scientists suggest that global temperatures could rise by as much as four and a half degrees by 2040, and six degrees by the end of the century. If that happens surface temperatures in some parts of the world could increase by ten to twelve degrees, making them uninhabitable for human beings and too hot and arid for the growing of crops. Combined with sea level rises this would lead to massive population movements and the proliferation of wars for the control of resources. The political and economic consequences are therefore incalculable.

The response of the ruling class

Undoubtedly, there are sections of the ruling class, nationally and internationally, who recognize that their continued exploitation of the planet and its people depends on the existence of a manageable environment and stable nation states that are not undermined by ecological devastation and popular revolts against food shortages and rising prices.

Their anxieties were expressed by Richard Jones, deputy director of the International National Energy Agency, who in May 2012 wrote to the world’s energy ministers warning of the threat of a six degree temperature rise and urging governments to “Please take our warning seriously”.

The report by Lord Stern earlier this year argued that if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change then 80% of the world’s reserves of coal, oil and gas, must remain “in the ground”. Similarly, a Ministry of Defence report, Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2040, speaks of climate change becoming a “primary driver” of global change in the years ahead, amplifying “existing social, political and resource stresses, shifting the tipping point at which conflict ignites”.

In spite of such warnings – and nineteen sets of UN climate talks since the first Earth Summit in 1992 – world governments are still very far from reaching a binding agreement on limiting carbon emissions. Instead, Western governments have looked to neoliberal solutions such as the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme, which has been a manifest failure and for many corporations a licence to pollute.

The limited benefits of our own government’s “Green Deal” will be far outweighed by the effects of George Osborne’s determination to make gas a “core part” of Britain’s energy mix up to and beyond 2030 and his promotion of fracking and coal gasification in the hope of emulating the US shale gas and oil revolution.

Current British government policy seems designed to do the opposite of what is needed. It includes pushing for new-build gas plants which could bust the UK’s emissions targets, halving the tax paid by gas exploration companies from 64% to 32%, and government support for fracking through the relaxation of the planning regulations. Reinforcing this we have Tory opposition to wind farms and the growth of climate scepticism as an ideology on the political right.

While there may be some hope of some kind of breakthrough in the series of UN climate talks up to 2015 the constraints imposed by the logic of capitalism will almost certainly ensure that any action agreed upon will be too little, if not too late.

The pressures in the background include the system’s need to adopt more and more extreme methods of extracting oil, gas and coal to sustain its hoped-for levels of economic growth, and the political leverage and financial weight of the carbon corporations. According to the Stern Report, the top 200 energy companies spent $674bn (£441bn) in 2012 on finding and exploiting new reserves of gas and oil. This is equivalent to 1% of the world’s Gross Domestic Product and enough to pay for the transition to a “clean” sustainable economy.

In Britain, the fossil fuel lobby represents the interests of a section of the ruling class which is entrenched in the British political system. As Chancellor, George Osborne is one of the most powerful promoters of these interests while the Government’s Cabinet Office adviser in this area is Lord John Browne, a former Chief Executive of BP and currently chairman and 30% owner of Quadrilla Resources, the first of the energy companies licensed to carry out fracking in Britain.

The renewable energy industry, being a lot newer and smaller, does not benefit from such influence. Consequently, despite its promise of being the greenest government ever, the Coalition government has cut subsidies for renewables and invested £13.5bn in recovering UK oil and gas this year, the largest investment in any industrial sector.

A further barrier to progress is what the Carbon Tracker think-tank has called the “Carbon Bubble”, the frenzy of financial speculation in the fossil fuel industry. This is driven by investors’ belief that governments will not act decisively to restrict the burning of fossil fuels and switch to renewables. Any move in that direction is likely to wipe billions of dollars off the market valuation of the energy companies and trigger a financial crash on the scale of the 2007-8 banking crisis.

All of this argues that the climate crisis is as much a political crisis as an ecological one, and needs to be addressed alongside the broader political struggles against austerity, the cuts, unemployment, and attacks on living standards. Fuel poverty in particular is a class issue. A recent report by Cambridge Econometrics estimates that the dash for gas will cost the UK economy around £20bn.

This will be paid for through higher energy bills when already a quarter of UK households are struggling to pay their bills. Engaging with such issues is crucial, but we also have to recognise that the climate movement has its own specific concerns and forms of struggle that we need to relate to. As Harman wrote in 2007: “That means trying to give struggles a direction that protects people’s living standards and conditions while at the same time presenting real alternatives to pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere”.

The changing climate movement

The failure of the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, when the US and China, backed by India, Brazil and South Africa, blocked any move towards binding emissions targets, left the climate movement in a state of demoralisation. This was epitomised by the disbanding of Climate Camp in February 2011 and the ever-decreasing size of demonstrations as compared with the “Wave” protests in London and Glasgow in 2009 which attracted over 50,000 people.

Nonetheless, a number of recent developments point to the potential for a revival of the movement and its increasing receptiveness to class politics. Climate campaigners have played an important role in the Occupy movement, and the networks formed by activists after the disbanding of Climate Camp have been instrumental in creating new campaigns and movements focussed on austerity. These include UK Uncut and Fuel Poverty Action, while the Reclaim the Power coalition initiated by No Dash for Gas has made a systematic effort to involve anti-austerity groups, pensioners’ associations and trade unions.

This is very different from the way the old climate camps were built, and has laid the ground for a productive synergy between the protest movement and parallel initiatives by our own comrades and others in the CCC’s Trade Union Group and the One Million Climate Jobs campaign.

This was evidenced by the climate bloc organised by Occupy at the Manchester TUC demonstration in September, which adopted the slogan “No to fracking, yes to a million climate jobs”.

The Trade Union Group itself played
a large part in putting together a climate bloc of over twenty campaign groups for the TUC demonstration in October 2012. More recently it worked with Reclaim the Power in organising a well-attended workshop during its anti-fracking protest camp at Balcombe in West Sussex.

The main speakers for the workshop were Manuel Cortes, General Secretary of TSSA, and Chris Baugh, Assistant General Secretary of PCS, both supporters of the Trade Union Group, and the subsequent break-out sessions were dominated by discussion of the means of creating climate jobs.

The increasing influence of the One Million Climate Jobs campaign, both within the climate movement and at all levels of the trade unions, is a further reason for believing that the potential exists for a re-establishing the climate movement on a broader political basis.

The campaign now has the backing of five national unions, PCS, UCU, TSSA, CWU and Unite, the recent addition of Unite being a significant step forward.

The preparation of an updated edition of the campaign pamphlet due for publication in the spring is also an opportunity to add further endorsements from national unions.

A further priority has been to broaden support among rank and file trade unionists and environmental reps, and wherever possible drawing them into joint activity with climate campaigners.

In May 2012 the Trade Union Group organised the Climate Jobs Caravan tour which travelled 3000 miles, visited 25 towns and cities, and acted as a focus for city centre activities, street stalls and public meetings.

The tour was a notable success in bringing together local climate networks, representatives of NGO’s, and trade unionists, much of its funding coming from union branches, trades councils and regional councils.

In June of this year, the Trade Union Group organised a national conference on “Confronting the Climate Crisis” which not only attracted 160 trade unionists and climate activists but made a significant breakthrough in providing a platform for leading climate scientists to give detailed briefings on the implications of climate change and the failure of the politicians to mount an adequate response.

The increasing readiness of climate scientists to speak at conferences of this kind represents an important addition to the armoury of the movement.

As a key weapon in that armoury, the campaign for a million climate jobs derives its strength from the simplicity and credibility of its argument.

This proposes that for a tiny fraction of the £375bn poured into the economy through quantitative easing the Government could create a million secure jobs, insulate homes and public buildings, provide cheaper and better public transport, and directly tackle climate change by developing renewables.

The reformist politics of the campaign, and the Keynesian basis of its economic argument, should not blind us to its potential as a programme for a broad united front that can strengthen the challenge to neoliberalism and provide the anti-austerity movement with a powerful and persuasive offensive demand.

At the People’s Assembly in June a workshop on the environment organised by the CCC attracted over 300 people and was packed to overflowing.

Instances of non-violent direct action have also drawn widespread support. In October last year, twenty-one activists from No Dash for Gas climbed into and occupied the newly constructed gas-fired power station at West Burton, Nottinghamshire, closing the station for a week and preventing the emission of 19,117 tonnes of CO2.

The resulting attempt by EDF Energy to sue them for £5m damages provoked a storm of protest, including a petition of 64,000 signatures, which eventually led to the dropping of its action. As No Dash for Gas proclaimed on its website: “21 people went up the chimney and 64,000 came down!”

The rapid rise of an anti-fracking movement in reaction to Cuadrilla Resources’ exploratory drills at Fylde near Blackpool and Balcombe in West Sussex now adds a new and explosive element to these developments.

Comrades should not underestimate the potential of this movement to open up a new political battle-front in the period up to and beyond the General Election. There are already 176 onshore licences for “petroleum exploration development” in the UK, including shale gas and coal-bed methane, and the current round of applications will add significantly more.

With 64% of England sitting on top of shale gas and oil deposits the eventual number of fracking sites could run into thousands, or possibly tens of thousands.

Sir David King, the Government’s former Chief Scientific Advisor, estimates that for fracking to have an economic impact there would need to be 2,000-3,000 wells drilled each year.

Some of these will be in areas of outstanding natural beauty, some on the edge of urban areas such as Salford and Trafford, many in Tory constituencies, including those of William Hague, Michael Gove and Osborne himself.

Tory MPs have been told they must support fracking, even in their own constituencies, so with 45 anti-fracking groups already in existence the battle lines are starting to be drawn.

No doubt many of the protest groups will be chiefly concerned with local issues of water pollution and the impact on house prices, but the need to strengthen their campaigns and deflect the charge of nimbyism will mean they are likely to turn to the larger argument about climate change and welcome the support of activists, as they have in Balcombe.

This map shows UK oil and gas exploration and development licences currently issued or subject to consultation. The grey areas represent parts of the country vulnerable to fracking.

The challenge and opportunities for the SWP

The journalist and environmental campaigner George Monbiot has said that “Climate change is perhaps the gravest calamity our species has ever encountered. Its impact dwarfs that of any war, any plague, any famine we have confronted so far.

It makes genocide and ethnic cleansing look like sideshows at the circus of human suffering”. The starkness of this assessment should impress upon us the enormity of the climate issue and the need to connect with it, wherever possible, in all areas of the party’s work. The contribution of party members to the activities of the Campaign against Climate Change has already been impressive and suggests that engagement with the issue opens up opportunities for building the party’s influence and strengthening the fight against austerity and the Coalition government.

All SWP members should read and sell the “One Million Climate Jobs” pamphlet and raise its proposals in their unions, anti-cuts meetings, unemployed workers’ groups, and wherever the argument is put that environmental barbarism is acceptable if it leads to the creation of jobs.

Branches should consider organising public meetings, or at least branch meetings, for the launch of the new edition of the pamphlet in the spring. A speaker and/or workshop on the campaign should
be a regular feature of Unite the Resistance conferences and comrades should attempt to win the affiliation of their union branch or trades council to the CCC Trade Union Group and, if possible, attend as its delegate.

The party’s industrial fractions can also make a contribution by supporting the “Green Light” campaign launched by ShareAction and supported by the Trade Union Group which calls for the withdrawal of pension funds from the carbon corporations and other polluting industries.

Currently the CCC is using the environmental argument to support the TUC-backed campaign for the re-nationalisation of the railways and the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy initiative which calls for the power industry to be brought back into public ownership. These again are areas where the fractions can be involved.

On 29th October the CCC launched its “Time to Act!” campaign with a meeting in parliament chaired by Joan Walley, chair of the House of Commons Scrutiny Committee on the Environment, and addressed by, among others, Professor Joanna Haigh, Head of Atmospheric Physics at Imperial College, and Philip Pearson, the TUC’s Senior Policy Officer for Climate Change and Energy.

The campaign will involve a series of events running through the General Election and local elections and include local meetings and university seminars leading up to a national demonstration next autumn. SWP branches and SWSS groups should support these events and play a part in organising them while raising the general arguments for socialism.

In the universities especially this could make a significant contribution to rebuilding our periphery. The expansion of fracking may also mean that there is, or soon will be, anti-fracking groups in many localities where we have branches. It is important that comrades are involved and help to shape these campaigns.

As Marxists we understand that the world’s fever will only be cured if we eradicate its cause, the poison of capitalism. But we can’t just wait for the revolution or carry on our politics in the same old way.

Climate change poses challenges for the whole party and not just the climate fraction. The question of climate jobs has allowed us to bring the trade union movement and the environmental movement closer together.

Because it also raises the question of austerity and economic crisis, it also allows us to raise wider questions about the nature of capitalism and its impact on the environment.

But for revolutionary socialists it is not enough to simply raise demands like climate jobs. We also have to be developing and winning people to our critique of capitalism. So alongside getting involved in environmental campaigns and local climate networks, we also need to be hosting meetings such as “Marxism and Ecology” and “Capitalism and the Environment” to make sure our comrades are armed with the arguments to take into the movement.

As Harman argued:

“The impact of climate change will cause an intensification of all the struggles bred by capitalism, just as it will cause spasmodic protests over particular climate change issues. There is only one way to build the forces needed to put an end to the system that creates climate change. That is through participation in all these struggles, pulling them together into a force that can challenge capitalism as a whole.”

**IPSWICH: FROM FOUNDATIONS TO FRAMEWORK**

*John (Ipswich)*

Last year I wrote in the pre-conference IB how Ipswich SWP started off with a branch of 2 members (officially four but two shortly left because they were not active within the party), the first branch in the town since 1994.

Thirteen months later and the branch has gone from 2 to 24 members!

The success of Ipswich SWP can be put down to the following - a high level of confidence in the ideas of the party both in terms of our theoretical heritage and in our current perspectives, strategy and tactics as outlined by the CC and as contained in Socialist Worker, Socialist Review and International Socialism journal - without this prerequisite the two founding comrades would not have been able to make the 60 mile round trip into Ipswich week in and week out.

This is an important point. Ipswich SWP does not have a single supporter of the faction and never has done. We do not navel gaze. We do not turn inwards. Because we have the confidence in the ideas of the party we are able to constantly push outwards.

We also understand that the back drop to the crisis in the party is a reflection of the low level of struggle that has initiated a break with the ideas of a section of the party (including the centrality of the working class, democratic centralism, the theory and application of the united front, women’s oppression and movementism) resulting in blaming the CC for what in many respects can be laid at the door of the national trade union leaders.

This means that whatever set backs we may encounter we are aware that at the end of the day it always comes back to the party – the one key text that is constantly pushed and referred to is Cliff’s Lenin, in particular “Building the Party”.

As said, when we started out there were only two of us and we had no grand plan other than to set up a regular Saturday sale, selling for 3 hours from 10am, to see what was out there.

We decided before we could run we needed to walk. Within weeks we started to recruit on the back of the paper sales (we sell anything between 25-45 depending on the petition) so now we have anything from 2-6 comrades on a sale, with most joining the second half of the sale.

This gave us the chance to start having regular branch meetings (which are monthly due to the high cost of hiring venues with a informal branch taking place over a coffee after the Saturday sale) where we have a mixture of CC speakers and speakers from within the branch including the newer members doing meetings in order to build up their confidence and knowledge of Marxist theory and practice.

We have also initiated a number of regular industrial sales: Royal Mail mail centre (with 2 post workers who buy Socialist Review each month) with 6-8 sold on each sale, multi departmental civil service building sale (6-19 SW sold), probation workers sale (6 SW), hospital sale (6 SW) and a college sale soon to be established. A regular estate sale is also planned.

The membership of the branch have been recruited from the following:

- Saturday sale: 7
- Royal Mail sale: 1
- UTR: 5
- UAF: 2
- Internet: 1
- Old membership list (re-register): 4
- Moved into Ipswich branch: 2

We have 12 members who pay their subs by DD, with another 5 by semi regular cash subs. The remainder are in the process of being discussed with in terms of making a financial commitment to the party.

Over the course of the year we have launched a number of united front initiatives such as Unite The Resistance, Anti-Bedroom Tax and Unite Against Fascism which has enabled us to begin to shape the political landscape in Ipswich.

This is in addition to relating to the People’s Assembly and the recent strikes/industrial action short of a strike by fire fighters, teachers, probation workers, civil service workers and the upcoming postal strikes.

We have held four UTR meetings from October 2012 from The Case for the General Strike, Bedroom Tax to two meetings on fighting austerity. While the meetings in terms of size were modest it has enabled us to build up a small but rooted list of contacts from the trade union movement (CWU, PCS, Unite, NUT, Unison) whose
quality far outweighs their quantity - the last UfR meeting we had on fighting austerity on the 1st October while the smallest one numerically was also the most serious with almost everyone a trade unionist and serious about getting involved (the meeting agreed to help set up a postworkers support group for the upcoming postal strikes).

On the Bedroom Tax, we held a very successful meeting in June this year with around 25 people attending. However, it is true to say that while we have a small network of contacts on the biggest estate in Ipswich (who would provide the spine of any future anti bedroom tax campaign - two of which are likely to join the SWP in the near future) the bedroom tax campaign has not taken off.

To their credit the Labour Council while not coming out in favour of a no-evictions policy are in fact doing exactly that in practice and are to be applauded for that.

However, with a Labour party nationally committed to scrapping the bedroom tax while not yet in power (sic) and with arrears still building up a potential explosive situation could arise - and we have at least a kernel of an organisation in place.

We have also begun an orientation around Disabled People Against the Cuts - a new formation in Ipswich.

The founding member of Ipswich DPAC joined the party after the last UfR meeting. Over the course of next year DPAC will be launching various meetings and campaigns.

The most successful United Front we have initiated is Unite Against Fascism. And it is here that the application of the united front tactic has borne such success pulling in a wide range of people and groups from the Labour Party, union officials, members of the trade council, teachers, civil servants, artists, reformists of various shades, revolutionaries etc.

For months it just plodded on (with the exception of an SWP and UAF member convincing a local Muslim charity worker to put out a statement of regret after he had previously joined with fellow Muslims an EDL march to commemorate Lee Rigby’s killing) until the EDL ‘lobbied’ a UAF public meeting at the local Unite union offices.

From this moment on it was like lighted the proverbial touch paper. UAF has developed a life of its own.

Such was the outrage at the EDL ‘lobby’ of the Unite office and the EDL marching in Ipswich.

Two weeks after the EDL marched in Ipswich UAF led a 135-strong march for multiculturalism with a range of speakers afterwards including Ipswich Council leader and Steve Hart from Unite the Union, with an SWP member who is also a member of Unison’s NEC speaking in a personal capacity afterwards.

From this an LMHR gig had been organised and was closed down by the venue owner due to pressure from the EDL - however, such was the outrage that a bigger and better one is planned with Ipswich Council backing it among others.

While SWP members are involved with LMHR it is fair to say that LMHR has a life of its own, again symptomatic of the successful application of the united front tactic.

The SWP has not only firmly established a foundation in terms of a modest branch with a high level of activity and ideological/theoretical engagement but as can be seen has established a framework in terms of initiating a series of united fronts to engage with wider forces.

While it is important to keep this in perspective it is not unreasonable to say that the first year been incredibly successful.

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ON OSTRICH HEADS AND SAND – A REPLY TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Mike (Leeds City Centre)

I wrote a piece in IB1 based on the experience of running the appeal and re-registration last year in Leeds District. After a careful and through audit we concluded that we had less than 100 members not the 200 on the Centre’s records.

The Central Committee’s response in IB2 (“Building the Party - who is a member”) was “That we don’t believe this is a valid approach”. I drew a deep breath and read on expecting to be suitably demolished only to be disappointed and indeed depressed by their dismissal.

The CC argued that these members do exist but for a variety of reasons are not currently active. Their argument must be read in the context that nationally only 30% of members pay regular subs – Leeds is 31% – so this is not an issue confined to Leeds.

I had the good fortune to be branch secretary of Stoke Newington IS in the 1960s and as Tony Cliff lived nearby we would sometimes discuss branch issues.

One such issue was collection of subs – in those days mainly in cash. Cliff’s position was robust – “You pay for your politics – it’s too important not to”.

I agreed and still agree, after all you can’t be in a union without paying subs, even more so should this be the case in a revolutionary party. Of course there are members who find it difficult to pay – but even 25p a week is a commitment – more importantly ensures regular contact.

However to suggest that 70% of the membership falls into this category or are just currently inactive is not realistic and doesn’t show the judgement of the CC in a very good light – indeed ostrich heads and sand come to mind.

To reiterate, no ‘member’ was deleted from Leeds until they had fulfilled all of the following conditions:

1. They didn’t pay subs – most never had – although some had cancelled.
2. There was no way of communicating with them – no valid email/phone and no longer at the postal address, which was checked for occupancy.
3. They were unknown to anyone in the District

Of course some comrades transfer and don’t tell us – we identified a few such and the local branch was notified of their presence in the area. And a few more left consciously.

Our view in Leeds is that they were recruited – on a coach or at a street sale or a freshers’ fair – but not followed up. Most of them were recruited over three years ago and will have forgotten that they ever signed up – after all they never paid subs and engaged in no noticeable activity.

So why is this important and not just a piece of accounting pedantry? For at least three reasons:

i) Trying to relate to members as individuals is hard and time wasting if over half are just names on paper.

ii) Understanding our resources is essential if activity is to be prioritised rationally.

iii) Democracy – many, (most?) districts are sending delegates to conference on the basis of inflated figures. There is little incentive to update the membership list if the only results are a reduction in delegates and a swipe from the CC.

Finally, we are in a class war so a military metaphor is appropriate. An army that plans a campaign based on 2,500, of which only 1,500 are trained and equipped, will have problems. Too many attacks will be launched, and too much territory occupied, with exhaustion, demoralisation or even desertion as consequences.

I’m genuinely puzzled by the CC’s refusal to face reality – I would be pleased to be proven wrong and I certainly have no desire to add to the CC’s current difficulties.

If the CC is right and the 70% who don’t pay do exist as members we should have a top priority led by the CC to convert a high proportion to subs paying members.

Our finances will be a lot better and these members will be drawn closer – and I can accept a powerful kick from the ostrich.

But sadly, like Monty Python’s dead parrot or for those of a literary turn of mind, Gogol’s ‘Dead Souls’, the 70% mostly do not exist.

Please let’s face the facts and build on smaller but firmer foundations.
CASTING OFF THE SOILED SHIRT — FOR A REFOUNDAION OF THE SWP

Neil (Edinburgh)

"...we are out to rebuild the world. Yet we are afraid of our own selves. We are loath to cast off the ‘dear old’ soiled shirt...but it is time to cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen." Lenin

Introduction

Was it worth it? Four hundred and fifty comrades gone, many of them young, including 80% of our existing students. Marxism, our key public platform, and the conference for Unite the Resistance, our main united front, were only half the size of the previous year’s events. We are publicly tainted with sexism. Forums in which we were previously able to argue for our ideas are now barred to us. Figures on the left who previously worked with us no longer willing to do so. The atmosphere in many districts is poisoned. Branch meeting attendance in some large cities has been reduced to single figures. And for what? So little, so much has been sacrificed, could cut and run when finally called upon to face the very party body, the Disputes Committee (DC), which his supporters had previously assured us was the model of procedural perfection!

After the vilification of the comrades who brought the allegations, after the denials, after the delays and the attempts at obstruction, we have been presented with two reports.

In one, the Commission into the DC effectively concludes that the body which found M’s guilt or innocence ‘not proven’ in relation to the first accusation needs to be reformed in order to make it ‘fit for purpose’: the logical corollary of which is that it was previously ‘unfit for purpose’. The Central Committee (CC) denies this, but its own Conference motion refers to the dispute processes having been ‘shown not to be adequate’ and to ‘flaws in our disciplinary procedures’.

In the other report, the DC itself concludes that M does indeed have a ‘case to answer’ in relation to the second accusation — the only conclusion, other than ‘no case to answer’, that the Central Committee (CC) allowed it to reach.

Now, in no other investigative situation, from a union disciplinary hearing to a trial for war crimes, is the accused allowed to prevent a positive verdict being reached by non-compliance.

If they choose to not to turn up, or are beyond the reach of the investigation, a conclusion is normally reached on the basis of the available evidence — of which there was a substantial amount in this case. Yet even within this artificially imposed remit, the DC found there to be a case to answer when it could easily have found that there was not.

In the light of these conclusions we are surely entitled to ask why we have had to endure the convulsions of the last 9 months when both of them could have been reached at beginning of the year, as opposition factions argued at the time, without the subsequent damage to the party.

Yet following its original mishandling of the disputes, the CC has had to be pushed into every surreptitious shift in position, every partial concession. There was to be no special conference; there was. There was to be no Commission into the DC; then there was. The DC Review Body was limited to examining questions of ‘leaks’ and ‘confidentiality’; then its remit was to review all DC procedures. There was no second case; then there was. Four comrades were going to be suspended, then they weren’t. There could be no apology, but there can now be... an expression of regret. Every time the CC has made any concessions it has been so reluctantly, so grudgingly, and with such ill grace, that it gained no credit in the party — to one side it displays weakness and to the other pusillanimity — and the party has gained no credit in the wider world. It is time for our leaders to be held to account for the catastrophe which has overtaken us on their watch, and for which they are almost entirely responsible.

To reverse the effects of a catastrophe it is however necessary to recognise that one has taken place. Some comrades claim not to care about departed members: once outside the SWP they are dismissed as never having really been One of Us in the first place. As Edward Thompson wrote about an earlier generation of orthodoxo-enforcers, ‘most of the ushers at the doors were trying to show one out, in order to have proof that one was never serious about being in.’

In our case leaving ‘proves’ that you always held views which were merely reformist, autonomist, feminist or, most dreadfully of all, ‘movementist’ — a non-existent category conjured up by Alex C and Charlie K to provide a pseudo-explanation for the existence of the opposition.

The same comrades tend to be equally dismissive of our tarnished reputation. We need not care for the opinion of anyone outside our ranks, apparently, since if they already politically active they must by definition be – if not one of the categories listed in the previous paragraph – then ‘sectarians’, whose opinion can be safely disregarded.

But in reality we cannot, on the one hand, beat our inflated chests with our fists (presumably the ones with which we ‘punch above our weight’) and proclaim to the world how important we are, while on the other throw up our hands in horror when the world dares to take an interest in our behaviour — particularly when they see of it appears to contradict our boasts about fighting for women’s liberation. The SWP is either significant enough to be the subject of debate on the left or it is not. We can’t have it both ways, so which is it?

I still think it is still the former, but that position is at serious risk. Apart from the vital day-to-day work that comrades do in workplaces, communities and campaigns, the SWP has at least two great historic achievements to its credit in the Anti-Nazi League and the Stop the War Coalition — not merely campaigns, or even united fronts, but social movements — yes, movements — which actually helped to change aspects of British society for the better, particularly in relation to racism. They show what we can be and the possibility of what we could still become, and are among the reasons why those of us in the Rebuilding the Party faction have remained members. But their memory will not sustain the party forever.

One of the most depressing aspects of the CC’s mishandling of the disputes is the effect it has had on the party’s periphery—which is numerically much bigger than the party itself.

These people (many from the ranks of our ex-members), whatever their disagreements with this or that aspect of our politics or organization, have tended to look to the party for a lead, or for an explanation of world events. But for many of them the refusal to accept that anything had gone wrong over the last year has not only led them to call into question their reliance on the party, but also those aspects of our record which might have been thought beyond retrospective revaluation. In these circumstances our influence will increasingly be exercised as a result of the respect afforded individual party activists despite, not because, of their membership of the party.

And even this buffer will not be indefinitely sustainable. Our cadre are increasingly in their forties, fifties and sixties, not least in those public-sector white-collar unions which are so central to our industrial work.

In ten to fifteen years the current layer of leading activists will be retired; but they — I should say ‘we’, since I’m one of them — are not being replaced at anything like the rate necessary to sustain the current degree of implantation in the structures of the labour movement.

This is partly because the kind of permanent, full-time entry-level jobs for former


university students in the NHS, local gov-
ernment, the civil service or education simply do not exist in the same numbers as they did in the 1970s and 1980s – and we apparently have no interest in sustained work in the kind of low-level private sector service jobs where graduates increasingly tend to find employment.

This is not the only barrier: student membership of the party is notoriously volatile in any case, but as young people leave the party to form new groups and RevSocs, or join existing campaigns, they form alternative poles of attraction to the SWP or at least convey the negative message not to go anywhere near it.

Many of our current difficulties have deep and long-standing sources which cannot be resolved at one or even several conferences; but to even begin to address them, the running sore of the DC cases has first to be healed.

This requires an open acknowledge-
ment of what has gone wrong—not vague hand-waving in the direction of non-spe-
cific ‘mistakes’, but a detailed accounting for what has happened and who was responsible.

Preventing our influence being reduced to that of a large sect, let alone recovering its former extent or increasing it to higher levels will require nothing less than a com-
plete re-launch, essentially a re-founding of the SWP. Comrades, it is as serious as that.

Factions: undeclared and permanent

The CC has predictably attempted to mini-
mise the significance of the DC reports and shift the blame for the crisis onto what they call ‘factionalism’. But you can no more have political factions in isolation than you can have social classes.

It was therefore a welcome recogni-
tion of reality for the CC to even refer in passing to ‘factions’ in the plural in IB1, although it did not, alas, enlighten puzzled comrades as to the nature of these multiple factions. In IB2 though we are back to the singular: ‘Over the past year a faction has formed and persisted in violation of party rules through successive conferences, party councils and national committees, with its own internal structure, website, email list and bank account.’

The current threat to the party, appar-
ently, lies solely with the existence of Rebuilding the Party and its demand for an apology to the two women—not with the behaviour towards them which requires an apology to be made in the first place.

There have in fact been four opposition factions and one internal platform formed since pre-Conference period opened in October 2012 and they have been perfectly open about their existence, membership and objectives.

The membership of these factions has changed—with now nearly 500 members gone, the majority oppositionists, it is diffi-
cult to see how this could be otherwise. And if some of their demands have been similar it is because the underlying issues have remained consistent across the last 12 months.

No one, on any side, denies that there is crisis in the party and most comrades accept that it is the greatest in our his-
tory; yet we were expected to say nothing for six months as it continued to unfold, with members resigning in droves, and wait for the sanctioned period of discus-
sion to begin! To capitulate to this kind of bureaucratic formalism and remain silent would have been a complete abdication of responsibility to the party. In fact, had it not been for the existence of the faction and our ongoing critique of the CC’s position the haemorrhaging would have continued at an even greater rate than is currently the case.

Rebuilding the Party has openly declared itself, issued a statement of its aims, and provided a list of its members. Contrast our behaviour however with that of the Undeclared Faction set up to defend M. It has a genuinely ‘secret’ existence, although a rough sense of at least part of its membership can found in the signatories to the Statement for a Revolutionary Party in IB1.

Illustrative of the way this faction oper-
ates is one episode which took place during the January Conference. A gathering of M’s supporters were presented with a list of approved names for whom to vote in the NC election – an action which is somewhat difficult to interpret in anything other than a factional way.

Yet when members of the open oppo-
sition factions attempted to gain access to this meeting, they were told that the organisers were not obliged to let them in because it ‘was not a faction meeting’. It is difficult to say which great literary satirist named Joseph is the most appropriate ref-

erence point here: Heller or Kafka. The joy of being in an Undeclared Faction means you never have to dissolve it.

It may be that members of the Unde-
clared Faction genuinely believe that they are not in a faction and, given their propen-
sity for making declarations along the lines of ‘we are the majority’ or even ‘we are the party’, this seems quite likely.

Even the extraordinary degree of arrogance and presumption involved in pronouncements of this type is however preferable to the alternative explanation for their behaviour, which is that they know perfectly well they are behaving in a factional manner, but simply don’t care, because they have come to regard themselves as indispensable, ordained to lead, and therefore permitted (by History, perhaps?) to ignore the rules with utmost cynicism while denouncing everyone else for doing so. In effect, members of the Undeclared Faction regard themselves as having ownership of the party, its struc-
tures, leading bodies and traditions, which they define in increasingly narrow ways.

Not only does this faction only operate in secret, it has done so ‘in permanence’ since before pre-Conference period opened in 2012, with the same and leadership and goals, which are to restore M to what they regard as his rightful position, purge the party of all dissidents and keep on doing what we’re currently doing, even though it is signally failing to ‘build the party’, let alone shift the balance of class forces in our favour.

The pure party of the Elect which will be left after losing several hundred more members will not of course be the ‘small sharp axe’ of their fantasies, but a blunt penknife, or possibly a tack. ‘They... see rainbow dreams as they drown’, as Trotsky wrote of earlier Divine-Right-to-Rulers, ad-

cratically of great historical significa-
cence, but similarly gropping with sightless eyes towards destruction.10

Why then has the CC not moved, at any time in the intervening 12 months, to deal with these flagrant breaches of the Con-
stitution which, as we are forever being reminded, does not allow secret or perma-
nent factions?

One reason might be that at least 5 mem-
bers of the current CC are themselves part of the leadership of the Undeclared Faction. The CC Conference slate not only includes them but proposes to add at least one other to their number. In other words, rather than deal with those who have neither the hon-
esty nor the integrity to declare an open faction, the CC majority have joined with them in unleashing a barrage of hypocriri-
critic abuse against those of us which have done so, and now they intend to strengthen their influence over the party.

The clearest statement of the CC major-
ity position can be found in an article by Alex and Charlie, ‘The Politics of the SWP Crisis’, in the current issue of International Socialism.11

Once again, the comrades concerned cannot conceive that their own behaviour is in any way factional. Not only do they refuse to accept any responsibility for the crisis, they present their account in manner similar to the omniscient narrators of nine-
teenth-century realist fiction, pronouncing on the different scenes and characters in turn from a position of pretended objec-
tivity; but in fact they are unreliable narrators, and their account a highly ten-
dentious one full of evasions, omissions and distortions.12


Comrades tempted to support the CC majority may wish to consider how serious it is about reuniting the party when, as noted above, the CC slate includes 6 members of the Undeclared Faction, and their agenda has certainly not changed.

The fact that, if elected, the Secret 6 will be in a numerical minority should not lull anyone into a false sense of security. The original ‘secret-faction-within-the-CC’ was of course the Rees-German-Bamberg-Nineham group. They were also a minority within the leadership, but were nevertheless the group that led us to an earlier disaster in 2007-8. Their activities were variously endured, tolerated and some instances actively colluded with by members of the current CC, including Alex and Charlie, without public demur, until the Respect debacle finally forced apart the facade of CC unity.

Unlike the CC majority, which appears to have no ideas beyond keeping the show on the road with the leadership, members of the Undeclared Faction know exactly what they want, however suicidal for the party it may be, and are therefore likely to prevail over the others.

Nor is it the case that the two factions have been equally responsible for party’s current problems. Apart from M himself, how many of the 450 plus comrades who have left the party since March belonged to his faction?

How many of the comrades currently being driven off District Committees, as in Manchester, or marginalised in their branches belong to his faction? On the other hand, how many members of the opposition factions have been invited to join the CC slate or been recommended by the CC as candidates for the NC? To ask these questions is to answer them.

Fever dreams
What then has led to the emergence of successive opposition factions since October 2012? The latest crisis was like a lightning flash illuminating the darkness into which we have fallen, exposing the extent to which the party had failed to embody the rage against oppression which should be the basis of any socialist politics.

The shock which the DC report produced in delegates to the January conference is something which none of us who were present will ever forget. It was this reaction, when conveyed back to the branches, and the refusal of the CC to recognise, let alone engage with it, that ensured the continuation of factional life beyond that conference and its sequel, not the leaking of the session proceedings.

To imagine otherwise is to shift attention from the substantive issue involved—the tactical ineptitude and absence of any imaginative sympathy on the part of the CC—to the means by which these failings were exposed to some people outside the party. In common parlance this is called ‘shooting the messenger’.

Acceptance of the DC report on the first case was clearly not a decision of the same order as, for example, whether to campaign for Jerry Hicks or Len McCluskey – apart from anything else, it did not involve any activity which had to be carried out, but rather a judgement on how the DC (and in reality, the CC) had behaved. The very narrowness of the vote (239 to 209) should have signalled the deep levels of unhappiness among delegates and the need to respond to it.

Instead, the validity of the vote on the original DC report was defended by Alex on the basis of the ‘50% plus one’ doctrine, so let us just consider the implications of this for the class struggle.

If, during the Miner’s Strike, the ballot had gone ahead and there had been a majority for not striking, would we have accepted this, or would we have argued that the minority should fight and seek to picket out the majority? If there had been a minority for a fight at Grangemouth would we have insisted it respect the will of the majority? Were the Bolsheviks wrong in the immediate aftermath of October to treat the votes of workers as more important than those of peasants, even though the latter were 90% of the population? You might argue that these examples are irrelevant since we are talking about the internal affairs of our party, not the conduct of the class struggle or the electoral arrangements of post-revolutionary regimes; but Alex did not argue the case on these grounds, but precisely as a general principle, and that principle is clearly untenable.

This was bad enough, but what followed was worse, although very revealing of the current CC’s attitude to democracy. The CC’s piece in IB2 contains these moments of self-congratulation:

>*Far from there being a ‘democratic deficit’ in the party, we have shifted from a situation in which there was quite a low level of debate and discussion, to a situation in which there is a great deal. … By December, after three conferences in 2013, it would be difficult to claim that SWP does not tolerate internal dissent or that we discourage argument. We intend to enter into the pre-conference period and the aggregates in that spirit.* \(^{13}\)

In fact the upsurge of democratic debate, which is real enough, has been almost entirely the result of issues raised by the various oppositions and would not have taken place otherwise: it is disingenuous to say the least for the CC to claim the credit for it. But it was the conduct of the special conference in March which casts the biggest doubt on its pretensions to uphold party democracy.

As long as criticism of the party’s democratic structures came from a handful of trouble-makers in Edinburgh, Manchester and North London, with little support more widely in the party, it could be grudgingly tolerated.

As soon as minority positions (e.g. on the size and composition of the CC) began to gather support the entire democratic process was deliberately debouched.

The CC made a definite, concentrated attempt to get delegations to the March Special Conference which would vote for their position. This was wrong on a number of levels. Delegates, we are told every year in the Introduction to IB1, are not supposed to go to conference with a mandate, but—whatever positions their branches or districts might have taken in the pre-conference period—to listen to the debates and then decide on the basis of the argumentation. Evidently the CC was prepared to make an exception on this occasion, since the majority of delegates went with the sole purpose of voting for its position, regardless of what was said in the debate.

In short, conference as our supreme decision making body was rendered completely redundant, an irrelevance, since the outcome had already been decided before it even started on the basis of the selection of delegates at the aggregates. To appreciate how undemocratic this is, consider a fictitious example.

Let’s imagine a town in England and call it Mugsborough, after the setting for one of the great works of socialist literature. Mugsborough SWP nominally had 80 members, of whom 20 attended the aggregate which elected the delegation of 8. The branch was split between those who supported the CC (11 members) and those who supported In Defence Of Our Party (IDOOP) (9 members). With the branch so evenly divided, the most obvious solution would have been for a mixed delegation, divided into perhaps 5 in the former camp and 3 in the latter, in recognition of the fact that there was a majority, albeit a small one, for the CC.

But no, instead the CC majority voted only for nominees who belong to their side, with the result that the Mugsborough delegation was a monolith with a mandate and a significant body of branch opinion went unrepresented.

To complete this picture we need only note that, subsequent to the Conference, 5 of the IDOOP-supporting comrades resigned—as did 10 of the comrades who never attended the aggregate, whose links to the party have been steadily weakening over years and decades, and who took this opportunity to sever them completely. Needless to say, this example is not entirely imaginary.

The CC writes, ‘these cases, however difficult, cannot be the ultimate cause of the party crisis’. \(^{14}\)

On this point, at least, we can agree.

\(^{13}\)Central Committee, ‘The Fever and the Cure’, pp8, 9-10.

\(^{14}\)Ibid, p5.
Crisis of this sort are not the product of mere accident or contingency, but have their origins in a structure and a culture which both require to be renewed if the party is to survive as anything other than a sect. But even long-time critics of the internal regime such as myself were previously reluctant to set up a faction.

The extent of the current opposition (and this remember after the departure of hundreds of oppositionists) is a consequence of the widespread understanding that the DC cases were merely the latest symptom of a deep-seated dysfunction in our organisation.

The cumulative effect of three long-term developments meant that it was no longer feasible to carry on, submitting annual contributions to the IB and motions to Conference in the hope that this might break the cycle of decline.

The first is our failure to correctly understand the neoliberal period and to develop a politics that would allow us to address the changes it has caused, above all in the structure, organisation and consciousness of the working class. The second, which results from these failures was our long-term inability to grow beyond a certain size—a problem the character of which has now changed from persistent relative stagnation to actual secular decline. The third was the regular recurrence of divisions within the CC—now open, now hidden, but mostly hidden— which continue to show no sign of coming to an end. I will discuss these in reverse order.

(i) Divided leadership. The first symptoms of the leadership crisis became visible in 2008 following the split in Respect, when it became clear that, unknown to most of our members, the CC had been deeply divided for some time. These divisions resulted in Rees, German and Nineham being voted off the CC in 2009 and this trio splitting in 2010 with their supporters to form Counterfire. In the midst of these events, the 2009 Democracy Commission report stated:

_The Democracy Commission is united in calling for a more open, democratic culture in the SWP, conducive to the frank debate of political differences. Of particular importance in the development of this democratic culture is the handling of disagreements within the Central Committee. For some time now the custom and practice has been for ALL differences within the CC to be hidden from the wider membership (except for close personal confidants) with all CC members presenting an image of more or less total unity until the last possible moment._

Did anything actually change? Things certainly went quiet for a year, but shortly after the first intimations of the M affair at 2011 Conference, a further split occurred, as another member of the CC (Bambry) left along with the majority of the Glasgow students to form the International Socialist Group. Following Marxism 2012 yet another member of the CC (Mayer) resigned and, in the aftermath of our January Conference, announced his adherence to Counterfire.

Immediately before that Conference it became apparent that there was still yet another division within the CC with four members disagreeing with its response to the DC report on M (Mark B, Joseph C, Hannah D and Ray M). For the entire pre-Conference discussion period all of these comrades were apparently indispensable to the leadership of the party; days before Conference began, the indispensible ability of two members of the dissent group (Hannah and Ray) was revoked and another two comrades substituted for them. Following Conference another one of the original four (Mark) resigned.

In none of these cases were party members allowed to know about the existence of disagreements, let alone what they were about, until long after they were fully declared within the CC itself. And of course this is also true of the current divisions within the CC, which are being denied at aggregates as I write and will continue to be denied until some new crisis means the pretence can no longer be sustained. And so it goes.

(ii) Declining membership. The reason for these recurring divisions within the CC is ultimately a failure to agree a strategic orientation in the ‘real world’ of which we have heard so much of late. Five years ago, I drew attention to the most obvious sign of this: our inability to grow in membership terms beyond a certain limit. The CC’s response, then and now, is to oscillate between two positions.

One is simply to claim that there is no crisis of growth. Registration figures published before the January conference apparently showed that, as of November last year, we had 7,597 members, 32 percent of whom paid regular subs.

The published figures for the previous four years are of comparable magnitude, but in each case they involve a degree of fantasy easily the equal of anything in the novels of China Mieville.

We spend quite a lot of time boasting about our ‘Leninism’, but one thing is clear: our definition of membership – our real one, that is, not the one that used to appear on our membership cards – bears no relation to the definition adopted by the Bolsheviks during the 1902 split in the RSDLP. Truth be told, it bears no relation to definition adopted by the Mensheviks during the same dispute.

In practice, a member is someone whose name appears on a membership list, whether or not they take part in any activities of even the most minimal sort. Of course there are many people who have at some point in their lives been members and may still carry some of our politics in their trade unions or in an other way. There are even names to describe such people: ‘supporters’ for one or – a perfectly useful term unfairly tainted by association with Stalinism – ‘fellow travellers’ for another; but not ‘members’. The discrepancy between the official figures and reality can be demonstrated in a number of ways.

Prior to the March Conference around 500 comrades signed a statement supporting the CC position (it is unclear whether these numbers subsequently grew or shrank — probably the latter given that the list appeared only once): another 540 signed up to the IDOOP faction statement. Immediately before Conference Party Notes boasted that over 1,000 people had taken part in pre-Conference aggregates: a comparable figure. In other words, in the face of the gravest internal crisis faced by the party in our history, something in the region of 1,000-1,100 people either identified themselves with one side or the other, or turned out to discuss the issues and vote for delegations.

These calculations are scarcely exact, of course, and obviously do not account for the entire membership: the two groups identified here—signatories and attendees – will have overlapped rather than been exactly aligned; some comrades will have adopted a middle or undecided position and not signed up for either side, while others will have been unable to attend their aggregate. The overall membership figure will therefore be larger, but not 6,000 larger.

Or take another measure, extrapolating from one local experience. Edinburgh branch had a claimed membership of 170 members prior to March.

I estimate that between the January and March Conferences maybe 40 different members turned up either at branch meetings and/or at the pre-March aggregate—in effect, almost everyone who plays any role

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whichever in the branch. Even so, that amounts to less than 25% of the claimed membership.

Now Edinburgh branch has always been one with a fairly high level of attendance and participation, so to use its activist base as a way of estimating the national membership is to probably err on the high side. Even so, if we apply this percentage to the claimed national membership we only get a figure of 1,850. I invite comrades in other branches to conduct a similar comparison of claimed membership with actual turnout—at a time, remember, of intense party crisis—and note the discrepancy.

Finally, take the figures based on subs paid by standing order. According to the November 2012 figures there are 2,532 of these. Now, there will be ‘real’ members whose level of poverty is such that they are unable to pay by standing order or at all. Unfortunately it is also the case that there are subs payers who do nothing at all except pay subs: to some extent these groupings cancel each other out.

Let us say, then, that based on these different methods of calculation, our ‘real’ membership at the time of the March conference was somewhere between c. 1,500 at the lower end and c. 2,500 at the higher. The point is that even if we accept the latter figure, it is not remotely compatible with a claimed membership of 7,597. And since March we have lost over 450 members, including—let us remind ourselves yet again—the majority of our students.

We are constantly told not to tell lies to the class; is it too much to ask that we start by not telling lies to ourselves? Let me be clear. I am not suggesting that we adopt the standards of membership advocated by Lenin in 1902 or by the Undeclared Faction today, since that would reduce our numbers to the low hundreds.

What I am suggesting is that we stop pretending that we currently operate according to some imaginary ‘Bolshevik’ standard and instead draw up a workable definition of membership which is based on an agreed level of actual participation in party activity, compatible with patterns of work, care responsibilities, areas of expertise, levels of income, geographical location, and so on.

The second CC response to the problem of growth is, if not exactly to concede the point, then to explain why membership has not grown with reference to a succession of insurmountable objective conditions, Alex C did both at the Democracy Commission Conference in 2009 and at the January Conference in 2013. There is obviously some truth in this; in particular, the period which we retrospectively identified as the ‘downturn’, beginning around 1975, did make growth extraordinarily difficult for the revolutionary left, as we recognised at the time after much internal debate—not coincidentally, the last such debate the party has conducted. However, between the late eighties and the onset of the present succession of crises in 2008, the CC has never seriously allowed that any objective conditions might have impeded the possibilities for party growth.

Indeed, comrades suggesting that there might actually be reasons beyond our control for failing to build were denounced for their pessimism, lack of involvement, failure to understand the new mood, inability to see the green shoots or silver linings in every dark cloud, or whatever.

Thinking back over endless over-optimistic Socialist Worker headlines over the years, under a succession of different editors, the degree of chutzpah involved here is of truly cosmic proportions. Was the CC previously lying about the opportunities it claimed to exist then? Or were they simply consistently wrong about them? Neither possibility reflects very well on the quality of their leadership.

One can accept—as materialists we have to accept—that conditions have not been uniformly conducive to growth, but the claim to objective circumstances have posed uniformly insuperable barriers to it for nearly four decades implies that a revolutionary party cannot be built in normal capitalist conditions; but since one of our fundamental tenets is that the revolutionary party must be built before the revolutionary situation arises, this comes close to saying that it cannot be built at all.

As Denis Godard has written of the crisis in the French New Anti-capitalist Party:

‘The times we live in have seen no less than the start of a systemic crisis of capitalism, quantitatively the largest social revolt in France since 1968 (the movement for pensions), the Arab revolutions, the Indignados movement in Spain and Greece, the Occupy movement in the United States. How can you make such a period the reason for failure of an anti-capitalist party?’

(iii) Absent Strategies. The discrepancy between our claimed and real membership has had a profoundly disabling effect on our politics.

We are unable, even ‘punching above our weight’, to influence events to the extent that we would wish. Several disabling behaviours follow from this. Since the CC knows that our real membership is much less than is claimed, reality inevitably impacts on our tactics.

Proposals are accepted or rejected, not on the basis of whether they are correct or not, but on the basis of whether we have sufficient forces to carry them out; but since we cannot admit that this is the reason, spurious theoretical justifications are produced for refusing to contemplate a change of direction.

On the one hand it leads to a reliance on the trade union bureaucracy to initiate actions and events, followed by denunciations of the same bureaucracy when it—entirely predictably—fails to follow through. ‘Working with and against the bureaucracy’ here involves doing each in succession, not simultaneously in a dialectical unity.

On the other hand it leads to substitutionism by full-timers to compensate for an absent membership. Both behaviours encourage a form of uncritical over-reliance on party leaders who either have influence with the bureaucracy, or who are able to pull off impressive interventions with our limited resources. What would we do without them? How could we doubt their absolute integrity in all things? This I think is the real reason for the determination of the CC to protect M at all costs: he was simply much more important to them than most other comrades, however many hundreds of them—all supposedly ‘gold dust’, remember—were leaving in disgust.

It was this, rather than what some departed comrades rashly described as the existence of a ‘rape-culture’ in the SWP, which is the source of the problem.

The real explanation for our failure to grow is that it is not so much the nature of the objective conditions, as our failure to understand them: analytic failure led to a long-term mistaken perspective which in turn strengthened the most bureaucratic aspects of the organisational structure which was consolidated by 1975.

The working class in this country is weaker, organisationally and ideologically, than it was before the neoliberal onslaught began under Labour in 1976.

Clearly the weakening has not been uniform: white-collar public sector unions have indeed consolidated their position and several have moved to the left; on some issues like racism, sexism and LGBT rights internal union politics across the board have improved unrecognisably compared to the 1970s.

The central point is that—whether we use the term neoliberalism or not—our class has suffered a series of defeats since the 1970s, with only the abolition of the Poll Tax (nearly 25 years ago) to counterbalance them. If defeats are not reversed—and these have not been reversed—they have effects: They do not simply undermine ‘confidence’, but allow the bourgeoisie to restructure the labour market, for example by establishing non-union workplaces or in some cases entire industries. For the absence of doubt this does not mean that the working class has: a) ceased to exist; b) been completely atomised; or c) no longer possesses the potential to become a revolutionary social force.

What it does mean is that revolutionaries have to start from a realistic assessment of the situation, without illusions, if we are to have any chance of influencing the

http://www.iaj.org.uk/?id=874
course of the class struggle.

Godard draws attention to the ‘subjective element’, one aspect of which is the failure to correctly analyse the period:

_The lack of strategic concern leads to a lack of concern in the analysis of concrete reality. This has led to the lack of analysis of a long cycle of evolution (and reposition) of the capitalist organisation of production, the destruction of the traditional working class and the reconstitution of a new class composition..._

“Should we think in terms of organising struggles against race discrimination and struggles in workplaces? Don’t the development of migration and the feminisation of labour alter the relationship between struggles against discrimination and struggles in workplaces? Don’t the fragmentation of production units and contracts, the development of precariousness and the growth in service jobs lead to a change in the role and in the methods of struggle in inner-city areas?”

“These discussions—but we could cite others—were absent in the construction of the NPA, not to mention the changing face of the state or of imperialism, the role of the media, of social networks.”

This was written of France, but—‘the tale is told of you’, or rather, of us.

Back in 1974 Tony Cliff said, in response to the arguments of an earlier faction: “When I hear the word strategy, I laugh. 20 His laughter has not withstood the decades since. At one level the absence of a strategy can simply be a realistic assessment of the extent to which a small organisation can affect events, expressing a becoming modesty in an organisation too small to seriously think about a ‘programme’ or an ‘International’.

But it can also be a manoeuvre to give the CC absolute freedom of movement and to avoid any set of specific goals against which performance can be assessed or the leadership held to account for failed initiatives and the non-fulfilment of prophesies. As it is we live in a kind of permanent conditional future tense: what we claim might happen hasn’t actually happened yet, but give it another year, wait until the stars are in alignment and it will: so the lonely hour of the last judge never arrives, is always postponed until some future point.

What we have instead of a strategy is a piece of Mr McIawber (‘something will turn up’) style wishful thinking, which goes something like this: at some point ‘the anger’ will explode, possibly as the result of bureaucratic mass strike, and the lack of confidence which has held workers back will finally be overcome in a revival of militancy.

During this insurgency, our existing problems will be overcome, as hitherto unorganised workers in the private sector will flood into the unions in what Pete J calls ‘the tide of the struggle’. Once the tide is in (no, I don’t understand Pete’s metaphor either), we will be in a position to lead these struggles.

To point out the problems with this non-strategy is not to succumb to autonomism or workerism or to express a belief in the revolutionary role of the proletariat. It is simply to insist that we stop fumbling ourselves to sleep with the pretense that nothing of significance has changed since the 1970s. It is to demand that we do what Cliff did in theoretical terms at the end of the Second World War. Naturally the CC are offended by the suggestion that Cliff’s legacy might not be their collective property.

A third argument is that Tony Cliff, Mike Kidron and others were ‘heretical’ in relation to the wider left when they developed their ideas, notably the theories of state capitalism and the permanent arms economy. Surely we should be heretical today.

_The problem with this argument is that it is inevitably used to advance claims which are far from heretical—indeed they conform to the common sense of the wider movement and left academia. ... What exactly is so brave about accommodating the prevailing ideas of accommodation? How is this analogous to the efforts of Cliff and Kidron?_ 21

Here we have the CC’s team of defence lawyers in full diversionary flow. The point is not that Cliff and Kidron were heretical in relation to ‘the wider left’, but that they were heretical in relation to the positions held by the Trotskyist movement (the Fourth International and the British organisation (the Revolutionary Communist Party) to which Cliff belonged.

His argument was that Trotskyism was content simply to repeat Trotsky’s claims about the nature of the USSR, the stagnation of the world economy and the inevitability of permanent revolution despite the fact that the first had limited explanatory power and the second and third were contradicted by the empirical evidence.

I am perfectly happy to affirm my continuing adherence to the revolutionary potential of the working class, the necessity for Leninist organisation, the centrality of the declining rate of profit in causing the capitalist crisis and the pernicious influence of bourgeois feminism (which, incidentally, I regard—in line with the recent work of Hester Eisenstein and Nancy Fraser— as being complicit with social neoliberalism).

But merely bearing witness to these truths tells us nothing about the actual level of organisation and consciousness of the working class compared with the early 1970s. In that the CC does not help us to distinguish between those aspects of Leninism which are of continuing relevance under neoliberalism and those which were specific to a transitional society ruled by a feudal-absolutist autocracy.

It does not illuminate the nature of the contemporary countervailing tendencies to

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21 Central Committee, ‘The Fever and the Cure’, p.11.
Problems of party democracy

There are three elements which we must now address. In addition to theory and strategy, and more immediately important than either, is democracy. Why?

The International Socialists (IS) made the turn to a democratic centralist form of organisation between 1968 and 1975. In his book on the May events in France, co-written with Ian Birchall, Cliff signalled his embrace of democratic centralism by arguing that a new period of crisis and revolution had begun in which the relatively loose, federal structure of the IS, suitable in a period of post-war boom in which there was little generalised struggle, was no longer an adequate basis from which to build a revolutionary mass party of the working class.23

Given that I and other internal critics of the leadership regime which emerged from this period are often falsely accused of wanting to abandon democratic centralism in any form, it is perhaps worth stating here that I regard this shift as having been absolutely essential.

My admiration for the theoretical openness and creativity of the pre-1974 IS does not mean that I think the structures which accompanied it were capable of responding to the explosion of 1968. Had we not done so the IS would have shared the same fate as, for example, Solidarity in Britain and Socialism or Barbarism in France—two other initially stimulating groups whose anti-Leninism ultimately confined them to irrelevance and eventual self-dissolution. But agreement with the necessity for democratic centralism says nothing about the particular versions of the form which are appropriate at any given period. Most members of the SWP can give a one-sentence textbook definition of democratic centralism along the following lines: we arrive at a policy through collective discussion (democracy) and then the party as a whole— including those members who may have opposed the decision—puts it into effect (centralism).

Now, at one level, there is nothing particularly ‘Leninist’ about this; it is how any genuinely democratic organisation should work, be it an anti-bedroom tax group or a bowling club. The extent to which other socialist or labour movement organisations do not make decisions binding on their members or, more to the point, their leaderships, is simply an indication of how undemocratic they actually are. But democratic centralism, as currently practised in the party, privileges centralism (‘decisive leadership’) at the expense of democracy. According to the theory, conference discussion and decisions (democracy) and then comrades, including those who opposed the agreed position, carry out the decisions (centralism). Fine: but what does conference actually decide? It is presented with a series of general perspective documents which are usually so bland and platitudinous that it is virtually impossible to disagree with them: the economic crisis is not going to be solved, times are hard but there are also opportunities, we have been successful in stopping the various Defence Leagues, but must not be complacent over the threat of fascism, and so on.

To agree with this kind of statement is not to make a decision over strategy or tactics, or anything specific enough for the CC to be held to account. Some policy decisions are taken by Annual Conference—the decision to support Jerry Hicks as the General Secretary of Unite is one recent example; but most of the real decisions about actual policy—to establish united fronts, to join electoral coalitions—are almost always made by the CC itself between conferences, with conference asked to ratify them after the event: Conference in January agreed a student strategy which was then overturned by the CC, even though it must have intended to do this when Conference was taking place; the decision to launch Unite the Resistance was not taken by Conference even though it is our key united front.

Decisions are therefore binding on members even though in most cases they will not have been involved in arriving at them. In effect, the democratic element comes from the act of electing the CC, the centralist moment from doing what it decides.

A moment’s reflection should show that it is incompatible with any conception of democratic centralism in which both terms have equal weight, in which action is preceded by collective discussion and agreement. In effect, it is to elevate the CC into an organ above and superior to the party as a whole. This has nothing intrinsically to do with the theory of democratic centralism: the obsession with ‘decisive leadership’ and making ‘sharp polemical interventions’ as the absolute measure of revolutionary organisational virtue, even of adherence to Leninism itself, appears to be a particular innovation all of our own, although one we could well have done without.

The current model of the CC is that of a relatively small group, collectively elected by the slate system, the overwhelming majority of whom work full-time for the party and either live in London or within travelling distance of it.

They are the ones who conduct the analyses, formulate the policies and articulate the strategies.

Other members are, of course, invited to consider how best these may be put into effect at National Committee, Party Council and branch meetings, but initiative, leadership, flows from the top down.

Comrades who want to retain this model with only minor modifications use two main arguments in support of their position.

One is about how the leadership is selected: if the CC is to function properly it needs to be a cohesive body of comrades with complementary skills who are able to work together around an agreed perspective: the best way of ensuring the maintenance of such a body is for the existing CC to select its own membership and have it elected en bloc by Conference.

The other is about decision making: if the CC is to respond to unexpected events or new situations which leave no time for formal democratic debates, it must have both the ability to meet when required and the authority to have decisions immediately carried out by party members: decisiveness is all.

Narrowing the basis of CC membership to full-time revolutionaries exclusively based in one city involves several potential dangers, illustrative of the fact that the Marxist law which holds that ‘being determines consciousness’ is not suspended for Marxists themselves.

Removal from direct experience of the workplace can lead to insensitivity towards the daily realities which workers face and an over-confidence in atypical and exceptional individual struggles as if they heralded widespread tendencies: we should generalise from the best experiences of the class, not pretend that those experiences are already being generalised, which is all too often what the party does.

Because members of the CC are not based in workplaces, their view of what has been happening in the working class tends to be filtered through ‘trusted’ individuals who tend to support the CC’s take on events.

Because the level of struggle has been so low for years, we tend to forget that strikes and other forms of industrial action are normal under capitalism, and do not necessarily herald the Red Dawn, even in a time of austerity. Finally, it cannot be assumed, although it usually is, that the situation in London is necessarily typical of the country as a whole, even though in many respects it is further from that of most British cities than say the situation of Glasgow is from that of Newcastle.

Even more problematic is the process of collective self-selection involved in choosing the membership of the CC. It is claimed, that any combination of members other than that presented by the CC itself will be unable to lead. In effect, this is a form of blackmail: elect whom we want or the CC cannot be held responsible for failing to provide proper leadership. Or, more colloquially—vote for us, or the party gets it. Cliff’s original 1968 proposal was much less constractive: ‘An Executive, Political Committee, etc., are elected by the Conference as individuals, or on a list of candidates where there are fractional groupings: each group of delegates is entitled to elect the number of people to the Committees in proportion to their share at the Conference.’24

out of an entire membership of, let’s say, 2,000 can possibly form a cohesive leadership. Nor do the absurdities stop there. Given that some CC members are brought on to carry out specific functions, we are also being asked to accept that only one person is able the play the role of treasure, industrial organiser or whatever.

What does this say about our membership—or more to the point, what does it say about the attitude of the leadership to our membership, if the capabilities of the latter are really so limited? What seems to be involved here is a desire to handpick the ‘right’ people so as to minimise the possibilities of disagreement or indecisiveness.

And one can understand why: on the basis of the divisions outlined earlier in this contribution the CC seems to have no mechanism for dealing with sustained internal differences of opinion.

But that is an argument for finding a mechanism, not for trying to rule out differences in advance. I will return to this point below, but in general terms, members of the CC, like any other elected body, will have to work with others with whom they may not always agree or even like. The party has the right to expect that CC members will overcome any such obstacles to cooperation and find ways of working together on the basis of shared Marxist beliefs regardless of which individuals are elected. The consequences of this current style of leadership selection are threefold.

First, although this centralisation of power certainly enables the CC to be decisive, it also makes it far less able to be effective, except in situations where there is already a large element of agreement. The burden of having to ‘lead’, all the time, to always have an answer for everything without needing to involve the wider party places an enormous and destructive pressure on members of the CC.

As we have seen, divisions or uncertainties cannot be admitted because it might suggest the leadership is less than omnipotent. And this applies not only in terms of strategy but increasingly in terms of theory as well, as ever fewer people are trusted to develop it. But the CC is simply composed of comrades with particular skills, abilities and experience, not superhumans. We have chosen them from among our own ranks to fulfil the particular role of collectively directing our activities.

Revolutionaries, who are—or at any rate should be—the most rebellious and insubordinate members of the working class, are prepared to accept this direction from other comrades temporarily elevated to this position, because some comrades must be given the task of specialising in that role. The myth of infallibility, which has yet again been exploded by the present crisis, will always be resurrected so long as CC members are seen as a special and superior type of comrade rather than first among equals.

Second, centralisation without substantive democracy has a tendency to breed passivity (which is quite compatible with frenetic activity), a waiting on the CC’s next initiative and an inability to effectively argue with people whom hold other ideas from ours. Here is Lukács from 1923:

*If the party consists merely of a hierarchy of officials isolated from the mass of ordinary members who are normally given the role of passive onlookers, if the party only occasionally acts as a whole then this will produce in the members a certain indifference composed equally of blind trust and apathy with regard to the day-to-day actions of the leadership. Their criticism will at best be of the post festum variety (at congresses, etc.) which seldom exert any decisive influence on future actions.*

And here are Gramsci and Togliatti, noting in 1926 that a crucial aspect of a revolutionary party was the ‘capacity of the local organisations and of individual comrades, to confront unforeseen circumstances and take up correct positions even before directives arrive from the leading bodies’:

*It is necessary to combat the form of passivity... which consists in only being able to ‘wait from orders from above’. The party must be characterised by ‘initiative’ at the base; in other words, the base organs must be able to react immediately to every unforeseen and unexpected situation.*

We have ignored this advice. Shortly after the SWP was launched, Chris Harman made this claim:

*In the IS and the SWP we have attempted, over the years, to develop... a model which we think bears some similarity to the Bolshevik party before the isolation and degeneration of the Russian revolution. It is a model that recognises that a leadership is needed—the class war is after all a war, and in a war an army has to be led.*

*But it also recognises that the personnel, and the strategies and the tactics of the leadership should not be sacrosanct, but should be open to discussion by the membership, especially after key developments in the struggle and before conferences. Only thus can the leadership be forced to maintain contact with the lived experience of the struggle.*

In many ways this was a very interesting article—it correctly notes, for example, that ‘autonomism’ tends to be a reaction to authoritarianism in revolutionary organisations.

Two things are noticeable about this paragraph. One is the absolute obsession with ‘leadership’ at the expense of the members, who are generously to be allowed to ‘discuss’ the leaders activities, but little else. The second is the revealing use of the military metaphor—something has become so naturalised that we barely register it (‘we are a combat party’, etc.)

After all, what is the main characteristic of an army? It is blind, unthinking obedience to the official command; even the cadres (the term originally used to describe the non-commissioned officers of the post-revolutionary French army) do not question their order, but simply translate them into language comprehensible by the rank and file. You can aspire to build a ‘party of leaders’, but you cannot have an ‘army of leaders’ since this is a contradiction in terms.

The cult of obedience (or, in Undeclared Faction code: ‘loyalty’ and ‘discipline’) is an astonishing one to find in any genuinely revolutionary party, but especially this one, forged as it was in the struggle against Social Democracy, Stalinism and Orthodox Trotskyism. ‘What you as a revolutionary aspire to is a master’, said Jacques Lacan to the Vincennes students in 1969: ‘You shall have one.’

What Lacan meant was that the young revolutionaries wanted to be told what to do, to willingly abandon the difficulties and uncertainties of critical thought.

Since, contrary to what Alex claims, members of the party are not only in but also at least partly of bourgeois society, this is not entirely surprising, for that society inculcates precisely these attitudes, which are not without their compensations: ‘For the individual, life is made easier through capitulation to the collective with which he identifies. He is spared the cognition of his impotence; within the circle of their own company, the few become many.’ Theodor Adorno describes this as ‘resignation’: ‘The feeling of a new security is purchased with the sacrifice of autonomous thinking.’ Against this model of submission our ideal should be that of Rosa Luxemburg:

*We misuse words and we practice self-deception when we apply the same term–discipline–to such dissimilar notions as: 1. the absence of thought and will in a body with a thousand automatically moving hands and legs, and 2. the spontaneous coordination of the conscious, political acts of a body of men.*

What is there in common between the regulated docility of an oppressed class

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26 Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti [1926]. ‘The Italian Situation and the Tasks of the PCI (‘The Theses’),’ in Selections from the Political Writings, 1921–1926, edited by Quentin Hoare (Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), p265


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and the self-discipline and organization of a class struggling for its emancipation? The self-discipline of the Social Democracy is not merely the replacement of the authority of bourgeois rulers with the authority of a socialist central committee. The working class will acquire the sense of the new discipline, the freely assumed self-discipline of the Social Democracy, not as a result of the discipline imposed on it by the capitalist state, but by expropriating, to the last root, its old habits of obedience and servility. 30

Democratic debate is how comrades learn to argue and conduct discussions in a fraternal manner, in an atmosphere of relative security and shared values, which is invaluable for participating in the movement where we will be met by arguments which cannot be answered by bullying, assertion or repeating what the CC members have said at even higher volume. There is no effective feedback loop through which the leadership is compelled to listen prior to taking decisions.

This is, after all, the classic instrumentalist argument for democracy: it enables correct decisions to be made through the process of debate and discussion. But what is to prevent correct decisions being made by a small group without all the inconvenience and expense of democracy? This is after all what our current practice involves for much of the time.

The problem, as we have discovered to our cost, is that although an undemocratic structure can produce correct perspectives and a democratic one can arrive at wrong ones; only the latter has the possibility of correcting mistakes, precisely because it draws on the wider experience of the party as a whole, ‘generalising from the best experiences’.

Those comrades who imagine that our present difficulties are have been caused only by incorrect perspectives, rather than our internal culture and structure, are therefore avoiding the question of how correct perspectives are arrived at in the first place.

But democracy is also important for ensuring that decisions are actually carried out. The only way in which comrades will commit to carrying out decisions with which they disagree (the ‘centralist’ aspect of democratic centralism) is if they have either participated in or at least experienced a full debate in which contending positions are counter-posed. This is it which gives the process legitimacy, as Alasdair MacIntyre explains:

“How can intellectual freedom and party discipline be combined? The answer to this is not just the obvious one that a certain stock of shared intellectual conviction is necessary for a man to be in a Marxist party at all. But more than this that where there is sharp disagreement it is necessary that discipline provides for this by allowing minority views to have their say inside the party on all appropriate occasions. If this is provided for then disagreements can remain on the level of intellectual principle without on the one hand hindering action or on the other hand degenerating into mock battles between the ‘individual’ and the ‘collective’. 31

The relationship between the CC and the broader party is thus not merely a matter of abstract democratic principle. If our understanding of the present period is correct, then very divisive political questions are going to be posed and serious revolutionaryaries, whether members of the rank-and-file or the CC, will differ in the answers they give to these.

Democratic and open debate of such positions is the only way to arrive at conclusions that can be tested in practice. The current set-up almost guarantees that this will not happen: if an issue is sufficiently important to divide the CC, it will fester amongst its members, who tend then to leave the organisation rather than give up the positions of authority (and, presumably, careers) to which they have become accustomed. At this point there are always enough rank-and-file members of the party dissatisfied with the internal life to leave with the fallen leader, and form a new organisation. Political clarity is not reached but rather smothered in the ensuing atmosphere of defensiveness.

What has to be done

First, the CC has to apologise to the women, to the party and to the wider left for the way in which the complaints were treated. No one is asking for the cases to be reopened—which is now impossible anyway—but for public recognition of how flawed our procedures were.

Some comrades evidently feel that to do so would be an unpardonable act of weakness—‘we iron-hard Bolshevik cadres must never confess to error! (etc.)’ Can comrades not realise how completely and utterly ridiculous this makes us look? In fact, such an admission would be a sign of strength, not weakness, since it would demonstrate that our organisation was resilient and self-confident enough to recognise and correct our mistakes.

Second, the party has remove those members of the Undeclared Faction from positions of leadership. This is not a punishment for the attempted cover-up, the secret factionalism, and the rest; it is to prevent the party being destroyed or reduced to a sect, which is the most likely outcome if the CC slate as currently constituted is elected. There is no need to use our imaginations as to what this would mean, since unfortunately, the history of Trotskyism provides all too many examples. Here is one:

Discussion, which is dangerous to the leadership, can be checked by hyperactivity; and this, in turn, is justified by the nearness of crush. The membership, driven at a frenzied pace, has a high casualty rate. A large proportion is always new—and therefore does not remember the non-fulfilment of past prophecies. A vicious circle is set up which makes the correction of the line more and more difficult. ‘Building the leadership’—which is, of course, identified with the organisation—becomes a substitute for serious political and industrial work.

Serious militants are repelled and the ‘revolutionary youth’ come to make up an ever larger proportion of the activists. The leadership, which alone has much continuity, becomes unchallengeable and finds it less and less necessary to check its policies and practice. This is also one of the sources of sectarianism. Because the cadre is basically uneducated politically, as it must be in the absence of serious internal discussion, it must be protected from ‘contamination’ by contact with militants of other organisations. 32

Sound familiar? This is Duncan Hallas on the Socialist Labour League, later the Worker’s Revolutionary Party, in 1969; but with the substitution of ‘students’ for ‘revolutionary youth’ this perfectly captures tendencies which already exist within our own party. We can still turn back from this, but the hour is getting late.

These two actions are the bare minimum necessary just to end the crisis and ensure that the party survives in a form that will allow it to rebuild.

But a culture built up over decades cannot be reshaped overnight: we can make a start by electing a CC which is committed to making those changes, in dialogue with the party as whole, we can accept the DC Review Body report with the amendments that strengthen it, we can finally implement the Democracy Commission report (which was signed off by representative figures from.

30 Rosa Luxemburg [1904], ‘Organisational Questions of Social Democracy’, in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, edited by Mary–Alicia Watkins (Pathfinder, 1970), p119. http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rud/s01.htm. A similar point was made by Cornelius Castoriadis (using one of his many pseudonyms) against the orthodox Trotskyist Cliff Slaughter in an early issue of the IFL. ‘The author finally betrays his basically bourgeois mentality by depicting the centralisation of bourgeois power, its organisation, its weapons, etc., and by denouncing it in order to combat this, “a heightening of discipline and centralised authority to an unprecedented degree”. Not for a single moment does he suspect that proletarian centralisation and discipline—as exemplified for instance by a worker’s council or a strike committee—represent a completely different thing from capitalist centralisation and discipline, of which he is constantly asking for more,’ Paul Cardan, ‘Socialism and Capitalism’, International Socialism, first series, 4 (spring 1961), p27, note 17. http://www.marxists.org/history/eto/l/newspaper/sjs/1961/n0004/cardan.htm


all the current factions in the party 33), and can we support all the Conference motions that widen and deepen our internal democracy. Ultimately we will have to agree a way of choosing a CC which is based on our lay membership rather than our full-timers. If we are able to save and democratise the party it will be one of the very few occasions in the history of the left where a party in crisis has avoided splits, expulsions and collapse, and prove itself capable of internal reform and rebirth. Are we capable of this? It is time to cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen.

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DYFAL DONC A DYR Y GARREG (PERSISTENT BLOWS SHATTER THE STONE)

Steve (Edinburgh), Niaz, Steve and Anna (Euston), Dave (Liverpool), Pete (Birmingham Small Heath), Andy (Woolwich & Plumstead), Jon (Worthing), Marianne (Cardiff), Mike (Leeds City Centre), Julie (Nottingham)

There have been a number of articles in the IB that wrestle with the changing nature of the working class and the effect of structural changes to the British economy on its combatability.

We think that the comrades in question are missing the point and underestimate the huge changes in the composition and nature of the class since the beginning of capitalism and the huge differences in the structure of the class that have existed in different parts of the country and indeed internationally.

On the face of it the situation today looks unpromising and could be characterised by millions of workers on zero hours (the old fashioned word for this is casual) contracts, millions more underemployed, the absence of large scale industrial production and a low level of unionisation. In fact it looks a lot like the situation in Liverpool around 1900, although you would have to throw in some of the content of the consultation to be brought forward to call action along with a strike committee authorisation and not a person with them but the carters. Lord Mayor, Head Constable, police, special constables, military and gunboats all sink into insignificance by the side of working class solidarity, and even a fool can see it in operation at this hour, in this City”.

The point here is not that we are on the verge of dual power but that unpromising circumstances don’t of necessity stop the working class from fighting back.

As members of the PCS fraction of the SWP, including lay members, PCS reps, branch officers, GEC and NEC members we would like to outline some of the work we have been doing in the last year. In doing so we also intend to respond to some of the contributions about industrial strategy that have been put forward by Faction members in the previous Internal Bulletins.

We have to start by saying that we don’t think that the PCS fraction is anywhere close to perfect. However we are an organisation that meets regularly, has an elected leadership and is capable of developing a strategy in cooperation with the CC and Industrial Office.

Ray from Hackney argues in IB1 “At present the Party’s industrial perspectives are impressionistic. On the whole they are developed without the active involvement of the Party’s cadre or a consistent engagement with the class.”

This is at odds with the experience of the PCS fraction. Far from perspectives being passed down from the overworked Industrial Office, we sometimes have to fight to get their attention. In the recent Industrial Action Consultation the decision to produce a leaflet, the content of the leaflet and the article in Socialist Worker all came from discussion amongst PCS fraction members who then talked to the Industrial Office. In fact comrades in the Industrial Office weren’t even aware of some of the content of the consultation.

A proposal to call for the NEC meeting to be brought forward to call action alongside other public sector strikes developed out of a discussion in the fraction meeting.

More generally comrades often face having to cope with making decisions under pressure and have to rely on a shared understanding of the current situation and immediate priorities based on prior discussions.

“A consistent engagement with the class” isn’t some abstract concept, it’s what you get when you are engaged in daily battles in your workplace, feed your experiences back through discussion with other comrades including the CC, and develop a political strategy.

There have been recent criticisms of the SWP’s strategy in focusing on the public sector as a means of leading the fightback across the working class. The argument has varied from public sector workers being a privileged bunch of workers and therefore not having a vested interest in fighting workers oppression, to the public sector not being strategically placed to undermine capitalism and therefore the focus should be on the private sector.

To take PCS members as an example, whilst not (yet) as subject to casualisation as much of FE & Health sectors, a substantial % of members have to claim the same benefits that they administer; struggle with utility bills, Payday Lender debts, rent and threatened & actual job loss through relocation of workplaces beyond practical travel, especially for low paid clerical and part-time workers.

To the extent that we have managed to blunt some of the worst of the offensive on jobs & conditions this has been a result of union density & organisation – not cosy relationships with the employer.

The strategic impact of taking action is also a matter of potential mobilising impact on the wider class as much as immediate, direct impact on the employer. It is obvious around the NHS but also explains our insistence on opposing the government’s policies; tax dodging and attacks on claimants etc, not just narrowly focusing on workplace impact on individual members.

A recent example is a comrade in the Independent Living Fund who liaised with local DPAC to turn a PCS walk-out into a public event opposing the offensive on disabled people.

In recent years both nationally and internationally, the public sector has been at the centre of the fightback.

The role played by public sector workers, especially in Egypt, opens up possibilities that were largely absent, or at least much weaker, in the revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989, Indonesia in 1998, Serbia in 2000 and Argentina 2001.

Public sector forces in the Arab world have not been seen for more than half a century and they have shown their power in liberating society from below as the most organised section of the organised working class.

The strikes which spread like wild fire across Egypt started with the public sector workers in the Mahalla textile industry. The textile workers are mainly industrial workers but in the public sector showing how important it is to avoid false polarisations between private and public. Over 25,000 workers are employed in the textile industry in Egypt and when they won their strike after a sit in 2006, it set off a wave of strikes both in the public, as well as the private sector.

One of the most inspiring examples after Mahalla was the Egyptian tax collectors who in 2007 followed the sit down tactic and they eventually won a 350% pay rise after their strike grew achieved national prominence and publicity.

The tax collectors also became the first group of workers to set up an independent trade union in Tahrir Square after the revolution which both other public sector

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and private sector workers followed. In the final days of Mubarak’s regime, it was the public sector workers who proved to have the social weight and power to crack the regime, for example, the Suez canal service workers, telecom workers, hospital, postal workers. All these workers played a decisive part in Mubarak’s downfall.

Greece which has been the crucible of resistance in Europe has been led by the public sector, with the most advanced section of the public sector helping to move the other unions along. The first strike that opened up the struggle was by local teachers unions, then the journalists, printers and civil servants joined in. This eventually moved the bigger unions into action and the general strike. There have been wide spread mobilisations in Spain with the teachers, hospital workers and fire fighters.

**Building resistance in the civil service**

The industrial office has argued for the necessity of politicoising strikes in fraction meetings, SWP conferences and every other SWP gathering over the last number of years.

The office has argued that in order for the rank and file to develop the confidence to defeat government attacks, they need to feel that they are not fighting alone and acting in isolation but are fighting as part of a class. One crucial environment for politicoising a strike is the picket line as it is where the most militant members join together to not only stop members crossing but to also discuss the strategy and tactics for the way forward. The confidence that members develop on the picket line depends on its size and if they are able to convince other members not to cross.

In one workplace, Euston Tower HMRC, we have invited groups to join our picket lines, such as students, welfare rights campaigners and other trade unionists etc. When they come along and give speeches of solidarity, not only does it boost the confidence of pickets but they also have an important role in deterring other civil servants from crossing the picket line just by their very presence.

An argument has to be had before every strike to convince members that their attendance on the picket line is vital to ensuring the success of the strike.

This can be frustrating at times as members have been involved in many one day strikes and in 2013 the argument ‘what does a one day strike achieve?’ has been a more regular refrain.

A couple of us therefore decided we needed to have a more militant approach on the picket lines to keep members motivated. We have the headquarters of ATOS around the corner so when we went out on strike in June, we invited some disability rights campaigners to join our picket line.

At the end of the picket, we decided to have a joint protest outside of ATOS HQ, about 10 of us walked up to the entrance and it was then suggested by one of the disability rights campaigners that we should protest inside. We quickly agreed and 5 of us walked through the revolving doors, one of the protestors, who is a wheelchair user, got stuck inside the revolving door but we eventually got in and shouted and protested for about 5 minutes.

On the next one day strike, we decided to protest inside Starbucks which is also based around the corner. Around 10-15 of us went inside and began chanting ‘this is a simple ask, Starbucks, pay your tax’.

Both actions proved popular with the members as they not only politicoised the picket line but also because they were fun and exciting. We filmed both events and put them on YouTube to help convince others to organise similar action.

For days after both pickets, members who spoke about how much they enjoyed either watching or being part of the protests and saying that we needed more of it. These stunts as well as more general political campaigning within the office around issues like the NHS and UAF have politicoised the working environment and some reps have now began attending the odd demonstration and it’s also been possible to sell Socialist Worker to reps and file members who basically saw our comrade as a ‘loony lefty’ initially but who now have serious debates with us.

We have several members of the SWP who by accident find themselves working in the same jobcentre. Currently both reps positions are held by SWP members.

We have been at the forefront of 2 significant successes in the office:

- We worked alongside Muslim staff members to make sure that all staff who wanted to could take leave for Eid. Eid has a significant impact on staff levels in the office and in previous years management had refused to allow all staff to take Eid.
- We helped to make sure the job seeker directions which were being inappropriately used were withdrawn. Since these directions are the basis of sanctions being applied this was an important development. There is a real tension between welfare campaigners and job centres and many campaigners feel the PCS doesn’t do enough. Actions like ours help to build unity against the government.

While neither of these are major victories in the battle for socialism they have played a significant part in raising morale and confidence in the office, and gaining our members’ respect.

When the union ran a consultation about how the industrial action strategy should develop ours was the only office in the branch to consult every member and hold consultation meetings. We were able to win our office to voting for escalating the action. This meant that we had some authority in the branch when we proposed that the GEC should be recalled to restart the industrial action and to coordinate it with the teachers, firefighters and postal workers actions.

As a result of our work we have several staff involved in initiatives with us. We took two non-members with us to visit the local FBU picket line, have a regular attendant at SWP public meetings and took the branch secretary to Marxism.

**DWP call centre dispute**

Most disputes in the Civil Service in recent years have been top down. There are some exceptions to this. The dispute against the compulsory transfer of 20% of the admin staff in Merseyside jobcentres last year was one of these. This took place (with strike pay!) despite attempts by some union officials to prevent the strike taking place and was a partial success stopping about half of the transfers.

More interestingly was the long running call centre dispute. This took place over a long period starting at the beginning of 2008 when a number of senior managers from the private sector call centre industry were drafted in and there was a concerted assault on workers terms and conditions. It is pretty clear the intention of this was to prepare the ground for a privatised government call centre network as work was taken on from different government departments and managers talked about being “the government’s call centre network of choice”.

The first problem is that many people in the union thought that call centre workers were too difficult to organise and so it was left to our two comrades on the PCS DWP executive to do a disproportionate amount of the work in building for the strikes that did eventually take place in 2011 and 2012. Had our comrades not been there it is unlikely the work would have been done. Because the workplaces were literally spread from one end of the country to the other it could also not have been done by a few activists in one office.

The second problem was that having won a strike ballot initially on a 42% turnout in a postal ballot (the Director of Call Centres had a heart attack in DWP HQ when the result was announced) the union then spent the next two years stitching up a deal.

While activists were prepared to stand up to attempts to sell the dispute short there was clearly not enough confidence among the rank and file to defy the official union recommendation to a deal although the turnout to accept what was on offer was down to 29%.

The point being that although supposedly difficult to organise such workers (according to some left officials) they were able to defeat a serious management attack but there was not the confidence to act independently. Staff were angry but lacked confidence. The problem is how do we build that confidence?
SWP members standing for election to national positions

One of the key aspects of the recent strikes in the public sector is that they were orchestrated by a combination of rank and file activists and lay NEC members working with sections of the trade union bureaucracy. The fact that the SWP has been so successful in winning some of these posts is a sign of the respect and trust that SWP comrades have earned across the trade union movement over many years of campaigning activity.

Within PCS, our comrades on the NEC have helped Mark Serwotka’s efforts to move the union leftwards and their national positions have also allowed them to address members meetings and wider campaign rallies across the country promoting the necessity of rank and file struggle.

Also, it was our comrades who 10 years ago, played a leading role in ensuring that Mark Serwotka successfully stood as, and retained, his general secretary position after a right wing coup.

PCS has since become a union which has organised more national action than any other major union as part of a wider political confrontation with the government’s systematic destruction of our public services. PCS has also embedded a political strategy of public services, not private profit which the SWP industrial office has also encouraged by continually arguing for the politicisation of strikes.

In the Summer the PCS NEC voted to “pause” national strike action while a long consultation was held. Our four members on the NEC were the only people to vote against this, allowing the SWP to argue that there was an alternative.

Equally when the NEC recently met to consider the outcome of the consultation, and hesitated about further national action, we argued for a clear decision on national action before Xmas, preferably with other unions but alone if necessary.

Even when we have not won votes for action, we have sometimes managed to pull significant minorities with us, thus gaining respect amongst activists and members in the offices for being prepared to put arguments for action whilst under substantial pressure from the PCS leadership not to do so.

The position taken by union officials makes a big difference. Tony Cliff explained in 1988:

“We can fall into the trap of believing that either the bureaucracy is omnipotent or that it doesn’t count. In fact, it’s neither the one, nor the other. If it’s omnipotent, then we might as well forget about rank and file action. If it doesn’t count, then we just do everything from below without putting any demands on the union machine’.

The challenge we face is how to understand how to both pressure the union bureaucracy and use every official event to focus and strengthen resistance, while seizing every opportunity to build an independent and militant rank and file.

There really is only one game in town and there are no shortcuts to building working class self-confidence and self-activity. By continuing to win the small victories we raise confidence for the bigger battles. Hence the use of a Welsh proverb in the title of this article-the “stone” “will break” if we persevere even if we don’t know when.

In PCS comrades have been giving it a good “done” and will continue doing so!

However, if the scale of the assault is shocking, the reaction of staff has been inspiring.

At meetings between Unison, Unite and RCN workers voted by a show of hands to support industrial action and voting no confidence in the board.

Myself and an RCN rep held joint meetings across the wards with nurses, health care support workers, and other staff and had a fantastic response. We set up a “union table” in the canteen once a week, where people could come and sit and talk about what was happening. About 30 staff have signed up to union and we recruited two new UNISON stewards, with another two about to stand. (including one Polish, one black and one Philipino, male and female) and a couple to the RCN.

We have had demos, boards of meeting and gate protests. On the first demo the RCN rep had never been on a demo before in her life, she spoke brilliantly from the platform as did the new stewards; the new Philipino steward led a contingent from A&E with their own homemade banner. These rank and file speakers were met with huge cheers as workers recognised their own anger and determination being expressed in words that echoed their own feelings.

A Unite rep spoke at the gate protest and rally who had also not spoken before and was really nervous but we encouraged him to do so.

It was great to see these stewards who have always seen the union as top down, now shifting from bottom up, meeting with staff on the shop floor. This gives people a different perspective. In addition, one nurse and one admin worker who came to the UitR conference were greatly enthused and their own understanding of the need to build the militant minority was reinforced.

This is when Socialist Worker fits like never before. The regular weekly sale maintained doggedly over years by comrades in the local branch soared to up to 18 in one week!

People are asking important questions: “Why are the attacks happening?”, “How can management be so cruel and vicious?”, “Why are our union officials not leading a fight?” These questions require intensely political answers: PFI and the market; how can we fight austerity; how to unite struggles across the working class; the nature of the trade union bureaucracy; what the lessons of Grangemouth mean for us at Whips.

The local branches in east London were also critical in uniting three Save Our NHS campaigns and mobilising a brilliant demo and rally on a weekday evening outside the Barts and the London PFI.

The pavement and road was so blocked that the police asked us to move onto hospital property, just yards from the main entrance right below the PFU building. Caucuses between SWP hospital workers across the Barts sites and local SWP branches have been absolutely critical to

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DEFENDING THE NHS: THE FIGHTBACK IN EAST LONDON

Sam [Newham], Jim [Waltham Forest], Andy [Hackney Dalston]

There is a major assault on the NHS taking place across Britain. In east London, Barts Health, the biggest NHS trust in the UK, covering three of the country’s most deprived boroughs (Tower Hamlets, Newham and Waltham Forest), has launched a massive attack on hospital services and on the pay and conditions of the workforce.

The attack is driven by PFI debt, currently running at £129 million a year and rising. The payback on a capital outlay of £1 billion will total £7 billion in total.

Whipps Cross Hospital is at the sharp end of attacks that are taking place across the trust. Health care staff, including those in critical units such as A&E and intensive care wards, admin, managers, are being hit by ‘down banding’. Low paid workers will lose thousands of pounds a year. Pensions will be hit. Down banding will then hit our future scale point even if we apply for other jobs. Pay protection has been reduced from 3 years to 18 months. Many are leaving already.

Many Philippine workers have built their communities around Leytonstone, in some cases both partners work in the hospital. A cut in pay will be a major blow to working families across the borough.

As well as this our long-standing union steward of 26 years, Charlotte Mono, has been sacked for speaking out. This is the face of capitalism today.

The impact on health care provision across east London will be devastating. The skill mix on the wards will be drastically reduced and staff-patient ratios will soar. Barts is heading to join Mid-Staffs and Colchester in the NHS league table of shame.

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In PCS comrades have been giving it a good “done” and will continue doing so!
helping us mobilise resistance on the wards and in the community.

The potential to mobilise a real fight amongst the workforce is not matched however by our union leadership. It is true people are afraid of a bullying management but when they do feel able to express their collective rage and determination this breaks down. It is at this point that the role of our union leadership is key. As they hesitate and vacillate, the effect is to disorient a workforce still lacking the confidence to act independently. Confronted with this situation we still need to build resistance, put pressure on the union and mobilise to fight.

The regional union officials have bought into the argument that cuts must be made and that there is no alternative to PFI. They agreed the cut in pay protection without fully consulting members. We had a 300 strong vote in an indicative ballot for strike action and still union region have not allowed us to ballot.

Now union officials from RCN and Unison are telling the reps not to speak at gate protests as they don’t agree with a militant campaign to reinstate Charlotte. They want to keep everything quiet so as not to ‘jeopardise’ the appeal and they are trying to separate the issue of her sacking from the campaign against the cuts and down banding.

Again the political approach of the party to the trade union bureaucracy has been critical. The politics of the Socialist Party leads to a tendency to place the main focus on the failures of the union leadership, and score political points. However, this would have the effect of demoralising rather than galvanising workers and would have given the bureaucracy itself an excuse to wash its hands of us.

The sacking of Charlotte Monro is again shifting the focus of the campaign. This is an attack on the union itself and a marker for every activist in the NHS. We aim to galvanise community support with a letter to the press, calling for her re-instatement, signed by the local campaign groups, local GPs, health workers, councillors, trade unionists and hopefully MPs, making the connection between her sacking, her whistleblowing role and the disasters at Mid-Staffs, Colchester and elsewhere.

The Evening Standard has run two very good articles exposing the sacking of Charlotte; (the reporter lives locally and supports the NHS.)

We want to mobilise support to help us put pressure on Unison nationally to support the campaign in her defence and expose the cuts and call strike action. The stakes are high. A defeat for Charlotte would be a blow to union organisation and would leave some people feeling demoralised about the possibility of fighting back.

New workers in the public sector are joining unions; many want to be active and even play a role as stewards; an important layer want to see a fightback even if they do not always have the confidence. What is happening at Whipsn are part of a bigger picture. We have argued that the attacks on the NHS are part of a political attack on workers on all fronts.

That’s why our intervention cannot solely be on building the union and stewards network, we have to look at the individuals within the campaign who want more!

The inspiring thing about this campaign is its diversity and mix of staff from different ethnic backgrounds and skill range in the profession. Senior nurses and matrons have united with the lowest-paid workers and vice versa. People are very united and refuse to be divided by government scaremongering about ‘health tourism’, immigration threats etc.

That means giving a wider alternative, selling Socialist Worker, producing good Socialist Worker leaflets on the gate. The weekly paper sale by the local branch has meant a connection has been built with the workforce, such that three nurses joined the SWP at a 20 strong party caucus after our local demo.

We now need to urgently integrate these new members and try to ensure we get them to regular reader meetings around their shifts for new members and supporters. This will help educate and organise the people around us. It will help maximise the potential for a victory and lay down roots on a political basis for struggles to come, whatever the outcome of our current battle.

The role of the SWP is central to building a future network of activists in the hospital ready to continue the fight in the here and now, and in the future.

“\textbf{There should be some regard for proportionality; comrades who happen to be in the minority should not be crushed to the point of humiliation…}”

(Democracy commission)

It is becoming clear with some large recent aggregates (held before this IB came out) that the minority voice in the party will be far more minor at conference than is proportionate. This not only breaks our policy, but should also break our hearts.

In Manchester, an aggregate electing 35 delegates managed to elect just one from the opposition, a comrade who had joined the faction after she’d already been put on the “approved” list.

In North London, Ian B, Cliff’s biographer, wasn’t called to speak. In fact with the exception of those moving motions, no faction member was allowed to speak at all. Hardly the ‘full and open debate’ we have so often been promised. With 43 places available for election, and many faction members active in the district, none from the faction were delegated.

The now typical ‘loyalty slate’ ensured that those not delegated also included a number of non-faction members - comrades who just wanted to see some actual compromises. This included our two most prominent writers on the Middle East, Phil M and Anne A, and Mark C, who we supported as candidate for General Secretary of the UCU in 2012. So, good enough to lead the UCU, but not to attend the SWP conference!

Apparently the CC ‘regrets’ some such examples. But this was an entirely predictable outcome of its refusal to recommend that districts elect diverse delegations. It was predictable because it repeated the errors of the March special conference. After that conference some CC members also expressed reservations about the way in which it was elected and conducted. Generalised ‘regret’ that doesn’t lead to change or accountability bears no relation to the ‘merciless self-criticism’ needed of a revolutionary party.

If party conference is the sovereign body of our party’s democracy it needs to represent the debates and differences within the party. This does not mean institutionalising a form of proportional representation - just a political decision made in districts, and supported by the CC, not to shut down dissent and anyone associated with it. This is the only way the party will be able to move on united after conference. We cannot move on from a debate if it has not been had.

So… Is this what our democracy looks like…?

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**IS THIS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE?**

Adam, Bettina, Charlie, Despina M, Gill and Pete [Hackney East] Andy, Angela, Colin and Matthew [Hackney Dalston]

A slogan we have often used, especially in the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements, but in many more situations before and since, is: “This is what democracy looks like.”

It refers to those on the streets, the mass of the people on demonstrations. Usually a minority in society, but an active and militant minority of which we are a part.

It is a slogan to be proud of.

But what does democracy look like in the SWP today? Essentially, one without a minority - not one that will be seen at conference this December anyway.
The starting point for an explanation of the crisis in the party has been provided by the CC in two recent articles, The Politics of the SWP Crisis in ISJ 140 and The Fever and the Cure in IB3.

They argue, “Moving out of a period centred on a large degree of party routine, a very cohesive leadership and little controversy, into the era of mass movements contributed to the development of internal crises”.

It is not a contentious point that the party was on track right through the downturn years of the 1980s and 1990s.

It was organised to survive the harsh times and it succeeded in doing so, even growing a little in the process.

It was the events of Seattle in November 1999 that marked the start of the era of mass movements and the need for a change in the direction the party should take.

However the previous leadership, we believe, mishandled the manoeuvre. They misread the times to constitute a simple across-the-board upturn when in fact it was really quite complex and contradictory. They therefore steered the party hard right, broke up party structures, handed the newspaper over to the movement and charged forward. And with that they drove the party right off the rails. The organisation became disoriented and floundered.

So now we are suffering. There is so much to do in every locality, supporting students, united fronts and union work, raising the party profile, carrying our politics, putting on public meetings and selling our newspaper. But we are simply not organised to do it. Only a tiny proportion of the membership is involved. We are a party of notables when what is needed is a party of activists.

An individual speaking from a platform and often veiling their politics is no substitute for a group of organised activists on the ground. The party has been out of synch with the times.

Assurances from the leadership that all has been well have run counter to the experiences of the membership and in the last few years, unease and discontent has developed, simply waiting for some spark to detonate it into an open revolt. That came with the DC case.

It invariably happens when an organisation like ours has to make a sharp change in direction that there is rancour involving factions and resignations until the new direction is established and members can see in practice that the new direction works.

So some degree of discord is inevitable, but when the new direction doesn’t work, as in our party’s case, the crisis is very much worse.

What was required from the previous leadership to keep the party on track after Seattle?

Certainly not a simple immersion of the party into the movement but a thoroughgoing transformation of the party in the way we worked and in the way we thought.

What was required was a degree of diffusion outwards of the centre of gravity, a shift of initiative to the membership on the ground, a change to a more trusting relationship between the leadership and membership and a change in the concept of ‘cadre’.

Times were now much more complex than in the downturn, far more fluid and changeable, and variable from area to area.

All the various local activities could not be directed from the centre in any but the most general sense. Local members organised within party structures needed to be able to take these decisions themselves. They should have been encouraged to organise activity, to prioritise, be flexible and take initiatives.

And because the times were highly ideological and political, they also needed to be organised in order to carry the politics.

All this required the promotion of healthy cooperative and ongoing organisation on the ground. But to do this required a change in the old mindset that branches were nothing more than training grounds for an elite to pass through, to acquire the basics as quickly as possible before moving on elsewhere.

In present conditions, branches and districts (under the auspices of the CC) are the key structures through which the revolutionary party and every one of its members should operate.

With the publication of Building the Party in IB2 the CC is showing the way. But building and sustaining organisation on the ground requires great dedication, self-sacrifice and skill and even this level of application at the moment won’t bring immediate success.

The times now are really for sowing political seeds. Nevertheless building local organisation remains a political necessity. It is both the way to operate in the here and now, and the way to get the party back on track.

If we don’t make a huge effort in this direction then we can expect the bitterness, animosity and division that we have seen to recur again and again.

Time is not on our side. Things are moving in a direction of intense class struggle and our party is found at its weakest in forty years. Without some determined action to strengthen our structures we are in acute danger of being swept aside by events, just another irrelevant revolutionary party.

So now the leadership must return to the party’s previous achievements, be organised to do it. Only a tiny proportion of the membership is involved. We are a party of notables when what is needed is a party of activists.

An individual speaking from a platform and often veiling their politics is no substitute for a group of organised activists on the ground. The party has been out of synch with the times.

Assurances from the leadership that all has been well have run counter to the experiences of the membership and in the last few years, unease and discontent has developed, simply waiting for some spark to detonate it into an open revolt. That came with the DC case.

It invariably happens when an organisation like ours has to make a sharp change in direction that there is rancour involving factions and resignations until the new direction is established and members can see in practice that the new direction works.
honest, we could do worse than copy what the Socialist Party has done.

We need a centralised infrastructure that provides an easy way for districts and branches to enter accurate and useful information about their meetings and contact information, and we need to apply some thought and perhaps money to some simple search engine optimization so that when people look for socialist meetings on-line they have at least an outside chance of finding ours.

And if we don’t think we can do this fairly rapidly, we should just make a concerted and centralized effort to use Facebook to achieve the same ends.

This is the first time the CC failed to adequately intervene. The DC procedures are a guideline. They are not a list of hard and fast rules that bureaucratically regulate the handling of complaints.

Given the serious nature of my complaint and given that it was the second complaint against a leading member on the CC, at this stage the sensible thing to do would have been to put in a bit of effort and show a bit of ingenuity.

The CC should have intervened to organise a hearing on terms agreeable to both parties and to ensure that the complaint was dealt with quickly prior to the national conference.

Instead the CC reinstated the CC member to his job, moved me out of my role in the national office because I would “disrupt the harmony of the office” and then frustrated all attempts by me and others to raise our problems with the DC procedures at conference.

It is worth noting that the only things I requested were: that the DC used their right to co-opt some new people on to the committee to ensure there wasn’t an unfair bias from the original case and because I believed, and still do, that the composition of the original disputes committee did create an unfair bias because of the individual members relationship to the accused.

The most important thing to me though was having equal access to the evidence in the case, specifically access to his testimony.

Activists have fought for the right of women to have proper access to evidence in courts in rape and sexual harassment cases to ensure that women in an already potentially emotional and vulnerable state are not cross examined, are not put on the spot with evidence that they might not have proper chance to process, that can cause the individual to feel that they are being disbelieved, and that can have a triggering effect (can cause people to traumatically recall negative experiences or events) and that can add enormously to what is often already a traumatic experience.

Almost all of this is now accepted by the Disputes Committee Review. All of it was put into practice for my actual hearing. All of it is basic common sense stuff that is common practice in trade unions and in Equality and Human Rights guidelines.

Yet, despite conference being the only place I could challenge the DC procedures, the CC used bureaucratic process and rule mongering to prevent this from happening. We attempted several times to outline the issues with the DC procedure in Internal Bulletin pieces- not the details of the case these were rejected. Revised pieces were rejected. A statement signed by 30 comrades calling for the right for these issues to be raised at conference was rejected. The same comrades were denied the right to form a faction on this issue. We were formally denied by the CC and the Conference Arrangements Committee the right to even raise it from the conference floor.

At conference and after it we were then attacked by members of the CC and individual party members for failing to challenge the disputes committee. This was cited as proof that there couldn’t have been that much wrong with the procedure and used to reinforce the decision.

The CC claim in their latest IB piece that “overwhelmingly comrades accept the constitutional legitimacy but the actual legitimacy and the political legitimacy are the real issues. To tell 49% of your membership that they should dispel their misgivings about the outcome of a rape allegation when they are not confident in the procedure that reached that conclusion because a vote has taken place is plainly ridiculous and makes a mockery of our understanding of democratic centralism.

Failing to get anything out of conference a motion was put to the National Committee for a review of the DC. The CC opposed this and instead set up a commission with a narrowed remit to look only into leaks and confidentiality, not how to improve the procedures. A faction was formed which included a demand for a review. The CC still opposed a review in the run up to the special conference and only amended their motion to conference to include a review in the second edition after huge pressure and an unprecedented crisis in the party.

Are these the actions of a competent political leadership showing real effort and ingenuity to deal with a difficult situation?

Beginning to doubt whether it would ever be possible to get a fair hearing I submitted my complaint anyway on 1st March 2013. In meetings with the DC I was first told that my case could only be heard if I accepted a hearing which included the members of the previous panel and no right to access his testimony, because comrades had twice voted to endorse the DC procedures and I could not challenge them. I eventually agreed to go ahead on this basis.

On the 14th May 2013- after two and a half months of prevarication and delay- I was told in complete contradiction to their earlier position that now they would not proceed with my case because the disputes committee procedure did not command the confidence of the party.

After six more weeks, on the 28th June, nearly four months after I submitted my complaint, I was finally told that my case would not be heard until after conference 2014. I communicated that this was not possible for me due to the huge amount of personal distress I was experiencing and I would pursue other channels in the party to get this resolved. Then out of the blue two hours into the national committee on the 7th July I received the following e-mail (why this timing?):

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AN ACCOUNT OF THE DISPUTE

Anonymous

It is now over one year since I came forward with my complaint against M. As someone who has been a member for nearly 13 years and played an important role in building and developing the Socialist Workers Party, the actions of the CC and the escalation of the crisis is doubly horrifying for me.

Personally it has been highly emotionally distressing. As a committed revolutionary socialist, politically it has been devastating.

I write this as a response partly to the recent articles by Charlie and Alex and the Central Committee, and partly as a challenge to the narrative that is continuing to circulate.

1. The CC did not intervene quickly to ensure a hearing.

Charlie and Alex claim in their response to Jim Wolfreys’ article that “The CC took the initiative in ensuring [my] case was heard… it took some effort and ingenuity to overcome this obstacle, but we managed it.”

Alex repeats this assertion in his response to Tithi Bhattacharya’s letter to him: “you ignore our efforts to ensure that the second complaint was heard and that our disciplinary procedures have been reviewed”.

This is clearly intended to give the impression that the CC have acted in a principled and effective manner to deal with the case of sexual harassment that I brought to the disputes committee. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It took over 9 months from when I first made the complaint to get something approximating a fair hearing. Within 24 hours of giving evidence in the first hearing I had notified the CC that I was pursuing a separate complaint but did not have confidence in the existing disputes committee. I was told that the only way to challenge the existing rules was to wait until conference.

Pre-conference Bulletin 3 @ November 2013
As the DC has previously stated to you, we do not think that it is in your best interests for the DC to hear your case under the existing rules and we would prefer to wait until the outcome of the review has been concluded.

However, you have insisted that you want to go ahead with a hearing of the allegation at this time and under the existing rules. At the same time you have indicated, both at Conference and in discussion, that you have no confidence in the current procedure.

The Disputes Committee remains extremely concerned that breaches of confidentiality will undermine the confidence of comrades, and in particular women, to lodge complaints with our Committee. We must ensure, as far as possible, that those making allegations are confident that they will be taken seriously and interacted with sensitively. This is why we have been insistent about confidentiality.

We have decided that we will deal with your case at this time. However, both sides in this case must be treated with fairness.

This means that:

• We will not accommodate outside influence from anyone.

• There will be no CC member on the panel.

• The composition of the panel will be agreed in conjunction with both parties.

• If we need to co-opt comrades to hear the case we will approach people who were elected to review the DC.

Please confirm by return that you accept these conditions.

This communication is confidential between yourself and the DC.

Put in the context of over four months of distress, delay and hostility from the DC the entire tone and emphasis of this e-mail is unsympathetic and bullying.

The next day I receive a phone call to apologise and say I should never have received this e-mail, it hadn’t been agreed by the whole DC and that a hearing would proceed on terms agreeable to me. At this point the entire attitude and approach changed.

So what happened? I knowingly speculate that something was going on behind the scenes. Perhaps those comrades involved will one day explain what was really happening on the disputes committee.

But let us ask another question. Did the CC intervene because they were motivated by their principles on women’s oppression, or were they pushed into doing it? I would argue that there was very little “effort” or “ingenuity” shown by Charlie or Alex. The only ingenuity was to realise there was no way out for them other than to progress the case. Or put a different way: why, as they claim, did they have to put in so much effort to get my case heard? What or who was the obstacle?

2. The polarisation was caused by leaks and is motivated by political differences

The CC also claim that their actions were shaped by a polarised situation which occurred because of leaks from supporters of the complainants, and leaks from politically hostile CC members. Again this is not true.

Two days after I gave evidence my housemate was taken aside by our district organiser and told about the case.

He was told that the first woman threw herself at M, he rejected her and she was motivated by spurned affection.

A district organiser was told by a CC member, speaking about me, that “you had to ask questions about who would want to wreck the organisation, I’m not saying it is M15, but it is suspicious that someone would come forward so late”.

Rumour and speculation began to gather pace and much of it was coming from M and his supporters and was aimed at constructing a narrative to undermine myself and W.

Additionally, having worked for the party for 6 years and just recently moved to work in the national office I was suddenly moved out. This clearly raised questions. People began to find out that something was happening.

At this point the CC needed to intervene to provide some answers and stop the rumour mill. Both myself and W asked for this to happen. We both waved the need for confidentiality about anything other than the precise details of the case.

The CC should have intervened to provide clear information to comrades in the run up to national conference and to stem the atmosphere of rumour and speculation which was damaging to the party and damaging to our politics on women’s oppression.

In fact they did intervene but in a way that used the organised power of the party’s apparatus to fight for a position before I and others even had a chance to make a case to comrades at conference. While they began to build a side to accept the disputes committee report at conference, we were denied the right to speak on the grounds of confidentiality. The response from oppositional members of the ISJ editorial board to Charlie and Alex in the current ISJ makes the point well:

At this point the Central Committee, driven by a sectarian minority in its ranks, made a decision that would cost the party dear.

It opted to defend the disputes committee and argue in a statement to all members that anyone siding with those challenging the process would be demonstrating “a quite unwarranted lack of confidence in the capacity of the party and its structures to maintain and develop our tradition on women’s oppression”.

The CC did this before the women had even presented their case to conference. They wrote a document arguing that party members “should endorse the DC report”.

They wrote that “to take any other decision would have no basis in how the DC actually addressed this case”. They used the party apparatus to persuade over 500 members to put their names to the document.

All this before either of the women had been able to put their case to the membership. In the weeks before conference the CC even refused to let the complainants and their supporters circulate a list of proposals to members recommending changes to the disputes committee procedures.

Perhaps the CC did genuinely believe that the complaints were motivated by political differences. If that is true, their mistaken analysis of the situation and the failure to grasp the nettle of the dispute and ensure that it was dealt with in a principled manner has cost the party very dear indeed.

3. Challenging the sexist narrative around the dispute

The most horrifying aspect of this entire situation is the way that some members have so readily employed sexist rape myths and tropes to explain and justify the situation.

In the process comrades have constructed a narrative of the worst kind which directly parallels the sexist narrative used in the mainstream media about women who come forward with accusations of rape and sexual harassment.

People have speculated on why I have come forward so late and deployed this as an argument to undermine my complaint. I was actually asked by one comrade “what were your tactical reasons for coming forward when you did?”

In mainstream society women are accused of having ulterior motives such as jealousy. In the context of a revolutionary party my ulterior motives have been put down to wanting to lead a political break from the SWP into Counterfire or Workers Power. Or worse being an M15 agent trying to politically destroy the organisation. The partner of one of the members of the original disputes panel told a large group of people that “the Black Panthers were infiltrated by secret women police officers who planted false rape allegations in order to destroy the organisation.”

I have been labelled a feminist. This matters because it shows that I am influenced by bourgeois morality and on that basis have misunderstood what happened to me, I have too easily taken offence at something innocent. One comrade has claimed that ‘a fuck off would have done’ and I am blowing things out of proportion.
Most significantly I have recently discovered that two members of the disputes committee tried to prevent me ever giving evidence in the first place. Shockingly one of them presented an Internal Bulletin document that I signed a few years earlier as evidence of my feminist views to undermine my complaint.

On top of this my existence was repeatedly denied: “there is no second complaint”. This even happened in meetings where I had spoken and said people will know that I am the second person making a complaint. I did formally lodge a complaint, but because I stated that I was not willing for it to be heard by the existing committee this was interpreted and translated to comrades as there being no second complaint. Still today some people do not realise there was always a second complaint. The attempt to impose invisibility on me and deny me a voice again echoes the treatment of women in wider society.

In clear contrast reading Viv’s account in IB2 that there was a deliberate attempt to silence, bully and intimidate people involved in the cases from the very beginning. This certainly is and continues to be my experience. All the avenues we pursued to get our legitimate issues with the disputes committee resolved were blocked by the CC on the grounds of confidentiality and the bullying and victimisation I have experienced has been incredible.

In this period I was blocked by some members of my branch from taking on responsibility for educational on the grounds that they disagreed with my views on democracy in the party.

This was despite the fact that when asked they did not know what my views on democracy were.

And despite the fact that I was still working for the party and working on building branch engagement with key political texts and developing comrades political education.

A leading member and very close friend of M told comrades in my branch that “there had been political problems since before I came down from Manchester”, with the implication that this cast doubt on the validity of my complaint.

Another leading member shouted in my face two days before national conference that the only reason I was building united front campaigns was to gather people around me for a split. When I asked him to stop shouting in my face he said: “Why!! Am I a naughty man who’s bullying you? Is that what you are saying??”

One comrade was told by a leading member of my branch that I was “only being friendly to [her] so that [she would] take [my] side in arguments.” Comrades who I have known for years and worked closely with turn their heads away from me and blank me.

If those comrades sincerely believe I am politically motivated then who on earth has fuelled this speculation and why have the CC not intervened to undercuts the situation. If they do not think that then how shameful to treat a woman in this situation as a pariah and to bully and victimise her - even if they disagree with the method I have pursued to resolve the complaint.

So where on earth had this come from? Until this point no-one had ever raised a single complaint about my political views with me. I had recently been moved into an important role in the national office. The only thing that had changed in this period was that I had brought forward a complaint of sexual harassment and was attempting to get it resolved.

Why, despite being asked repeatedly, did the CC not intervene to resolve the issues or even investigate the complaints I was making of bullying?

The problem runs deep. This is not just about the behaviour of individual members. A more intellectually sophisticated version of the narrative is pushed by Charlie and Alex in their recent JSJ articles - read Thiti Bhattacharya’s response to their article.

Additionally the failure to directly challenge the worst aspects of this narrative makes the CC complicit - it is not adequate to say in a meeting that the women should be treated as members in good standing, if you do not follow up complaints from the women when they are not treated as members in good standing.

It is not adequate to abstractly articulate a commitment to women’s liberation if the CC do not directly challenge sexist commentary around the disputes when they witness it.

Conclusion
So why has this situation become so bitter and polarised? Why instead of finding ways to bridge the polarisation and unify the party have the CC operated on a split trajectory? Their actions at every turn have sought to deepen the polarisation in order to push sections of the party out of the organisation.

In the process the disputes cases have been trivialised. Although they accept that things have gone wrong with the procedures and mistakes have been made there is a continuing attempt to present the disputes cases as a secondary issue. This is wrong for many reasons. Most importantly sexual violence and women’s oppression more widely are issues at the core of our politics.

It also shows a failure to understand that many comrades actually just think we have got something wrong. It’s that simple. It has been the resistance to doing basic things to put the situation right - like having a review of the DC procedures- that has led many people to ask deeper questions about our democratic structures and what has gone wrong for us to reach this point.

The disputes cases are the scratch that has turned to gangrene. Unless the wound is sterilised it will continue to shape the unhealthy dynamic in the organisation which means all political debate is refracted through the prism of the dispute.

Today that means that despite saying that “there were problems with W’s case” and knowing that the impact of those failures on her life has been utterly, utterly devastating, they cannot even bring themselves to say “we are sorry. We are sorry that failings in our procedures have had a negative impact on your life, we have tried to put this right and hope nothing like this will ever happen to anyone else.”

Even if they do manage this, it is just a necessary prerequisite to move forward. It is no longer enough. It is not enough that we fought for months to have a DC review and this is now presented as the line drawn underneath the whole situation.

It is not good enough that I am put in the ludicrous position that I have to move a motion in my own branch meeting to get an apology.

The CC will claim this is an indication that the faction are constantly moving the goal posts. But the very fact that we have fought so hard for something so basic is testament to the rottenness of the political leadership of this organisation – an apology without any accountability will not resolve the crisis.

The Central Committee contests some of this version of events. Please read the article ‘Reply to the faction’ at the start of the bulletin.

WARNING – NAZI NICK COULD KEEP HIS SEAT!

In May 2014, Nazi BNP leader Nick Griffin only requires around seven and a half per cent of the vote to hold onto his seat as Member of the European Parliament [MEP] for North West England.

The form of proportional representation used at the European Elections provides the BNP with an opportunity to reposition themselves and to recover from previous defeats.

If the elections in Barking and Stoke-On-Trent had used the same electoral system as in the European Elections, then there would still be BNP Councillors in those areas.

Neither is it simply a question of whether or not Nazi Nick’s vote goes down – in 2004, when Nick Griffin failed to win a North West MEP seat, the BNP vote was actually higher than when the fascists won the same seat in 2009. This highlights the importance of increasing voter turn-out to beat the Nazis.
An alarm bell sounded at the local elections last May. In one North West town - Maryport – the BNP came second behind Labour, by only 94 votes. The BNP gained 811 votes, beating UKIP who polled only 127 votes. Nick Griffin said that he had learned important lessons from this election – mainly to do with postal votes, which are key in European Elections. Indeed, in August 2013, Nick Griffin was in Burnley for what he described as “a day of voter and postal vote registration”.

It is also important to say that the fact that the BNP’s manpower on the streets has been lessened will not reduce Nick Griffin’s chances of being re-elected – the important thing for any party standing in the Euros will not really be manpower on the streets but will be money: something which the BNP still have no shortage of. The Nazis will also receive mail-shots across the North West courtesy of the Royal Mail.

The Nazis’ 905 votes in Maryport hampered the Tories into 6th place, with Cameron’s party polling only 63 votes. This repeats a pattern developing elsewhere. At the Rotherham by-election in Winter 2012, BNP came ahead of both the Tories and the Lib Dems. At the South Shields by-election in May 2013, the BNP came ahead of the Lib Dems. The Lib Dem vote is collapsing. At the 2009 European Elections, they received 14.9 per cent of the vote and won only one seat.

- If the Lib Dem vote comes down by half – which is more than possible – there is a very good chance that the BNP [particularly if their vote flatslines at 8 per cent] could pip ahead of the Lib Dems for one of the North West seats.

- Neither will the success of UKIP necessarily deprive the BNP of a seat. A look at how the European Election vote is divided up shows why: for example, one poll nationally put UKIP’s vote at 24 per cent. It is unlikely they will achieve that at the Euros in the North West – but even if UKIP won one seat on 24 per cent, then their percentage of the vote would be halved as they go into contesting the next round for a second seat. This obviously would give them 12 per cent.

- If they secured a second seat, then their vote would be divided by a third as they go into the next round to contest winning a third seat. Thus giving them 4 per cent. At this point, the BNP would only need to get above 4 per cent to win a seat ahead of UKIP.

In 2009, the BNP won the seat with 8 per cent.

So it is vital that everyone avoids complacency. Nick Griffin could win his seat thus moving Britain more in line with the advance of fascist organisations across Europe. Another five years of fascists in the political mainstream and on our streets: in a more emboldened way than before.

We shouldn’t forget that it was the BNP’s winning of two MEP seats in 2009 that led to fascists trying to march on our streets for the past four years.

Both ballot box and protests

Opposing the Nazis on the streets is absolutely key. However, the fascists take a twin-track strategy.

It is important that we do the same. There is a tendency to think of the electoral part of the fight against fascism as being less important, or less militant, than the street protests against the fascists. This is not true.

We need to do both - mobilising the majority against the fascists on the streets and at the ballot-box.

Fascism has never come to power by force. While it is true that the fascists have always built up a street force at the same time, they have always come to power constitutionally and legally. For example, there was no March on Rome. Yet Mussolini claimed afterwards that his movement had taken power by force.

The truth is that the BNP Nazis are making incursions into areas - using letters by post, or days of voter and postal vote registration – yet in some areas there is no response to the fascists organising in communities in this way. Anti-fascists need to have the same degree of response to the Nazis mobilising around elections, as we do when the EDL turn up to protest in our communities.

Furthermore, the strength of UAF’s United Front, which in the North West has been steadily built up around the Nick Griffin Must Go campaign, strengthened the united front which mobilised around the Manchester anti-EDL protest in March and the Liverpool anti-fascist march in October.

We need to oppose the fascists on the streets wherever possible. But doing this is always a tactical question. The truth is that it is not always possible.

The German Communist Party in the 1930s had a strategy of ‘Smite the nazis wherever you see them’ – this did not work, as the results show. It is important to understand this, otherwise one builds up political problems long-term and often can descend into a moralism that postures as being more militant – which it isn’t.

Kick the Nazis out

UAF has been holding ‘Nick Griffin Must Go’ Days of Action across the North West - involving Trades Unionists, MPs, Councillors and others - to mobilise the anti-racist majority vote in good time for May 2014. The North West Constituency is bigger than some European member states - containing over 5 million voters, 5 sub-regions, and 39 local authority areas. It stretches up to the Scottish border and down past Crewe & Nantwich.

If we manage to stop Nazi Nick from winning the small percentage needed to keep his seat, it will send an inspiring message to anti-fascists across Europe.

It will mean we have pushed back the biggest advance by a fascist organisation in British political history, and will impact on the nazi’s attempts to mobilise on our streets too.

But we can only do this by recognising that the BNP have a good chance of winning with a small percentage, and therefore understanding that we must mobilise the anti-fascist majority at the ballot box - as we do on the streets - to kick the nazi’s out.

Nick Griffin has been writing to everyone who voted for him in 2009. The opportunity for him to keep his seat is very real. The stakes are too high to allow him to do this.

Therefore, everyone needs to get involved in the ‘Nick Griffin Must Go’ campaign - now.

UAF IN PORTSMOUTH

TOMMY ROBINSON: OUR PART IN HIS DOWNFALL

Simon (Portsmouth)

The events in Portsmouth after the death of Lee Rigby were largely successful for UAF but they also function as a cautionary tale.

There were a number of small mobilisations and counter protests, but in the interests of brevity I will concentrate on the most pertinent ones.

In the run up to the death of Lee Rigby Portsmouth EDL had accepted itself that it no longer functioned, there was a feeling on the left locally that it was a spent force.

When there was an Ad Hoc demo of around a dozen people outside the Mosque after Rigby’s death we only managed to mobilise around 30 people.

It was at this point we realised we had a real problem. When we had a counter protest to their wreath laying event we only managed to mobilise 40 people. More than them but by not many.

It became clear that the dormant Nazis in Portsmouth felt that their time had come. We were also confronted with two major challenges. A protest march against a local Muslim school opening, and March for England (MFE) announcing that they were marching on Trafalgar Day in Portsmouth in October.

Although we had regular meetings and were in a good position to respond, we still needed to re-energise the movement.

The obvious lesson was to reconnect with our base. It was also becoming clear that we had an additional problem. The local Anarchists always conducted themselves in a thoroughly principled way and are serious anti-fascists, however the same could not be said of some sections of the left who were motivated more by hostility to the SWP than anti-fascism.

The extent to how our own internal prob-
lems were being exploited became quite clear. We went to Portsmouth Trades Council and proceeded to organise a joint UAF/Portsmouth Trades Council public meeting in opposition to MFE.

It was clear we had to strengthen our links with the local trade union movement and we set about doing this. The Trades Council also arranged for Union reps to go onto our local steering group. We also established regular stalls in the town centre to strengthen our ties with the local community.

On the day of the EDLs demo outside the School the police agreed we were to be given the space over the road from them, a site of equal prominence and we marched from the city centre, they from a local pub.

We had been straightforward with the police from the outset, we were going to protest opposite them or along their route.

The EDL’s local organiser Mickey Baylis was apparently furious that we were to be allowed there, presuming they were allowed to march on any position.

This is no surprise. What did shock me was that clearly some anti-fascists were disappointed that this did not fit with their narrative of UAF being pushed into an assembly point half a mile away.

It became clear in the run up to the event that the EDLs were trying to get support from outside organisations as there was so little support in Pompey.

It now became a demo calling for Unity on the far right. When you are inviting Kent NF to your demo any pretence of being non-fascist gets a bit silly. Some people compared that local organiser to Hedley Lamarr in Blazing Saddles putting out an appeal for all cut throats and killers to come to Rock Ridge.

In the event they ended up marching through the streets throwing lit fireworks at peoples homes and into a WPCs face.

Although they had seemed initially to have a larger turnout to us, when it came down to it they mustered little more than a hundred whilst we had nearly two hundred.

Portsmouth UAF was criticised for claiming we were in the majority by some former comrades.

Most people there felt we were in the clear majority, that was also the opinion of the Portsmouth News, Council Officials and the Police. That will have to suffice.

It was a disaster for the EDL, the Portmouthish News denounced them as fascists, it was condemned by Tommy Robinson for involving other groups and was even mentioned in his resignation speech from EDL some weeks later.

This was followed by their humiliation in Tower Hamlets before we had our Public meeting. There was a general feeling that the fever had passed and any opportunity to capitalise on the Lee Rigby tragedy had been unsuccessful.

The Public meeting was important on two counts. Not just to discuss the forthcoming MFE march but also to debate our tactics in a forum with representatives of the Labour movement. This was important.

We had been criticised for consulting with Police over the arrangements for the march and there had been attacks on UAF from people demanding a more vanguardist approach.

There were representatives from Union, PCS, NUT, UCU, UCU, USDAW, NASUWT and NUS and we were able to win the argument again of the need to build a mass movement rather than to put our faith in squaidism or any of the other substitutionist arguments that were floating around.

As the days approached for the proposed march, we continued pushing out until the realisation dawned on us – They had decided not to bless Portsmouth with their presence.

They will be coming to Brighton on St George’s day and obviously we will be building for that.

They have collapsed in Portsmouth, but they can recover. The one thing about the Nazis we have all learnt is how the attacks can be somewhat like the Christopher Lee Hammer Dracula cycle, it doesn’t matter how final their defeat appears they can come back.

With the Con-Dem government piling on the attacks the ground is fertile, and sadly a Lee Rigby type scenario could occur again.

Obviously our united front campaigns and party work are all interconnected and the defeat of Portsmouth EDL has a direct impact on probably one of the biggest challenges facing the working class in Portsmouth.

The announcement of massive job losses in Portsmouth at the Dockyard is unquestionably the biggest blow to the community in living memory: thousands will lose their jobs.

3-400 attended a Rally in defence of their jobs in the town centre organised at 36 hours notice, the march next week will attract many more.

The collapse of the EDL makes our task very much easier to approach the issues on purely class terms.

We are already having arguments with people over issues of Anti-Scottish sentiment and chauvinist arguments, that is a consequence of the penetration of bourgois ideas through the media.

However we do not have the problem of an organised engine of reaction within the working class community pushing arguments in a reactionary direction. To a large extent we do not have the problem of “disputed territory” with the EDL.

The lessons that have been learnt over the recent period are the importance of regular UAF meetings and maintaining those contacts, within the Trade Unions, the Mosque and local communities etc.

Also what paid off were the basic ABCs, increasing our roots in the unions pushing out and not getting distracted by squaidist and other substitutionist arguments. If not for that, the problems we had would have been difficult to recover from.

IN DEFENCE OF UAF

Richard (Cambridge)

Travelling by train from Cambridge to Swansea with nothing for company but IBs 1 and 2 was proving a bit of a melancholy experience. This was until I began to think of the very real gains for our side that our party has been important in achieving over the past 12 months, despite our internal strife. The loud and militant teachers’ strikes, the bedroom tax protests, the Hovis strike, opposing war in Syria, the Jerry Hicks campaign and of course Unite Against Fascism.

Four or so years ago the prospect of Tommy Robinson retreating from the street fighting arena, admitting defeat, and of Nick Griffin desperately scrabbling around to save his Euro seat, would have seemed an ideal scenario we could only aspire to. Now both these things are happening. Of course there is no room for complacency; the current political landscape is perfect for the growth of large Fascist or racist organisations, as the sudden surge in support for the suavely-groomed xenophobes peddled by UKIP shows. Nor do I think we’ve seen the last of Mr Robinson.

But nonetheless this is a victory for anti-racists and anti-Fascists, one that it is worth being proud of and one it is worth asking ‘how and why did this happen?’

To try to answer this question I can only draw on my experiences in Cambridge, but maybe these will be useful to other places. And it’s an answer which has SWP members at its centre.

Our Unite Against Fascism group has been existence since the organisation was launched nationally, and meets regularly, at least once a month.

These meetings become much more regular when necessary, but even if we feel there is ‘nothing to discuss’ we still gather on the first Monday of the month. When these meetings are small and composed almost entirely of SWP members, we have still found them to be useful in assessing our work and planning ongoing campaigns (particularly around music and football) that can make a difference in our locality and pull in other people.

While keeping these meetings regular and focussed (with an agenda), we have resisted moves to make them too formal or bureaucratic, as it is our experience that such structures can deter particularly younger people, not used to the way some Trade Union and political meetings work. We have also been careful not to flood them with SW members, partly to avoid substituting ourselves for the group, but also because our members have lots of other political work to be doing.

The work of the UAF group is regularly discussed in SWP meetings. At some points it has become easy for members of the Party branch to worry about the structure,
size and relevance of the UAF organising meetings, wondering if they were fit for purpose. The best answer to these questions was given when we were put to the test opposing 2 EDL marches in our City in July 2011 and February 2013.

On both occasions our organising meetings suddenly swelled to 30 or even 50 people, a mixed and diverse bunch drawn from our work at gigs, with Trade Unions, football matches and with the mosque.

As we were known to these people due to consistent involvement with them over the past years, they were willing to take a lead from us in organising opposition to the EDL. The issue of banning the EDL, of staying at home while they marched or of organising squaddist interventions against individual Nazis weren’t raised, not because we were particularly good at speaking or even particularly bossy, but because we’d built up the respect of the local communities we were working with as being consistently the best fighters against racism and Fascism. They never thought that we didn’t know what we were doing!

As a result, as people will know, our counter protests were both massive, joyous, diverse, celebratory and simultaneously humiliating for the Fascists. Young and old, black and white, gay, straight, Muslims and Jews, councillors, an MEP, vicars, footie fans and emos and anarcho and Greens, all turned out on our demos to show the EDL in no uncertain terms that they were not welcome in our City.

So popular was our movement that the local Lib-Dem MP, who had monitored the first demo from the safety of the police control room, felt that the second time around he had to turn up and speak, and then marched with us – on our terms, under our UAF banner.

Equally important, new people became active in our UAF and LMHR groups. This has meant that we have a nucleus of people outside the party, not always a big enough group but an important one none the less, to call on when, for instance, we need to act in a hurry (as when the EDL called an unannounced demo around the death of Lee Rigby) or to act as reliable stewards on demonstrations.

The respect Party members won due to their consistent work within the UAF group has meant that, when necessary, we have been able to win important debates. A good example was the way a leading SWP member (also on Trades Council and so not a regular at UAF meetings) was able to win the group to our continued insistence that our march should go past the mosque (where the EDL wanted to go).

By convincing Mosque elders of this position, we were then able to force the hand of the police into letting us march this route. This was important in deflating the EDL. The principled, organised way we operated around these demonstrations meant that new people were also drawn towards and into the SWP.

Of course this level of activity and unity was easy to achieve in the run up to and immediate aftermath of the demonstrations. We held successful public meetings in the weeks immediately following both marches in order to expose new UAF members to the wider politics of anti Fascism, to complement their busy involvement with the nuts and bolts issues of organising our event. We felt they would benefit from taking a step back and accessing some anti Fascist political theory; of course the people that attended these meetings are generally the ones who are still consistently active.

However, with the return of more ‘normal’ political routine, some on the Left have again started to suggest that UAF doesn’t offer the best strategy. There have been half hearted attempts to launch a more populist anti racist movement in Cambridge as well as to recruit people to squaddist tactics.

While retaining friendly relations with people in both camps we have always insisted on the importance of maintaining our UAF group. It could be tempting to morph into some more cuddly We Are Cambridge or United Cambridge group, especially when it is suggested that these could take on other progressive issues as well.

However, we have to be clear that it is the politics of UAF that have inflicted two serious defeats on the EDL in Cambridge in the last 3 years. UAF is the organisation that consistently seeks to counter the Fascists by mobilising maximum numbers, and the only one that does so while avoiding the twin dangers of the popular front or the brave squads of hard guys taking out individual fascists. Yes I am sure UAF has made tactical mistakes in some cases (I know we have in Cambridge!), but UAF is the only organisation that truly stands in the proud and successful tradition of the Anti Nazi League, always seeking to organise mass opposition to Fascism on the streets.

Which is why it is essential to have UAF groups in as many places as possible, not just springing into action when opposing racist activity before disappearing again, but truly embedded in the community. Which is why we insist on meeting at least once a month, even if sometimes these meetings are small and composed mostly of SWP members.

So, what do we do at these meetings when we’re not organising mass demos in our town or transport to other towns?

Well, we seek to involve a wider level of people in anti racist activity, through utilising their talents and interests.

However, first of all it should go without saying that we regularly spend some meeting time ensuring we continue to maintain our invaluable good relations with local Trade Unions and the Mosque, without whom we’d have only a fraction of the success (and funds) we currently do. These are our bread and butter, without which we could have no functioning group, and it is always worth ensuring we maintain our friendly relations with both groups. We also try to start the meeting with a political discussion based around recent events in the anti Fascist struggle – last week we kicked off with the resignation of Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll, and what that means for our work.

But what else do we discuss?

A lot of our activity involving hundreds of people beyond our group happens through Love Music Hate Racism. There have consistently been LMHR / Rock Against Racism rock gigs in Cambridge over the past 20 years, which has helped to ensure that generations of indie kids in the City have grown up as anti racists.

As new promoters spring up, many of them have offered to run their own LMHR gigs, to display our banner at their gigs or to let us have a stall, or just to put the logo on their fliers.

It is worth pointing out here that many venues or promoters will happily let you run a LMHR stall at their gigs, you don’t have to limit yourself to involvement at nights you run yourself.

Our promoters are music lovers, and this makes the vast majority of them intrinsic anti racists who value the multi culturalism at the heart of most genres of popular music.

We have had no difficulty in getting stalls at gigs from artists ranging from The Levellers, The Libertines and Babshambles, Baddle Bizzle, Warning (East Anglia’s biggest and longest running Jungle and Drum’n’Bass club night), Public Image Limited, Attila the Stockbroker, The Pauldingtons, The Wildhearts, The Broken Family Band and Public Enemy (where Flavour Flav took a leaflet and offered words of support).

We have also run LMHR acoustic nights and under 14s gigs. This year the women’s officer at the University has again asked about hosting a LMHR gig. Many releases put out by local record labels carry the LMHR logo, and donate money to the cause when they can, and we can run a sponsored bus for LMHR, which helped us both to link with local musicians and was also a high profile way to meet new people while raising funds.

The English Disco Lovers had their first public appearance on our 2013 demonstration, and we have since worked with them on organising a fund raising disco night.

All of which has helped keep the music scene in Cambridge decidedly anti racist, so much so that the landlord of a local venue was happy to cancel a recent gig when it was discovered that the promoter was an EDL supporter. She did this without any input from us, and despite the fact that it cost her income from the gig and lead to the venue getting threatened.

Another field (!) of activity that has a big impact locally is our work around football. We have cooperated with members of local supporters groups, leafleting for Kick It Out days, countering any EDL activity at the clubs and getting kids to take part in anti racist initiatives in their schools and as guests of local football clubs.

We also hosted a public meeting at Cambridge United where board members, fans and players from United and Cambridge
City, along with Luther Blissett, all pledged their support to anti racism and diversity. This season we hope to organise a Primary School anti racist poster competition in cooperation with local clubs and the NUT Association.

In case some people aren’t interested in music or football, we seek to involve them in whatever they are excited by. Thus we have helped with and encouraged anti racist art exhibitions, poetry readings, radio shows and a book launch. There’s always posters to design, fly posters to be stuck, websites and Facebook pages to be updated, badges and T shirts to be created, stalls to run, contact lists to be sorted, school and Trade Unions talks to be given, and more.

Ideally, while not mobilising for a big demo or public meeting, we’d like UAF and LMHR to be places where people can use their skills and enthusiasms for the anti racist cause. And it’s because these less explicitly political activities are organised through the UAF group, they all help build the links that we will need when the racists and Fascists return.

For while it may have cheered me up on my train journey to think that the EDL are in crisis and the BNP are moribund, one thing is sure – the Fascists will return, ready to feed on the continued recession, and we have to be ready for them.

A recent UKIP inspired anti immigrant demonstration in Wisbech, which we helped oppose, shows the ways things might well develop. That’s why building UAF groups as local centres of anti racist activity and organisation has to be a priority.

### UAF MORE THAN EVER

**Paul (Newham)**

2013 has been some year, pregnant with possibilities, but has left many rightly, frustrated, by much talk, but little action.

As the Coalition’s cuts bite, a real alternative to Cameron/Clegg is long overdue. Elvis once sang, ‘A little less conversation, a little more action’, these words apply to Len McCluskey over Grangemouth, for instance. People’s Assemblies - great, but they can’t be a substitute for industrial action, as seems to be the case for some who lead the PA.

Counterfire’s and others apologetics re Grangemouth, shows some of the state we’re in....I aim to focus here, on anti Nazi work and will make some points raised by the opposition in the party.

Travelling/talking with Petros Constantinou, from Keerfa, in Greece, to the Unite/UAF demo, in Liverpool, recently, gave an insight into the best workings of how revolutionaries, through united front activities, have pushed Golden Dawn (GD), back, (for now at least).

Their work alone, as news of Pavlos Kryssas’ death broke, was speedy, bold and put the government on the defensive.

Keerfa is a model for anti fascists. Our comrades have been central to helping initiate a big, broad based, militant, mass anti Nazi movement. Faced with uphill challenges, SEK have been a part of maintaining Keerfa’s breadth and support, and in confronting GD. In France, anti fascists mobilised brilliantly in the wake of Clement Merc’s murder.

But the French Left’s poor stance over Islamophobia (with honourable exceptions) still does damage to widening the great potential for a much needed anti fascist movement to halt Marine Le Pen. Le Pen’s shock on being faced with a lively, UAF picket at Cambridge, this year, shows that this type of greeting is a rarity for her.

2014 brought the attempted Euro election lash up between the Front National and Geert Wilders. Much rides on such a project for the far right and though various pitfalls may beset the alliance, their efforts show the scale of what we face.

UKIP’s prominence next year, will also be a major test for anti racists. No wonder that they are cocky, given that all mainstream parties are willing to tilt towards UKIP’s line re immigration, border control, etc. The unpopular racist ‘Go Home’ vans have gone for now (helped on their way by protests in Scotland and London), but xenophobia will be a bad smell in 2014 Euro elections.

UAF’s role nationally, was recognised by Unite, who we worked closely with the aforementioned, Liverpool demo against fascism. Our North west UAF organiser, worked from the Unite offices in Liverpool. North West UAF has gained a huge groundswell of support from across the region. It is well rooted at all levels of the labour movement.

If, and it’s a big if, Nick Griffin, is kicked out next May, our comrades locally will have good reason to be proud of their role, the work has and continues to be, put in.

Having just returned from UAF’s successful trip to Auschwitz - Birkenau, has again, underlined the need to undercut today’s Nazis, by any means necessary.

As everyone who has been, says, you return a slightly changed person. Certainly, all who went, are more determined than ever to defeat fascists, at every step of the way. School students, pensioners, trades unionists, college students, all will never forget what we experienced. The party and our publications were also snapped up by non members on the visit.

The Edl have had a terrible year, encapsulated in Tommy Robinson (TR) and Kevin Carroll’s departure. That was something to celebrate! For many anti fascists, all those demos against Edl, all the leafletings, all the hard work, had had an effect. UAF’s strategy of opposing the scum, wherever they tried to intimidate local residents through mass activity (wherever possible) and the party’s role has paid off.

Over 4 years and over 200 demos against the Edl/Sdl has seen TR pushed into a corner, cosying up to the very spooky, Quilliam Foundation. Leopards don’t change their spots and TR has said as much, but to have quit in such circumstances has been a great fillip for anti fascists and a hammer blow to what is left of Edl. (A warning though, came, on November 9th, where in Durham, around 200 Edl marched, whilst our side was outnumbered, Edl are certainly down, but they are not yet finished).

The little Hitlers of Edl have had reality hit them in their faces, sadly, only metaphorically. For men with egos the size of planets, this will have left TR/Carroll with heavy hearts...

As such goes, Edl wish ‘they could turn back time’. Last May, as news was emerging of Lee Rigby’s killing, and what lay behind it, it didn’t take a genius to realise that the likes of Edl/Bnp, would aim to make hay from it. TR later said Lee Rigby’s death was a godsend to the Edl. The night of Lee Rigby’s death saw TR and around 60 others, run around Woolwich, targeting Muslims. TR was back from the political wilderness and sensed a chance to turn it around. For the previous 5 months, TR had spent time in jail, the Edl was collapsing and going nowhere fast.

However, the organisation was still intact enough for TR to push some buttons and make a comeback. Before May, there had been no major Edl advances, Walthamstow had been TR’s Waterloo, (coming as it did, a year after their humiliation in Tower Hamlets), the first part of 2013 saw Edl in disarray.

Walthamstow had seen Edl scared and realising that they were not popular in London. The short lived British Freedom Party, was another victim, that day. Fortuitously, Edl had a demo pencilled in Newcastle, the night of Rigby’s death. Maybe 1500 Edl attended, they were back. Our people, as part of Newcastle Unites, did well, but it was clear that battle was on again...The following Bank Holiday Monday saw nearly 1000 Edl effectively march to Whitehall. We had perhaps 500 in opposition, not great, though UAF had worked hard. As other anti fascists acknowledged, “UAF were the only national group to call a demo, fair play for that”.

Edl were buoyed up, but fortunately, due to the internal contradictions they suffer, this was to start unravelling, just as they felt most confident. Lessons were being learnt on our side, also, eg, the urgent need to revive some of the London UAF groups.

This was not rocket science as places like Walthamstow, Portsmouth, Leicester, the Black Country, show. There are no
short cuts, having established UAF groups matters, thus, it is heartening to see more parts of London with stronger, rooted, UAF organising centres. Shortly afterwards, in June, the Bnp foolishly called their first London demo for some time.

The same weekend, Edl called 70 demos to lay wreaths in memory of Lee Rigby at War Memorials. A clever move, or so they thought. This was clearly a test for all on the left.

As November’s excellent Socialist Review underlines, the party and UAF, raising ourselves, on the essence of the united front, set out to do all that we could to oppose both sets of pondlife. The Friday before the demos left you thinking, ‘Whatever happens tomorrow, could dictate how that we need to dissemble UAF and start...’

What made some difference was that in their arrogance, Edl overshot themselves. In many areas they simply didn’t show; or as in Brighton, showed at the crack of dawn, and made for the exit door. A shame they didn’t turn up in certain places, as ex squaddies were ready to put them right about showing respect for War memorials...

Our comrades and many anti fascists responded magnificently. UAF called demos wherever the Edl had promised to be. The 37 places where Edl showed were for the most part, flops. Portsmouth, Manchester, Sheffield, Notts, Cambridge, among others, saw good anti Nazi turnouts. As reports came in, you sensed they’d made a tactical mistake in dispersing their forces so widely. For all their talk of divisions, scattering your army across the battlefield, in such a fashion is a potential recipe for disaster.

The anti fascist demo against the Bnp, in Central London, saw around 1000 anti Nazis block the scum’s path and ruin their day. Again, our comrades, among others, rose to the occasion.

Griffin again fell flat on his face (not literally, unfortunately), as did his efforts to woo TR. The few Bnp who showed were the dregs. Police then made 58 arrests and Amy J was appallingly injured. If this was mean to frighten away anti fascists, it didn’t work.

It was surprising then, that after a day where Edl/Bnp had been defeated, a ‘comrade’ expounded at length on the perceived shortcomings of Swp and UAF.

This, on a day, when UAF had called nearly 40 demos against the Edl, and where SWP played a fine role. Apparently, if only we could effectively replicate the ANL, and some worked as hard as ex ANL full timers had, all would be much better.

That people who led the ANL were as contemptuous of this as others might have caused some reflection on Rennon’s part, but no, apparently, UAF is so ‘distant from party members’ and ‘bureaucratised’, that we need to dissemble UAF and start again.

To quote the recent BBC documentary, ‘Wherever the Edl demonstrated, there they were opposed by the UAF’. If the BBC realises who has been an impediment to Edl, surely, a historian can.

Then again, such a person’s claims re anti fascist events have long been inaccurate. UAF, the party and others dented Edl in more ways than one that weekend. 

What could have been extremely unpleasant turned in to a series of setbacks for Edl, as their comments on social media showed, in the following days.

UAF and party members also organised in solidarity with those who had their Mosques attacked, such as in Muswell Hill, (see North London’s piece in IB1), the Black Country, Harlow, Portsmouth..... In Woolwich itself, our comrades calmly and delicately held the line and helped to ensure there was no backlash, in the wake of the Rigby killing.

There were also efforts by far right elements to pump out poison, under the ‘Strong from Woolwich Strong’. Fortunately, many smelled a rat and it wasn’t long before, the fascist/extreme right connections of key figures was exposed (partly by UAF members, working with Searchlight) and the venture melted away.

Post Woolwich, TR knew that this was a time to re organise and move beyond infighting. But the unrelenting opposition to Edl was taking its toll on their leaders. Even TR must have realised that Edl demos were achieving nothing. UAF, along with like minded souls from the Unions, the Muslim Community, UEE in Tower Hamlets, and countless others, had a working pattern of organising broad counter demos, and generally, post Woolwich were starting to cause problems again for Edl.

Edl helped by continually shooting themselves in the foot (if only...). The Bank Holiday Monday London demo was castigated by the Metro’s front page, with its photo of 2 Seig Heiling, dipsticks.

Then, Help for Heroes refused any monies donated by Edl. Ludicrously, TR denounced them...maybe, the Quilliam Foundation started to turn the pressure up, around this time, too.

Seasoned anti fascists started to wonder, if TR was starting to lose the plot. Then, a charity football event, which included a Palestinian linked team, came under pressure from the Edl. The result? Another epic fail for Edl...

TR rolled the dice out again and declared that following a national demo in Birmingham, Edl would march on East London Mosque In September. Fighting talk. Their Brum demo was no great shakes in the way of being able to regain the initiative. But their 900-1000 turnout was a sign they could still pull numbers and that our ‘all out’ efforts re Tower Hamlets were right in tone and urgency. Despite the best efforts of anti Nazis in Brum, our smaller numbers and large plod turnout, were large barriers in our path.

Birmingham over, and it was game on again re T/Hamlets. People from the borough were angry and believing that Edl were aiming to visit once more. (Amy G might think that talk of 10,000 anti Nazis coming on the demo was ‘wild’, but all manner of forces in the borough the night before the demo, honestly thought, this was a real possibility).

People were not going to stand for it and once again UAF worked well with United East End, in the run up to the demo and on Sept 7th, itself. Increasingly, the way Edl were talking T/Hamlets up, it was looking like it could be make or break for them, though no one could have predicted TR’s departure, in the manner it happened.

UAF and others spent nearly 3 months working up to the day of the demo. Countless meetings, countless leafletings, and a huge host of labour movement and community groups uniting in action. The Edl were really losing it now if they thought they wanted to get to their target, East London.

Though, in this delusion, they had initially been assisted by the Met, who only backed off when police realise this might not be for the best. The day itself was a victory for anti fascists, and a bitter blow to Edl. For the 3rd time, Edl had been prevented from entering the borough. Only 600 made it, half of what they got in Brum. They were on the slide, to cap it all, another arrest for TR.

Police again intimidated anti fascists who had broken from the main demo to try to confront Edl. Like anyone else, I’d like to have treated Edl to a few home truths that day, up close. There’s been much discussion around the breakaway, I’ll just say, here, that it was a sadly obvious trap to fall into. Once police did what they did, solidarity went out to the arrestees, and we can continue the debate re tactics, as part of this. As for the claims that some of us knew in advance that plod were going to make mass arrests, well, do me a favour.

However, some, including Swp members virtually wrote the day off because of the arrests. This attitude doesn’t take into account how Mosque goers and other residents felt; overwhelmingly glad that Edl were not able to access T/Hamlets proper and do as they’d have liked.

It was the feeling of virtually everyone on the demo, the organisers and many others. As one Anti Fascist Network member said, “Today was a stunning victory”. This from someone, who can be very critical of UAF. The totality of the day’s happenings was eluded by some, viewing things as they do ‘through the prism of factionalism’.

Let’s be clear, the Met wanted at first to bounce Edl into T/Hamlets. 3000 police on the day ensured that mass confrontation was going to be night on impossible (as various anti Nazis understood). It was thus bizarre to see certain oppositionists cheer-lead the breakaway, ignore certain of us who knew what lay around the corner (Robocops), but when realising their error,
then sink away.

It’s a shame that the plan talked through at the party caucus the night before wasn’t related to others by the one faction member present, perhaps there were problems with Facebook that evening. Whatever, T/Hamlets was the final straw for TR and the rest of course...

All the above takes lace of course, in a climate of rising Islamophobia. Nigel Farage cleverly and cynically said nothing around the Woolwich events. He didn’t really need to.

Cameron/May’s rhetoric on migrants, immigration and ‘health tourism’, makes for tasty gruel for the UKIP, electoral, rot-tweiller. Though Ukip have had their share of problems, (fruitcake overload!), they have money, are organised and look set to do well, in 2014. Thus, the recent ‘Stand up to Ukip’, launch, is timely.

The anti fascist group’s Norscarf’s efforts, in a Staffordshire by election (assisted by Saif (members) along this road. Numbskull splitters from Edl like MFE and the ENA have failed.

Joyful was it to be in Brighton, again, as along with local anti Nazis, MFE met the pavement, several times. Edl splits, like the Infidels are also spending much time at Her Majesty’s Pleasure, as their attacks on individuals attracted the state’s attention.

Thus, that Edl came a cropper after their initial Woolwich and Facebook surge, was a result of many of us deciding to put a line in the sand. As ever, crucial support came from national unions, at all levels.

UAF’s stand continues to give heart to Muslims, as we are regularly told eg the re emerging Bravancce Centre in Muswell Hill, or Portsmouth, where comrades, at 3 days notice organised a 150 strong demo against Edl threats to the Mosque. They know who their friends are, in the battle against Islamophobia.

TR continued on his road to nowhere, as his so called charity walk, in London, the same day as Gay Pride, also flopped. No real Edl presence and TR and Carroll were lifted at Aldgate. A modest UAF demo in Central London saw us in high spirits and more fallout for Edl, following this. If Edl hadn’t been pressured at every turn, and constantly made stupid errors, culminating in a post Woolwich bellup, would TR have quit Edl? Answers on a postcard...

Of course there are weaknesses in UAF, such as we saw around the Woolwich time, initially, but comrades were quick to get to grips with what needed to be done. Richard R’s piece in this IB, is an excellent account of what a good UAF group looks like.

Moreover, UAF in the colleges is now a priority on a number of campuses with promising, early results. South London UAF, for instance, twice in a matter of months, have acquitted themselves well, humiliating demos by an Edl splinter group and the local Bnp, at Lunar House, the Border Agency Centre, in Croydon.

This small deed alone, undermines Rob O’s and other’s points that the party has an ‘increasingly sectarian attitude to working with groups we can’t control’.

It would come as news to those in Croydon PCS/Trades Council, who thanked us publicly for our role on both demos.

The years of opposing Edl/Bnp, particularly has been a massive effort by many and there is no one trick pony available here.

However, I do think it a mistake for some comrades to adapt the ‘We Are’ approach, unless there are specific reasons for doing so. To see this is 1/2 areas where UAF members are the backbone of the local UAF group is overly defensive.

We have earned the right to lead as UAF, if people aren’t clear re this, they should talk to Weyman or try the office, to talk it through. We need comrades on the ground that can work independently and take bold initiatives. It’s the only way to learn (for us all).

Moreover, UAF in the colleges is now a priority on a number of campuses with promising, early results. South London UAF, for instance, twice in a matter of months, have acquitted themselves well, humiliating demos by an Edl splinter group and the local Bnp, at Lunar House, the Border Agency Centre, in Croydon.

If those of us who signed the statement arguing for disciplinary action against permanent factioneers, are sectarian, the mind boggles.

It boggles further when it is claimed by one faction member that ‘we have played by the rules, we are not a permanent faction, the undeclared faction’, is. This is turning reality on its head, given the evidence of an opposition blog, 5 months old, various private meetings, the list is endless...

Moving on, Jim’s article in IB2 is fairly breathtaking. Jim has written some fine works on anti fascism, thus it’s disappointing that he doesn’t challenge the identity politics, not Marxism, that a section of the opposition hold.

He takes the ‘undeclared faction’ to task, but neglects to mention the fact that for nearly a year, he has helped lead a real, undeclared opposition.

Moreover, his assertion that the SWP has for 2 decades effectively substituted organisation over politics prompts the obvious question -why, if this is the case, has he not raised this before.

Various attempts to develop the ‘IS tradition in the ISJ (Harman on globalisation, to name but one) are forgotten, or one very useful pamphlet (Building the party in the age etc), were efforts to “get the party to relate to new situations”.

Re Mike G’s pieces, Mike has written that we ‘need to break out of structures that imprison our thinking’. But doesn’t say what that concretely means. Mike has written elsewhere, that oppositionists have been “battered” by those who disagree with them. For someone who has a great way with words, (particularly on the Radio), this is a very unhelpful formulation.

Mike, battering someone is very different to strongly disagreeing with them, as you know. But the image is created of poor, defenceless, oppositionists, at the mercy of CC supporters. This really won’t do.

Elsewhere, Mike want the CC to be accountable, fine, but opposition bloggers, Facebook Warriors (sadly the party has more than its fair share), are not to be measured by the same standards, it seems. Accountability for all, should be ABC, no?

Mike also argues that we had a brilliant intake of ‘youth’, post Millbank. Certainly, there were some great new members, but the bending of the stick towards youth, is a reminder that Paul Foot rightly held ‘youth worshipping’ to be a non starter.

Young people should be patiently talked to as much (often more) than most. Ian Birchall correctly said that SWP failed to recruit as well as we might, from the first ANL days.

However, we must not repeat the inverse mistake, of when recruiting, whilst listening/learning from new members, also not trying, hard, to recruit them to Marxism.

I was a Red Action supporter, way back and only through many arguments, did I stick. This was polemics, and I learnt much.
Mike’s claim that ‘argument and discussion’ has disappeared, beggars belief, given the last year. He then claims that the CC defend ‘their own interests’ against the party and class. This will come as news to 99.9% of the working class, let alone party members.

He also, as do many of course, raise the Disputes Committee cases. Incredibly, he argues that ‘confidentiality’ was really a matter of CC skulduggery. His blindness to seeing that, initially, all connected with the first case, particularly, wanted confidentiality for all, is sad. His allegation that the CC and the DC, covered up for Delta, and put ‘justice’ aside for factional motives, is/ should be, below him.

Where Mike also is wrong is re his remarks on anti fascism. UAF’s record is a good one, in Glasgow and Edinburgh, as Mike must know, so his words are puzzling. Moreover, to say that ‘Delta’ leads UAF and that much has been done recently to protect his role in UAF, is frankly, crass. Wake up, Mike, perhaps your critique would have more weight were you to get matters like this right.

To conclude, what morphed in to Edl, in 2009, has 4, hard years later, suffered enormously. They are in a corner but seek a way out. The Exeter demo in November looks set to be poor for them and can end the year off nicely for anti Nazis.

Our comrades locally are certainly working hard to try to ensure this. Broad (and at times) militant opposition, of which UAF and Swp have been key to, have played important roles in this. Edl’s own arrogance has also led to their current downfall.

Keeping Edl focussed was also going to be hard for TR, given the make up of the Edl. Hence, rivals were driven out (Infidels, etc) but even this couldn’t curb other competing figures who physically vied for leadership.

The partial decline of football firms around the Edl has also damaged them. At several grounds last and this season, anti fascist football fans made their presence felt to Edl Casuals. 2014 will see many tests for us all, in this sphere. I hope that the best of the opposition continue along the road with the party. Whatever, for UAF groups, we need to keep engaging with people, build in the localities, as part of a wider anti racist culture.

Lively, imaginative events, such as film showings, open Mic night and much more, should be part of this. The ruling class will aim to see us keep paying for the crisis and the far right will aim to feed off austerity. The party and UAF will be as important as ever in helping ferment resistance, in the months ahead.

THIRTEEN POINTS ABOUT OUR ANTI-FASCIST STRATEGY

Bat (Tower Hamlets)

1. The SWP has a proud record of anti-fascist campaigning, from the Anti Nazi League of the 1970s, the ANL of the 1990s through to Unite Against Fascism today. This record of practical success is built upon a solid theoretical foundation: our understanding of the united front tactic and how it can be applied in the here and now.

2. United fronts involve forging alliances with those to the right of us. But they must also involve a tension between revolutionaries and reformists. Otherwise they degenerate into popular fronts, where revolutionaries simply do the legwork for reformists and put a left gloss on their political positions.

3. Ultimately the difference between a united front and a popular front boils down to who is setting the political agenda. Are the reformists there to provide right wing cover for what the revolutionaries want to do? Or is it the other way round, with revolutionaries providing left wing cover for what reformists want to do?

4. It takes two to tango. And reformists do not bloc with revolutionaries because they are persuaded by the merits of Trotsky’s theorisation of fascism, or because they think we’re charming and wonderful people. They bloc with us because they have to, because we provide something they cannot.

5. The SWP’s ability to mobilise large numbers of activists – especially young people at anti-fascist demonstrations – is what ensures other forces on the left have to do business with us. Plenty of other left groups can operate in the bureaucracy as well as we can, if not better. No other left group can hegemonise street protests in the way we can.

6. This ability to hegemonise street protests is currently under grave threat. The leadership’s actions this year have driven away vast swathes of our younger members and fellow travellers. We could not pull off today the kind of complex ground operation we organised in Walthamstow on 1 September 2012.

7. We saw this at the Cenotaph and the Tower Hamlets protests this year. Both demonstrations attracted large numbers of young people who operated “autonomously”. They defied police lines and in many cases got arrested. At the Cenotaph these bold tactics paid off; at Tower Hamlets, they did not. In both cases the party’s influence over these young radicals was nil.

8. We cannot rebuild our influence among young people if we do not deal with the toxic legacy of the dispute. The CC’s current proposal is that we simply ignore this issue and conjure UAF student groups out of thin air. This is delusional. We either clean up our name, or pay the price.

9. The party is facing problems stemming from the dispute across the range of our activity. But the problems are doubly compounded in our anti-fascist work. That is because our disgraced former national secretary was deeply involved in UAF. And the party operation within UAF is still dominated by his diehard supporters. It is they who are running UAF as a “factional football”, and doing so brazenly.

10. Reformists are not stupid. They will have seen what happened at the Cenotaph and Tower Hamlets. They will have noticed that we can no longer command forces on the ground in the way that we once could. They will not be minded to feed a goose that no longer lays golden eggs.

11. If we cannot deliver numbers, the reformists will set the agenda. UAF will be pushed to the right and we will be pulled to the right with it. Young anti-fascist radicals will increasingly turn to the anarchists, not us. All of this is already starting to happen.

12. If these trends continue we will end with a situation that is all too common in the rest of Europe: an anti-fascist movement split between a large-but-passive reformist bloc and a militant-but-small current incapable of relating to the majority. This will weaken us all. It will throw away the crucial “subjective factor” that has hitherto been so successful at frustrating fascism in this country.

13. This grim scenario is not inevitable. There is still time to save the situation. But we have to clean up our party’s name and clean out our party’s anti-fascist operation. And we have to do that now.

A RESPONSE TO WEYMANS: LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN UAF

Phil (Hornsey & Wood Green)

In IB2 (“Leadership and accountability in UAF”, p92) I wrote:

“On Wednesday 4 September BBC London News reported that a delegation from Tower Hamlets handed in a petition of 10,000 signatures to the Home Office calling for the English Defence League march on Saturday 7 September to be banned. The delegation to the Home Office consisted of...
around half a dozen people led by Rev Alan Green, head of the borough’s interfaith forum. SWP Central Committee member Weyman Bennett was part of that delegation.

The delegation was screened to a potential audience of 600,000, so it was important we had some explanation for what seemed to contradict party policy on opposing the ban. Weyman’s reply in the same IB2 that out denies that he was part of the delegation. He wrote: “I was not part of any delegation that went into the Home Office calling for a ban.”

Here is the BBC London News footage of the delegation: http://youtu.be/pCXgR2R2Hb4?te=40s

You can see that Weyman is clearly part of the delegation, walking alongside Sabby Dhalu and behind Rev Alan Green, who is carrying the petition. The final seconds of the footage show the entire party entering the Home Office building.

I still would like Weyman to clarify exactly what happened and how Weyman squares his statement with the footage above? I spoke to Weyman directly about this matter on 27 October (at the DtRP conference) but he was evasive and contradictory.

I don’t want to go into the detail of our discussion, as this would be unfair, but one point Weyman made was that the “bourgeois media” were lying, however he would not be specific about what the “lies” were. He also implied his UAF duties meant he had to join the delegation. But Sabby was there to represent UAF, so why did Weyman have to be present?

On the 3rd November I wrote to Charlie K, asking for clarification over the issue. I have not yet received a reply.

The issue I’m raising about accountability is a serious one. How can we ensure that a CC member is acting in the interests of the party and not solely in the interests of UAF, if we don’t know what they are doing? Surely the whole RESPECT crises shows what a disaster that approach can be. At the least Weyman should recognise that comrades arguing against the ban may suddenly be asked about the way a CC member contradicts this and prepare us with a reply.

Comrades are entitled to a proper explanation of Weyman’s conduct. At present it looks very much as if he is ducking legitimate questions by making statements in an IB that are highly misleading if not downright untrue.

A SECOND REPLY TO PHIL
Weyman Bennett

Once again I want to refute the lie that I either support bans of the EDL or signed or presented a petition calling for a ban of the EDL to the Home Office on 4 September 2013 or any other day.

Firstly I have not evaded the issue. I replied to the claim made against me in IB2 and I also answered the allegation at the last National Committee. The National Secretary has also replied to Phil.

The events of the day are as follows. I had, along with a number of United East End and UAF officers, attended a press conference near the Home Office. Three members of that body went to the Home Office to meet a junior Minister to hand in a petition calling for the EDL to be banned. I was not part of that delegation. I went into the building and sat in the foyer while they had their meeting.

The reason I waited for them was because we were going to have a planning meeting for the demonstration straight after.

I am not and cannot be held responsible for how the BBC presents its news coverage.

Secondly, it is disappointing that Phil continues to question my support of the party’s position on the question of banning the EDL. It is a matter of record that I have opposed bans on the EDL in our publications, at the UAF conference and on almost every anti-EDL protest I have spoken on.

Comrades should consider whether such unfounded accusations they are damaging the SWP’s record on fighting fascism and are damaging Unite Against Fascism.

A FEW NOTES ON MOVEMENTISM
Roderick (Walthamstow)

Paul from Tower Hamlets, wrote an article in the first internal bulletin that warns of the “twin dangers of adaptation and sectarianism” (Bulletin 1, p62).

It is an important article that every comrade should read, and I agreed with his warnings about being “pulled into a spiral” that “ends in sectarianism”.

I do, however, want to respond to his charge that supporters of the Rebuilding the Party faction are movementist, and in particular his criticisms of my article on the Revolutionary Socialism blog (www.scribd.com/doc/161119796), which he believes shows evidence of movementism.

He summarises the argument in my and other articles as follows: “The struggles by organised, mainly public sector, workers have failed to break through. We therefore need to refocus away from this layer towards the more unorganised, precarious, usually younger workers found outside these layers of organised public sector workers. This argument is often tied to a whole analysis of the impact of neoliberalism on the working class in general.”

As far as it goes this is a reasonable summation, although the division in the argument he summarises is between public and private sectors, rather than between unionised or not, or organised or not. However he then goes on to say: “What is being argued here... is in reality to see this arena of work as a substitute for, an alternative to, a politics and perspective which has at its heart a focus on workers organising and fighting back at work.”

Now I can’t claim to speak on behalf of Phil or the other comrades he names, but that was emphatically not my argument. Paul’s claim is a misinterpretation of both my intention and the argument I put.

A key phase that was repeated to me by comrades when I first joined (as a somewhat ultra-left comrade in Northern Ireland) was: “Start where the class is at.” To me this meant starting with where people were in terms of their ideological level and their willingness to act, and then move them to where you want them to be. We can all agree, or I hope we can, that we need mass strikes to smash this government and the austerity agenda. And we need strikes in both private and public sectors – but crucially in those workplaces which are strategically important, many of which are in the public sector.

However, although workers are willing to fight in the much more highly organised public sector, there is a low level of confidence and very little rank and file organisation. The result has thus far been a much lower level of struggle than we hoped or expected, with the bureaucracy shirking from confrontation but the rank and file not having the confidence to move independently. We must therefore seek to analyse where the class is at, in this specific junc
ture, and adjust our tactics accordingly.

I argued that there has been, first of all, more militant activity in private sector workplaces: the occupations of Vestas and Visteon; the sparks’ dispute; and most recently the magnificent Hovis strike.

In such places a minority of workers were willing to take strike action in an uncompromising way. Secondly, at the present time the majority of workers are more likely to get active in social movements or community campaigns. We are, as Rob O said, still in an era of mass movements (Bulletin 1, p57).

That, in short, is where the workers are, so that is where we should focus our efforts in large part – in order to win them to where
we want them to be. This is why I argued that trade union activists in unionised industries – predominantly but not exclusively in the public sector – should get seriously involved in these different movements.

Paul is right to argue that we are already doing much good work in relating to social movements, including our activity in campaigns in the Benefit Justice Campaign, KOP and even at Occupy, where we were instrumental in bringing a trade union presence to these campaigns.

But my intention was to highlight a lack of strategic thinking in an approach to our industrial work that focuses predominantly on trade union officials and the need to put pressure on them from below. This is a vital element, but only one element. More rounded thinking is needed and this is something we should all be seeking to grope towards.

This was why I talked about the McDonal’d’s strike in the US. This has seen a move beyond simply encouraging a trade union presence in campaigns to a key service union, the SEIU, working within social movements to build the union in historically unorganised workplaces.

Hence my point, and this is crucial, that trade union involvement in movements should be as so as “imbibe the militant culture many of these movements have, making it easier to replicate this inside the trade union movement”. I would argue this is precisely what is happening with the SEIU and the McDonalds strikes. In the UK, the sparks’ links with Occupy and the students help give it a militant spirit that helped build confidence in the face of the bureaucracy’s reticence.

Finally, Paul mentions the argument about neoliberalism and the working class. The most important contribution was made by Neil D in the last ISJ, which I touched upon briefly. This sought to examine the changes that neoliberalism has wrought on the organisations and culture of workplaces, and the new challenges this creates in building in the workplace.

It is vital, I hope we all agree, to have a correct analysis of the state of play in the working class. Neil’s analysis points out the challenges we may face and should serve as a warning against hyper-optimism or a sense that the defining struggle is right round the corner. But this does not make the return of trade union struggle in any way impossible.

I’ll conclude by summarising my thoughts. We need to understand how our campaigns work can feed into workplace struggle, and vice versa.

We have to draw together social movements and rank-and-file trade unionists from both public and private sectors. This is a possible starting point for a strategy aimed at reigniting trade union struggle, as well as spreading trade unions into currently unorganised workplaces and industries. This would help build the kind of generalised fight-back with workers at the core that we all want to see.

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**POPULAR CONSCIOUSNESS, THE LABOUR LEADERS AND THE SWP**

*Sabby* (Camden)

George Orwell once remarked that every influence presses a working man into a passive role. The defeats of the 1980s, the disappointments of our failure to stop the 2003 war on Iraq and of the Blair/Brown governments, would seem to have intensified that passivity.

However, the pensions strikes of November 2011 and the recent public sector strike testify, as we have frequently argued, to a rank-and-file that responds to the call from the bureaucracy but is unwilling to act independently. The official leadership is predictably content to hold the potential back in the interests of maximising Ed Miliband’s prospects at the General Election.

However, it is clear that from numerous surveys, including the British Social Attitudes survey, that popular consciousness is to the left of the official leadership.

For example, these surveys have registered clear majorities in favour of the renationalisation of the railways and the utilities.

A key demand here, regularly put forward by our leading bodies and by numerous comrades but in need of frequent re-emphasis, is for the nationalisation of the banks, a singularly unpopular institution in British society, and, moreover, for the setting up of a people’s bank. An FBU picket during the recent strike responded well when I put to these ideas to him. Indeed, he agreed when I suggested that the working class should control society.

In this situation, the SWP would be clearly in step with the thinking of the majority of the working class if it were to keep putting such demands at the heart of its propaganda.

Again, this is nothing new - it is something we have called for on numerous occasions. It is simply worth reminding ourselves of the possibilities present in a state of society in which wages and living standards are falling, youth unemployment is rising, families are being clobbered by the bedroom tax, and the labour leadership is failing to provide the kind of fightback needed.

The SWP is recovering from its recent crisis. As with Mark Twain, reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated. Whatever mistakes may have been made, the leadership have held the party together and began the process of renewal, challenging up the successes mentioned in the CC report in IB2, including the recruitment of new members.

Clearly, there are no grounds for complacency. We need to intensify the hard, consistent work we always do, putting in that context the demands for the re-shaping of society which alone provide the answer to a capitalist society unable to stage any fundamental recovery from its recent crisis. In this situation, the SWP, if it acts correctly, could begin to make significant gains.

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**GRUDGING COMPROMISES AND ‘CONCESSIONS’ WON’T DO**

*Roger* (Huddersfield)

It is a mistake to think that the current dispute within the SWP is a diversion from our real tasks and from what is really going on in the class struggle. If a very serious problem is genuinely solved and the Party is reconciled through the correct application of our Marxist methods, based on an honest assessment of the facts and their context, this can be a real inspiration and the basis for genuine renewal. The debate over the “downturn” in the early 1980s had this impact.

Unfortunately we are a long way from that, but we need to persist, because indeed “what we have built so far is far too precious an achievement to be squandered” (IB2 CC document “The Fever and the Cure”, final paragraph). Replacing the SWP with another organisation in the same tradition is not a realistic perspective for any of us.

But the gulf between what the CC and its supporters have been arguing and what is needed for the Party to return to health is enormous and not obviously narrowing. This is illustrated both in the “The Fever and the Cure” and in Charlie’s and Alex’s “The Politics of the SWP crisis” in the latest International Socialist Journal.

Consider some of the arguments. We are told that the two dispute cases “cannot be the ultimate source of the party crisis. Why not?... The first piece of evidence is that there has been general agreement that the first case is closed and that the second case was ultimately heard in an acceptable manner.”

This sentence took my breath away, failing as it does to lay any remotely sound basis for a subsequent persuasive argument:

1. The first case is “closed” only to the extent that there are no moves or demands
to have the hearing and its decisions overturned and to have a new hearing of it.

But it is not closed, nor should it be yet, in that the narrative of what happened needs to be as honestly and fully established in front of the whole Party as it can be, subject to proper requirements of personal confidentiality. Only then can we all learn the real lessons, as we need to;

2. How could there be general agreement that “the second case was ultimately heard in an acceptable manner”? Have we had a report about it by which the membership as a whole could agree?

In the absence of any detailed information from the party leadership so far my impression has been that it was heard in a very unacceptable manner: that the Disputes Committee were instructed by the CC not to reach a decision on the accusation of sexual harassment made against M. I have not yet heard or read any good reasons why such a procedure was “acceptable”.

And then “The comrade who faced the accusations has left the party, so there can be no concern over the role he is playing”. Is this serious? Do the writers really not understand that M’s leaving the party before the hearing of the second case needs to be explained, if that is possible? If it is not explained, then why should it be an excuse for him to refuse to cooperate with the hearing? Why wasn’t the DC allowed to do their best in his absence, in accordance with natural justice? “The role he is playing” may no longer be a concern, but the role the CC played in blocking the normal process of the hearing surely is.

As for “The leadership has acknowledged that there are lessons to learn from all this” I will only comment that, from such a talented team, this is not a useful sentence.

The attention paid here by the CC to the two disputes therefore does not rise above the previous methods of discussing them: shutting down both the flow of information and discussion as far as possible and attempting to discredit those who express or organise discontent about it.

This has been (and may continue to be) “successful” but extremely damaging to the party.

For example, in debates about the Apologies motion in the Branches, if my own experience is representative, typical arguments against the motion were: “The faction are self righteous, trying to claim the ‘moral high ground’; “You are trying to destroy the party”; “you are trying to humiliate the leadership”; “People tell you different stories – it’s a question of who you trust”; “you are assuming that M is guilty – abandoning the presumption of innocence, a basic principle of justice”.

My point is not that these comments are intimidatory or personal attacks, but that they barely even attempt to address the real problems raised by the facts of the disputes as recounted in IB2 pp46-52 and 61-67. Without attention to these details (of course with amendments and corrections if they can be provided when needed) how can the party as a whole “learn lessons” as the leadership acknowledges is necessary? It certainly is not good enough for the CC and perhaps the NC to “learn the lessons” while the rest of us wait to be told in a brief reportback some time in the future what they are.

The party needs reconciliation, but it cannot be achieved on the basis of grudging compromises, nor would that have anything to do with our tradition. Why not? Because the political conduct of this debate by our party leadership and its supporters has been misguided, and that can only be changed if it is acknowledged democratically by the party as a whole. How can the leadership lead this if its members are not convinced?

In his speech at the Marxism Final Rally this year Eamonn McCann did not clearly take sides in the current dispute within the SWP in Britain. But what he did assert, persuasively, was that absolute intolerance of sexism, especially inside the party, has to be the priority.

I don’t believe that anyone can read the detailed narratives of the disputes in IB2 and honestly conclude that absolute determination to take the lead in combating sexism in the party was the overriding motive of the CC or the hundreds of leading comrades round the country who have supported the CC during this dispute.

Consider again the second case. After a year of destructive internal conflict, and six months after the formal complaint was lodged, the DC ruled that a leading member had a case to answer for sexual harassment, but no decision was allowed or made. This creates an intolerable situation because if there has indeed been sexist behaviour by a leading comrade, then the national leadership has resisted the uncovering and public admission of it, which makes meaningless any expression of regret or promises to improve the disputes procedures.

It is also contrary to our revolutionary tradition that the CC and its supporters have relied so heavily on arguments about rules, security and confidentiality, in order to discredit comrades motivated by alarm about alleged sexist behaviour by a leading comrade and the party’s alleged failure to deal with it satisfactorily.

This all has to change. The SWP is small but very effective because we are open, honest and aggressive against oppression and exploitation. If we compromise any of this in order to protect individual comrades or groups of comrades we are lost. Leading comrades need to be the most correct and the most accountable.

The revolutionary party of the future has to be quick, honest and ruthless in identifying, facing and correcting its mistakes. If we can’t or won’t do this now, there is not much chance that the mass movements of revolutionary workers in the future, women and men, gay and straight, will confidently look to us for leadership.

Paraphrasing Cromwell: I beseech you (the CC and supporters) in the cause of working-class revolution to consider you may be mistaken.

P.S. The national secretary has let me know that the CC did not instruct the disputes panel to limit its findings in any way on the second case, and that it was entirely the panel’s decision. I accept this. Roger.

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**WITHOUT REVOLUTIONARY THEORY THERE CAN BE NO REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT**

Cam (Manchester Chorlton) and Marcus (Euston)

Theory in action: Lenin talks about theory in action to the point where strategy and tactics become an art form. People are not born revolutionaries and we join the party at different points of our revolutionary education and development.

We would argue that we are in the process of an upturn, although struggle is slow, it is nonetheless increasing. Therefore more than ever we need to have a party that is capable of training revolutionaries.

**The memory of the class and the university of the class**

The party shouldn’t treat the training of revolutionaries as a linear process. We agree with Pat Stack’s statement about the memory of the class in that we don’t want to become ‘an old folk’s home with memories’ but the emphasis needs to be on the University of the Class-the training of revolutionaries and being at the forefront of Marxist analysis of the history of class struggle. The memory of the class must have analysis.

Training revolutionaries isn’t just about providing masses of theory for members to absorb by osmosis. You have to actively and systematically train revolutionaries.
not just in theory but in practice. First you learn from struggle then each ounce of action represents a tonne of theory.

There are several tools in our armoury of revolutionary education but we want a more active role in comrades’ education. The SWP only has a few educationalists running in the country currently. Even more rare is training provided on a one to one basis on the foundations of Marxist understanding let alone the more complex stuff.

Training and developing comrades is not seen as important as the next demo, united front or other class actions. We are not suggesting that we should choose to train revolutionaries over this but training has to be paramount as much as our other revolutionary activities. As is known, revolutions are a process that needs educated revolutionaries to act inside the class.

The prevailing ideas are the ideas of the ruling class and the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class. More than ever we need a party and we are not a party that waits around for someone else to do the analysis for us, we need a party of trained revolutionaries for us to be able to do this analysis. Contradictory consciousness goes hand in hand with the prevailing ideas of the ruling class and this is why it is important that all comrades take the educationalists seriously, we are a revolutionary party not an activist group nor do we want to become a discussion group.

The greatest motivation for revolutionaries comes from a strong understanding of Marxist analysis that the working class will win in the process of history. The educationalists and the training of revolutionaries will be a pivotal tool in retaining comrades.

But with this training there must be an understanding that we don’t have all the answers. People see things from many different parts of the material existence; one individual’s analysis is always partly right due to ideas being formed upon material foundations but always partly wrong due to only being one part of the world rather than being the whole (this is the objective, subjective divide of our reality).

Only through collective analysis can we become closer to a more accurate understanding of the world. Therefore with the systematic training of revolutionaries, all parties must listen and be listened to in the process of training.

Things to be done:

- Educationalists should be set up in each district. This should be done on a branch basis if possible.
- Each branch should have at least one person or a group of people that would go through with members on a one to one basis on the foundations of Marxist politics and suggest reading.
- Where possible members should go to or set up reading groups on Marxist classics such as the Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital.

This contribution tackles these essential aspects of the class struggle in a spirit of open discussion. It finishes by suggesting that the party’s narrative on N30, by missing out reference to the earlier 2005–06 pensions disputes under Labour, has been too one-dimensional.

Low level of strike activity

The level of UK strike activity after 1991 is not just low in relation to the 1970s or 1980s, as has been pointed out, but is historically unprecedented since strike records started in 1893. The number of strikes in each year since 1991 (that is, for 21 successive years, 1992–2012) is lower than in any of the preceding 99 years (1893–1991). The annual average number of strikes has fallen from its peak as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Annual average number of strikes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968–74</td>
<td>2,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975–79</td>
<td>2,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–84</td>
<td>1,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985–90</td>
<td>838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–96</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997–2001</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002–12</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: the provisional number of strikes starting in January–August 2013 is running at the same level as for the same period in 2012.)

There is a minimum threshold before strikes are included in government statistics, so some that meet the threshold are missed and others are too small or short; but this system has not changed (in fact, the statisticians now also collect their data from union websites, the Morning Star and Socialist Worker!), so the trends over time are generally reliable.

The visibility of strikes has also been transformed. During the 1970s there was an annual average of 984 strikes lasting more than five days; since 2002 the annual average number of strikes lasting more than five days in total (though some of these could now be spread out over several weeks or months) has been less than 20.

Strikes were once part of the ‘furniture’ of everyday life, something normal. A high proportion of strikes has always been those lasting one or two days; but while these were once usually unofficial strikes, they are now generally highly controlled official strikes.

While the manufacturing sector dominated strikes during the 1970s, with over 60% of the total, that proportion is now less than 20%, with an average of only 22 strikes in manufacturing each year during 2002–12. Public services (particularly the civil service and education now, less so local government, but very little in health), the Royal Mail (particularly in the form of unofficial strikes) and the privatized rail-

OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL STRIKES AND N30

Dave (Stoke)

Central to our tradition is that workers be prepared to take unofficial strike action if union officials do not go far enough. How do we turn this from a slogan into a practice, particularly when unofficial action has never really yet been on the agenda in much of the public services, where much of our membership is concentrated and where the main battle against austerity is currently being fought.

Inside the party we have to acknowledge the problems of working-class organization in more detail. These are greater than workers lacking the confidence to act without an official lead. If nothing else, the combination of the following three factors should give us pause for thought.

First, the depth of the dip in strike activity (in unofficial strikes in general and in the private sector in particular) over the last 20 years has not been fully acknowledged. Second, for more than 20 years the relation between unofficial and official strikes has had a legal dimension which never existed before; yet party publications still wrongly and confusingly label unofficial strikes as illegal. Third, for the last 30 years (an unprecedentedly long period), official strikes by unions have run the risk of employers obtaining court injunctions under the anti-union laws; our opposition to unions obeying injunctions needs finessing in order to offer more constructive criticism.
ways have been the main sites of strikes over the last twenty years. Discussions of strike trends are usually dominated by figures of ‘working days lost’ (the number of strikers multiplied by the number of days they are on strike). When the number of strikes is as low as it is now, the variation in annual totals for days lost reflects the presence or absence of one or more large strikes in particular years. This is no basis to draw conclusions about the relative combativity of the class as some comrades have attempted.

There have been only four years during 1991–2012 when over 1 million days were ‘lost’ in strikes, with at least one big dispute in each of these years: 1996 (a series of eight one-day postal strikes); 2002 (a one-day local government strike; firefighters’ strikes; London weighting strikes); 2007 (postal dispute; two one-day strikes; two one-day strikes by each worker over a two-week period; two 48-hour strikes) and 2011 (J30 and N30).

In other words, in 18 of the last 22 years there were less than 1 million days lost. There have been only two other years since 1893 with such low totals (1934 and 1940). While eruptions of strike activity have occurred before (and will again) we cannot pretend that we are not in uncharted territory given the length of time (effectively a generation) of such low strike activity (much longer than the last relatively quiet period, of 1927–34, following the defeat of the General Strike).

Impact of strikes on employers

Our tradition rightly emphasizes the importance of strikes as demonstrating the power of the working class. But the impact and effectiveness of strikes (whether official or unofficial) inevitably varies greatly between different types of employment. Some groups of workers are in more powerful positions than others in terms of how quickly a strike has a financial impact on the employer and how quickly other employers or the wider public are affected.

Where products or services are directly sold, employers are immediately affected financially when their workers strike. Strikes in the utilities (gas, water and electricity) and oil refineries, and by petrol tanker drivers, also immediately affect other employers and the public. Commercial transport (and warehousing) strikes can paralyse sections of manufacturing or retail (both of which are vulnerable due to just-in-time stock systems); the public is most quickly affected by shortages of food.

Passenger transport (road, rail, air) strikes affect other employers and the public, but the latter usually quickly find an alternative means of transport so such strikes are most effective when short. Strikes in manufacturing affect other employers but, apart from essential products (e.g., certain foodstuffs; possibly newspapers if online versions can be stopped), they usually take a while to affect the public. Construction strikes are particularly effective when employers face contract penalties but have little, if any, effect on the public.

Because public services (central and local government, education and health) are, in the main, funded from taxation in one form or another, strikes in them usually do not affect the employer’s pocket (apart from revenue collection activities). Such strikes cause varying levels of disruption to sections of the public (service users); the impact of widespread school strikes on working parents has been noted, for example.

But public service strikes have a mainly political impact (as central or local government is usually held accountable in one way or another) rather than an economic impact. This is not to say they are not important, or that they do not serve to raise union recruitment and morale, but their impact on the employer (particularly when strikes are restricted to one day at a time) is often not as dramatic as we would like.

It has been suggested that public sector strikes will stimulate private sector workers. But who in the private sector identifies with schoolteachers or university lecturers, for example. This is not to pander to prejudices about ‘gold- plated’ pensions or seeing such groups as an elite, but to recognize that many groups of private sector workers (especially manual workers) will have no obvious points of comparison with public service workers. Their comparisons will be with groups similar to themselves in the private sector. Our job is to advertise examples of successful strikes wherever they occur but we have to understand that, at the moment, some strikes are going to have a lot less resonance than others.

Unofficial strikes

Before the 1980s a very high percentage of strikes was unofficial, so much so that this was seen as the British ‘problem’. Most of these strikes were ‘unconstitutional’ (that is, in breach of agreed disputes procedures) and so unions did not generally support them; but most were also very short and so the unions often did not get a chance to take a position on them. Some of the longer strikes were later ‘officialized’ by unions or dispute pay agreed.

During the 1980s the big reduction in the number of strikes was, inevitably, mainly of unofficial strikes. By the time that the 1990 Employment Act differentiated between official (balloted) and unofficial (unballoted) strikes, there were relatively few of the latter. The squeezing out of unofficial strikes during the 1980s was a result of the hammering that workers in manufacturing, mining, construction and transport had through closures, redundancies, employer attacks and mass sackings of workers on strike.

Before the 1984 Trade Union Act, what constituted an official or an unofficial strike was a matter for individual unions. From September 1984 official strikes, to retain legal protection, had to be balloted but the law did not interfere with unofficial strikes. From January 1991 (after the 1990 Employment Act), in order to avoid legal liability for unballoted strikes, union officials had to ‘repudiate’ unofficial action (in principle, not that different a role to union officials upholding disputes procedure agreements and telling workers to stop any industrial action before procedure had been exhausted).

Party publications (including the most recent; for example, Socialist Worker, 9 November 2013, and Sean V’s online article for ISJ 140) often label unofficial strikes as illegal. They are not! Eamonn McC pointed this out about the Belfast postal strike in 2006 but this inaccurate label is still used.

It might be the language of the boss or even some union officials trying to put off workers from striking but it should not be our reaction. As long as a union ‘repudiates’ an unofficial strike, it is not legally liable. Unofficial strikers themselves are not breaking any laws; the union would open itself up to employers taking it to court (pursuing injunctions or damages) if it did not repudiate unofficial strikes.

There are, though, some legal differences between official and unofficial strikes. Workers sacked while taking unofficial action cannot claim unfair dismissal (e.g., as happened at Gate Gourmet in 2005). A subsequent balloted strike to secure reinstatement of sacked unofficial strikers is unlawful; an employer going to court on this would be granted an injunction to stop the strike (or even the ballot) and the union would be liable to heavy fines if it did not comply.

Many unions’ concerns to avoid the new legal liability that potentially came with unofficial strikes quite possibly reinforced most workers’ reluctance by the 1990s to take such action. Royal Mail workers have been a notable exception, having strategic power through their disruptive potential, reinforced by the exercise of solidarity action by other delivery or sorting offices.

Unofficial strikes have traditionally only been at the workplace or lower level. Even before the last twenty years it was relatively rare that they covered more than one workplace (though there are several examples from the late 1960s and early 1970s). Royal Mail workers, engineering construction workers and contract electricians in recent years provide examples of what is possible. But the confidence of workers to take unofficial strike action relates primarily to their strategic position in the labour process and their level of organization.

If action can have an immediate significant financial effect on their employer and the workers are not easily substitutable (by skill or numbers), then they can be more
confident of the employer not targeting strike leaders or sacking some or all of the strikers.

This is made much more likely when all or nearly all of that group of workers are union members, and where other workers (within the workplace or elsewhere in an organization or industry) refuse to do their work; a tradition of taking such action makes it easier (Royal Mail workers have already been cited).

Workers that do not fit these categories are more likely to be dependent on getting the union to agree to a ballot for an official strike rather than take unofficial action. Many of the remaining directly employed manual workers in public services and groups such as schoolteachers are well unionized, as are many professional groups within the NHS (these last rarely, if ever, have taken even official strike action — though the unions of physiotherapists, radiographers and chiropractors did come out on N30 and the BMA, the doctors’ union, took its first action since 1975 over the pensions dispute on 21 June 2012).

But overall union density in the public services at less than 60% suggests quite wide areas of public services (particularly in local government) with density below 50%, not currently fertile territory for organizing unofficial strikes, whether over local or national issues. Strikes build membership and organization; high levels of membership make unofficial (and official) strikes more effective. How to start this virtuous circle?

The era of injunctions

Since 1982 we have lived through the longest period, by some distance, of regular court injunctions against unions taking strike action since striking acquired a firm statutory footing in the 1870s. The only comparison outside wartimes (when strikes were periodically used court injunctions on strike action) was the 15-year period before the passing of the 1906 Trade Disputes Act (often referred to as labour’s Magna Carta). In their reaction to New Unionism, employers periodically used court injunctions on disputed points of law. These injunctions achieved their object of killing particular strikes stone dead.

If a union ignores an injunction it is in contempt of court, which is a criminal offence and the union can be fined. During the 1980s, a number of unions were fined (sometimes very heavily) for ignoring injunctions under the Conservatives’ anti-union legislation; on four occasions (NGA 1983; South Wales NUM 1984; SOGAT 1986; NUS 1988) when fines were not paid, union funds were also sequestrated. (The NUM’s national funds were sequestrated in 1984 as a result of a common law case.)

Since then injunctions have generally been complied with. Unions have learned how to strike within the law. Many injunctions in recent years have involved alleged infringements of the ridiculously restrictive balloting arrangements or notification of ballot results.

Socialist Worker, on a number of occasions during 2008–11, was still arguing for unions to defy injunctions — with all the consequences that would bring in terms of fines — though this seemed to have been toned down in 2012. Defiance of the anti-union laws and the courts is our position in principle (and we look back to some extent to the experience under the 1971 Industrial Relations Act for organized disobedience of the law if not always of the courts). But if we are still going to put forward this position when unions long ago abandoned it then it needs arguing through rather than gratuitously attacking unions for trying to survive in a legal minefield.

When injunctions stop a successfully ballot-led strike from happening, then unofficial strikes or protests (preferably on the day the strike was called for) seem, from experience, to be one practical way forward.

The background to N30

We have developed a particular narrative about the build-up to, and aftermath of, N30, centering around the role of left-led unions pushing right-led unions into action. For example, in the most recent account, Sean V in his online article for ISJ 140 states that “Right wing trade union leaders’ natural instincts are to oppose … coordinated action. They do so out of fear that this kind of action will start to move from a “trade dispute” into a more political one that seeks to bring down governments.”

He dates the first such co-ordinated action as April 2008 when the NUT and sections of PCS and of UCU struck together (for one day) over separate pay claims. In fact, during the 2002–03 public sector London weighting campaign there had already been a number of co-ordinated strikes (though far more separate ones).

While I would not underestimate the role of UCU, PCS and NUT in the (M24 and J30, 2011) build up to N30, Sean V’s account of N30 (as with other party publications on the subject) ignores what happened in 2005–06 in the earlier round of disputes (all reported in SW) over public service pensions. So our version of N30, at the time and afterwards, has missed out inconvenient facts and, in the process, failed to arm comrades.

Labour’s attack on public services pensions, particularly over raising the pension age to 65, had already led to a co-ordinated strike being called for 23 March 2005 after successful ballots by Unison, TGWU, Amicus and UCATT in local government, PCS and FDA in the civil service, and NIPSA in Northern Ireland. In this case, PCS decided to ballot after the local government unions had. This strike, scheduled for a few weeks before the general election, was only called off after the government withdrew its plans on 18 March (by which time the NUT had also agreed to ballot for an April strike) and promised further talks.

But with the government then failing to make any significant changes, 13 unions, this time covering central and local government, health and education, agreed at the September TUC that year to join forces to strike on the issue though no date was named. This strike threat was sufficient for a Public Services Forum agreement to be made in October for the NHS, civil service and teachers’ pension schemes, with changes starting in 2007 or 2008 (Mark Serwotka of PCS, no less, called it a ‘fantastic achievement’). New entrants in these schemes would have to work to age 65 but existing members could continue to retire at 60. Accrual rates and contributions changed in the NHS and teachers’ schemes, while new entrants in the civil service were put on a career average scheme.

The (fully funded) local government pension scheme was not part of this deal and so 11 affected unions struck together on 28 March 2006, at that time the largest strike of women workers ever in the UK. After this, a deal was reached (on 12 April) leading eventually to the unions agreeing that the ‘rule of 85’ would be phased out by 2020, so that after that date no one could retire on an unreduced pension before age 65; tiering of contributions was also introduced.

The Con-Dem government restarted what Labour had failed to achieve, wanting an increased pension age to the state pension age for all members in the NHS, civil service and teachers’ schemes, along with increased contributions and career average pensions for these three schemes and the local government scheme.

The unions naturally saw this dispute as a continuation of the earlier one under Labour. They had already crossed a number of red lines by their behaviour then and what they ended up agreeing to in 2011–12 was a further process of damage limitation as they saw it.

Sean V suggests that ‘The leaderships, in particular of Unison and the GMB, fearful of not being able to get the genie of the working class back into the bottle again, agreed to suspend any further strikes’ after N30. Is that really how they thought (on the basis of a one-day strike, however huge and magnificent it was) or was it a case of union leaders doing what they normally do, i.e. negotiating (and using strikes or the threat of them as leverage)?

The long delay from the announcement, on 14 September, of the strike date (30 November) to it actually happening made any further action before Christmas extremely unlikely (especially as seven days’ notice would be required by each individual union).

Some of the unions were taking action in a service-wide dispute either for the first time (FDA, NAHT, SoR, SCP, for example) or for the first time in decades (EIS, Prospect, CSP, for example) and were probably unlikely to do so again in a hurry, even if the terms of their ballot allowed it (and not all may have done).

Whatever we may have hoped at the
time, N30 was clearly the peak of the movement (who would have predicted in advance that that number of unions would come out together). Most union leaders would have seen any future smaller strike as damaging their credibility and therefore their bargaining position, something even Serwotka alluded to early in January 2012 (reported in SW).

Before N30, the government had made some concessions (including protection for those within ten years of retirement from April 2012) on 2 November. It also made clear that unions had to sign up to ‘heads of agreement’ on a scheme-by-scheme basis by the end of the year (in practical terms this meant during the last week before Christmas) or these concessions would be withdrawn. Not surprisingly some unions within each scheme signed up to the heads of agreement on 20 December 2011 though that did not mean they (or the rejections) had agreed a deal at that stage.

With any changes due to kick in from 1 April 2012 (apart from the local government scheme which had to be agreed by that date) any further strikes would have most effect if they took place before that date. In the event, despite our best efforts, the only such action was eventually limited to the NUT and UCU in London on 28 March (though more unions were to strike after 1 April).

While we rightly situated N30 and its build-up as a major battle within the class war against austerity, the union leaders on the whole saw it either as yet another separate campaign or as a continuation of the 2005–06 campaign (using similar tactics). What was unique about the pensions disputes was that the public service unions were openly confronted together, in 2005 and again in 2011, and were given the same deadlines.

N30 was clearly the most important strike in recent working-class history but we owed it to our membership and our audience to offer a more in-depth analysis – and this applies more generally to our coverage of official and unofficial strikes.

**IT’S ALL IN A WORD – A REPLY TO ALEX’S TWO FACTUAL ERRORS**

**Hannah (Euston)**

In my submission to IB2 entitled “a question of leadership” I argued that the CC’s lack of accountability to members has been a key element in the crisis that has dominated the party over the last year. This flowed not only from its handling of very serious allegations against a senior member, but also from its systematic refusal to inform members about those complaints, and the serious arguments on the CC about how they were being dealt with.

Alex’s response in IB2 restricts itself to alleging that I make two ‘factual errors’.

1. The first concerns a small example of the manner in which the CC tried to manage the potential damage to M. In July 2010 when attempts were being made to mediate between W & M I argued that as a result of W’s complaint some action needed to be taken against M to which Alex responded by asking me if I ‘had it in’ for M.

   He confirms such a question was put, but says it took place “in January 2011, in a very different context, following arguments on the Central Committee in the autumn and immediately before the party conference.”

   Here Alex is trying to muddy the waters by implying there were other arguments taking place which led him to ask such a question. In fact the only significant arguments taking place on the CC in late 2010 and early 2011 were around the handling of Comrade W’s complaint. They included debates about whether comrades should be informed about W’s complaint at conference 2011, how much they should be told, and how the CC should address the aftermath of the appalling session that ended up taking place at that conference.

   I stand by my original account, but either way you look at it the point still stands: whatever the timing of this comment it was an example of the pressure to put loyalty to a CC member before political principles on this question.

2. Much more seriously Alex claims that in my piece I imply that I believed in 2010 that W had been raped, that if this was the case I should have communicated this to himself and CK, who would then have reported it to the DC.

   What I actually said was: “The events she (W) described in 2010 remained consistent with the account she raised later, even if the language she used to describe events changed.” I also point out that in retrospect the CC clearly should have taken this to the DC.

   This is critical, since Alex has chosen publicly in the ISJ to imply that the substance of W’s allegation changed, thereby undermining the veracity of her complaint. This cannot be allowed to stand.

   All that changed between 2010 and 2012 was the word that Comrade W used to describe what happened to her.

   This is a very common reaction amongst women who are victims of sexual harassment, assault or rape. It is common because of the way sexism and oppression makes it difficult for women to come to terms with what has happened to them and acts as a deterrent against them coming forward.

   The question is: does Alex deny that the content of her complaint - which he was fully aware of - has remained consistent throughout? If he doesn’t, then can he explain why, despite having insight into the gravity of her complaint, he is prepared to imply otherwise?

   Finally Alex insists I must subject my own role to an accounting in the party. I would have thought its obvious that’s what I’m doing in IB2. But that cannot be a substitute for the CC being held to account for its failure of leadership through the worst crisis the party has experienced.

   The CC has had many opportunities to respond to W’s complaint in a way that she deserved. In relation to 2010, AC at least acknowledges the attempts at “mediation” failed. Following conference, the CC threw away an opportunity to respond to deep concerns expressed by comrades on this question.

   After months of protracted argument in the party, with all the damage that has caused, the proposals put forward by the Disputes Commission report show that the procedures that W was subject to in the hearing that took place in Autumn 2012 were not fit for purpose.

   This is now recognised in the latest CC motion which recognises flaws in the DC procedures and the “real distress” caused to the two complainants: something the CC “regrets”.

   The simple thing to do is to take political responsibility for the detriment suffered by W, and the second women X, by apologising. Regret without an apology will simply make the party look shifty on this question.

   It comes across as another attempt to avoid accountability by the leadership for their role in the crisis. It is a continuation of the mode of operation described in my IB2 article, which puts defending the internal cohesion and public unity of the CC, before an open and honest accounting of mistakes and political differences over this issue. It is remarkable that the leadership of a revolutionary organisation, which has overseen the biggest crisis in the party’s history, should still be trying to duck its responsibility.

   This is not about re-opening the case. W has left the party and made it clear she could not face such an ordeal. All comrades should respect her wishes. To keep saying that an apology would mean re-opening the case shows a cynical disregard for someone who has suffered enough already. She is not a political football, but a real human being who has suffered as a result of the party’s failings.

   So will Alex take this opportunity to address some of the damage caused by the failures of the CC? Or will he at least be honest with the membership about the deep divisions that continue to exist on the CC over this question in order that comrades can make an informed decision about who is really fit to serve on the leadership.
A PECULIAR FORM OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

Chris [Truro]

I can see it helps to get a reading of your contribution to the IB with many readers if you state your socialist creed and say how much you have done for the Party in the last period of time.

Then you cannot be accused of being a revisionist and a movementist, nor can you be accused of reading the internet when you should be out on Party duties!

So here goes: I believe in the working class as the only agent of change; I believe in socialism from below; I believe in the need to seize state power, in women’s liberation and the need for a mass revolutionary Party working with the working class.

I have carefully checked my movements and motions over the last year, and declare myself free from any infestation of studentism and creeping feminism (whatever they may be). And I have been active on behalf of Party and Class over the last period of time, more of that later. I do not belong to a faction but I will no doubt still offend many, while hoping to invite them to change their minds.

I want to say something about Comrade Delta too. I am glad he is no longer a member of the Party at last. But in noting his passing under terrible circumstances, I want to record something I am very grateful to him for, as he is far from all bad.

I think he probably saved lives on a day in Genoa back in 2001 when a group of us Globalize Resistance Saga travellers on the Anarchist Express found ourselves trapped in a square with the Black Block firing from behind us into the Carabinieri.

As they advanced on us with batons raised, he appeared from nowhere, took control of the situation and got us all sitting in a corner together with our hands raised and got to the front himself.

By some miracle the Superintendent of the Carabinieri arrived at the same time, and Comrade Delta, either in Italian or English I don’t know, explained the situation. The Superintendent started to smile, turned to the Carabinieri and told them, “No, these are not the ones we want, they are socialists from England.” Crisis over, and probably lives saved. Thank you Comrade Delta.

Shame on the CC

So you do not feel deceived into reading my contribution and getting a shock at the end of it, I want to say up front I am absolutely appalled by the complete incompetence of the CC over the last year at least, who have not done anything right in regard to the Comrade Delta case, and have in fact done everything wrong at every turn in the road. Always too little too late, with a meanness of socialist spirit.

It has been an ugly sight because it is not simply incompetence, but I fear may have bad motives too. To say sorry comes so easily to most of us. The CC would feel better for it, and so will the Party and the two women comrades who have been abused. Saying sorry is a sign of strength, not weakness. The CC’s latest position is to express regret on behalf of the Disputes Committee who are only 10% to blame, when they should own up and say “Deeply sorry”.

I couldn’t believe it when I read the proposed CC motion to Conference asking us to sign off their report card for the year with words to the effect of “pretty good really”. Really? The biggest crisis in the SWP’s history, entirely of their own making? Huge loss of membership. The Party very unpopular in some sections of the class even scoring the most dramatic own goal in the Party’s history, to the delight of our many reformist and sectarian enemies.

CC comrades, have you no shame? Fall on your swords collectively! Now! I know there are one or two good comrades among you, the names escape me, but you should have stood up and fought like Comrade Hannah.

Please please, the small handful of good comrades left on the CC, resign before Conference comes, tell the truth and throw yourselves on the mercy of the Party, so you can still be of service to the Party, possibly in the granite mines in the Scottish Highlands, or on the agricultural lands of Cornwall, organising Lithuanian, Russian and Polish farm workers. The Party can be forgiving, and one day you could return. Possibly.

The students are innocent

I am very cross with the way the CC has treated the students. They have been wonderful in fighting the government. Even here in Falmouth, where nothing has ever happened before, they occupied for three weeks!

We were so thrilled we clubbed together to run a tab for them for an evening at the Masons Arms when it was all over. But then the CC call them deviants and movementists, saying that they don’t understand our politics and they have infected the rest of the Party. What rubbish! Are you saying if they understood our politics better they could live with female comrades being harassed or maybe worse?

Some in the Party appear to live with it, but not the students, and many other besides. Dare I say it, our loyalty to the Class and to Marxism should come before our loyalty to the Party.

That’s why the CC should go, so Class, Marxism and the Party can be reunited, and this whole sordid episode concluded before the class struggle is put back by 20 years. Yes, that is how long I think it will take for the SWP to get back on its feet: think about what opportunities we could miss as a result. Think of Hungary 1956 and the damage it did to the CP. Give us back our Party! Please don’t make us join the maggoty sectarian Socialist Party or the permanent toothache called the CPGB. Death might be preferable.

The strategy of blaming the students was just so transparent. Whoever thought up this simple jape must have learnt it at the Catherine De Medici school of politics, not from Marx or Lenin. She cleverly married her son to a Protestant to enhance his chance of being king of France, but when the French didn’t like it she created a smoke screen with the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, killing 30,000 protestors to distract attention from her mistake. Poor protestors. Poor students.

Comradeship and a duty of care

Because of bad health I have been out of the loop for a bit, so forgive me if I tread where others have gone before, but I want to say the Party must embrace comradeship better than it has in the past. The Party is a community, or at least it should be.

I’ve been in the Party since 1971 and I have been lucky to be with good comrades in Camden, Tottenham, Coventry and Cambridge, but sometimes comradeship in the party is shallow. From what people say it gets thinner the higher up the Party you go. If we are to be a community of comrades and build, in embryo, the seeds of the future socialist society, then we have a duty of care towards one another.

I’m sorry to use the expression “duty of care”, it may be a bourgeois term but it will have to do until we find our own words. What the Comrade Delta case showed is we may not recognise a duty of care towards one another as much as we should. And the duty of care comes more than all the more important the more senior and powerful a comrade is in the Party because of the power imbalance, and the unchecked nature of our deformed democratic centralism, especially with those who may be young or vulnerable.

If capitalist institutions can have a code of conduct to protect the young and vulnerable, we can do as good, I think a whole lot better I think.

I remember an acquaintance who taught sport part-time on behalf of a governing body at a university. He was 35 and had an affair with a 20 year old in the group. He got sacked, and rightly so I say. He breached his duty of trust.

We may be a lot more informal in the Party and liking to think we are throwing over bourgeois morality etc, but we still have a duty to the young and vulnerable. Any Youth Service will tell you their
definition of a young person runs up to 25 years of age. So let’s get a code of conduct sorted fast for the CC and I would suggest full-timers too, who are all in a position of power and prestige and could abuse it. (OK, a code of conduct for all of us!)

**The CC needs to take responsibility for its mistakes**

Two things made me sit up and take notice when I read the CC resolution for Conference. The first was the suggestion we were correct to proceed in the format we were over the last period...This is worrying...If we two things... The CC does not think NC... But the reason given for this was surprising, that it would allow for better communication downwards. Not upwards. Yes downwards. This tells us two things. The CC does not think there is a problem that the CC might be isolated and therefore benefit from the NC pushing ideas up from the rank and file membership, or dare I say it, that it would be good for the NC to keep a bit of a check on the CC.

No, the need is for improved communications downwards so the Party membership understands the CC better. What tosh! It also implies that the recent difficulties are not the creation of the CC, but the Party members’ failure to understand the CC! How dare they!

The CC seems to find it very difficult to accept responsibility for its mistakes over the last period. This is worrying. If someone cannot accept responsibility for their actions, or if a group cannot accept responsibility for what they do, alarm bells need to ring.

They are either at best politically and morally immature, or at worst a group with a shared collective borderline personality disorder. It is just so simple to say, “Sorry we messed up”, you have to ask why they cannot do this. It’s also scary. They are not stupid. They are not ignorant of their mistakes.

The alternative explanations should worry us all. Are they arrogant and think by permanent resistance, that they can get away with anything? Have some of them managed to convince themselves and others they have done no wrong and should just carry on as normal? Are they saying we need to stand together or we will fall together? Are some intimidated? Are they afraid to lose face, power, prestige? Whatever the explanation, it should have no part in revolutionary practice. The stables need a thorough cleaning.

### Changes to our form of democratic centralism

In truth, it is too easy to personalise things and point to bad individuals. As Marxists we know it is our environment which shapes us, and I’m sorry to say the environment responsible for the corruption of our CC and full-timers is the peculiar form of democratic centralism we have espoused for the last 40 years. Democratic centralism fine. Our kind of democratic centralism, not fine.

There have been modest hints at what should change in IBs One and Two. As one-off items they will do only so much good. So here is my full menu for changing our version (not Lenin’s, mind) of democratic centralism so we are more in touch with the class, and the CC is better informed by the Party members, more transparent, and more under control.

1. Comrade Candy (Camden) suggested a *regular internal bulletin*. Right on. It was always a great publication, and I remember spending countless Saturdays with Laurie Flynn back in the 70s stapling it together at Cotton Gardens. People used to whisper it was better than Socialist Worker. They were wrong of course, but apparatchiks like me needed inside information about the Party to fuel us.

   It even included the full minutes of the weekly Executive Meetings and the monthly National Committee, with recorded votes of both! Comrades all over the country scoured the minutes carefully and nodded knowingly when Cliff, Harman and Hallas lined up against Protz, Foot and Higgins.

   Personally I’m fed up getting my (incorrect) inside information about my Party from the Weekly Worker or on some internet sites. A regular IB could also carry the key Party data members are asking for. Otherwise it’s like going to the doctor for endless blood tests and never getting the results. Feed back on your progress is vital or you decide the pain isn’t worth it!

2. I think it was Comrade Candy again along with others including the CC who suggested *more NC meetings*.

   I would go the whole hog, make them monthly, and *make the NC the CC!!!!* Let’s get some fresh air into the SWP corridors of power. You could still have the weekly meetings of what was the CC and call it the Executive Committee.

   And I would say no full-time workers on the weekly Executive Committee: of course they would attend, they would need to, to explain what they are doing to the EC lay members and seek their approval. Just like a democratic trade union we campaign for.

   I have gained the impression for some time now the leadership’s love of democratic centralism is less to do with delivering “the big punch” than the ease of political control democratic centralism provides them with. By the way, “Packing a punch above our weight” is very easy nowadays. There is no Left Labour, no CP, no Militant... it’s a bit like walking on the moon, we only have to stamp our feet and we have an impact. It has nothing to do with democratic centralism.

   I suspect International Socialism packed a bigger punch despite the opposition of rivals, and without the current form of democratic centralism.

   I’m sorry to tell you this, but democratic centralism is a bit of a fiction when it come to doing things. I remember asking the Branch chair when I was put in charge of implementing a national policy locally, I said it is going to be very easy with democratic centralism now, I just tell the members what they have to do and they do it? Er, no, he said, you still have to persuade them. I think our democratic centralism is a big stick to frighten us with.

   Could it be why we have so many inactive members and so few paying their subs? It’s a form of passive rebellion that says I don’t agree?

3. Numerous contributors have attacked the pernicious slate system and rightly so I say. Who are these people on the slate? Do we know what their record is, what their politics are, what they stand for? Are they even competent? I have never met one of them. I know vaguely who six of them are. But not enough to vote for them and entrust the wellbeing of the Party and Class to them. It seems to be an oligarchy, a cabal, bringing on who they want and ditching others. Powerful patronage that.

Ian (Enfield) was kind enough to say they are not a bureaucracy. I would say they are heading that way. So how do we get a fresh, invigorating leadership? There are inadequate channels upwards, unless you get the tap on the shoulder. For many there must be the fear that if we applied a new broom, it would all fall apart. Quite the opposite. We are a Party of massive rank and file talent, and it’s about time space was made in the leadership for the new wine. Or the burst bottles will allow the new wine to flow outside the Party. Again. We need new writers, organisers and thinkers.

At the moment we have one person who does most of the writing, and it may be he is a little weary: what he writes reads like a mix of a GCSE or A level primer. Nobody can be an expert in everything. The first two IBs have made it clear we still have many fresh and vibrant minds left in the Party. Give them their heads.

So let’s have *individual elections with hustings at Conference*. Even election flyers! Lordy Lordy, whatever next. The spirit of the Prague Spring lives on! I can only tell you now how good it was to be a Party member in the early 70s before we...
went for our peculiar form of democratic centralism!

The monthly National Committee meetings were a joy to attend and behold. Cliff, always sitting on the far left of the front row, but permanently twisted round in his seat to take in all the contributors, Hallas, Foot, Harman, Prozt, Birchall, Charlton, Higgins, Palmer... and in the gallery Hitchens, Devlin, McCann and many others making contributions. And 35 other members of the NC too.

We were not a democratic centralist party then, just the International Socialism group, and levels of discipline and commitment were very high because we felt involved in our group, we believed in our group and we wanted to do what the group wanted us to do. And of course we would have survived the downturn like that.

4. Factions. A sensitive topic I gather. Slow thinkers like me have barely warmed up in 3 months when the thinking is all over for another year. “Cogito interruptus” is a bad thing and makes comrades bad tempered.

What I do know is the more we are allowed to contribute to the Party, the more we can give. We feel involved. It becomes our Party. So I say, go on, be brave, let factions run for 6 months. And stop calling them factions. Factions are thought of as nasty infighting.

Find better words and the fear and sectarianism will disappear. How about “Commissions”? Or “Tendences”? Or “Creative thinking forums”? Or “Research Projects”, or “Theory and Practice Groups”. Those comrades, including me, who have kept going for the last period of time show it is possible for comrades to do two things at once, even more maybe! We can build the Party, sell Socialist Worker... and think and read! That’s four!

5. We can’t be luddites about the internet! Even I learned how to use it at 63. The genie is well and truly out of the bottle and it’s not going back inside. There have been very cogent contributions about how we can use interactive websites and discussion groups for the benefit of the Party and the membership.

If we don’t have them, members and others will set them up and we will all go there, and the results could be unpredictable and unpleasant. The Party has a duty to provide. We need an internet discussion vehicle.

6. The key to making democratic centralism work is rebuilding the party’s relationship with the class. That’s how we get the democratic bit (the Class tells us it got it all wrong and what to do instead) and the Party then understands what leadership is needed.

Do we all feel comfortable with how that relationship between Party and Class stands right now? Well, my modest contribution is to say we need to turn to the class (again!) and it needs to be a permanent turn. It’s all very well and important marching along with a placard but that really is not “struggle”.

Every member needs to know and practice class struggle in their workplace. That is where it all happens, fighting your boss, facing down the foreman and the charge hands, defeating the racist and the scab you have to work alongside, pulling the majority to your side, and ambushing the full-timer when he turns up to put a lid on things. That is struggle.

It should be at the heart of what every working Party member does. From that we can flow our rank and file work beyond our own work place, our union branch and our union fractions; without struggle at the point of production they are impossible or it is a substitution for struggle.

Can we have a concerted effort to recruit more members in the workplace? Can members recruit more workmates? When we do not have those openings, can we produce more factory bulletins? And heresy on heresy, why not encourage comrades to go into workplaces, including students.

I know all the drawbacks we cite, but it is better than standing and watching at least they will get an education in struggle. There was a very thoughtful contribution in IB1 from a comrade who suggested we need a much more accurate understanding of what is going on at the point of production, from the workers themselves, as Marx did, but equally as we did with Barker and Cliff in 1964 in a book with a very long title and Cliff and Hyman did in 1970 in “The Employers Offensive”. If we can do it twice successfully we can do it a third time!

There are so many issues being debated on the left and in the Party about the subtleties of the working class today, we need as a Party to get to grips and provide the answers. We haven’t got all the answers so let’s pretend we have.

And once we have turned to the class, permanently and hopefully for the last time, we need to stick at it.

I last held office in the Party as a Branch Secretary in 2001. (That is a long time ago I accept but I have reason to believe things are much the same now in terms of our commitment to the struggle at the point of production).

We had members who were convenors in three massive workplaces. But they played no part in Party life and the Branch had no orientation to them. There were plenty of members in the Branch who were union members but their needs or experiences never surfaced at Branch.

The Branch for example voted down we centre our Socialist Alliance work on the 3 convenors’ workplaces, as the springboard for a city-wide rank and file movement, for a lasting legacy. That idea of course went a stage beyond the formula for a Socialist Alliance handed down from the Centre! (Fortunately in partnership with the Labour Left and a WRP convenor, we later got a joint rank and file group to oppose Labour privatisation). Sometimes we lose our way on other initiatives and forget we want to be the Party of the Class and what that means. We cannot drift away again. In the mornings, every morning, we must continue the struggle at the point of production and on into the evening. When we are done for the day, we can go have a bit of relaxation on activities with less exacting “struggle”, which are often great fun, but not “struggle”!

And we must stick at our rank and file work. After the 1972-4 miners’ strikes, we had lots of good contacts and a paper "The Collier”. But we had let it drop by 1985! What a tragedy. If the “Collier” didn’t work, try some alternative rank and file initiative. But don’t just give up! The same goes for the deceased “Postal Worker”. Don’t give up! As for the trade union bureaucracy, they are under orders not to give up in blocking our rank and file work.

I’m convinced Unison and Unite must hold regular seminars for their full-time officers on how to block rank and file movements and the SWP!

Our efforts at fighting the cuts in Cornwall were based around the idea of making it mostly a trade union movement against the cuts, although we welcomed all prepared to fight. There is no Trades Council anywhere in Cornwall so we focussed Cornwall Anti Cuts Alliance on trade unions.

We got most of them joined up. NUT, NASUWT, FBU, CWU, UNISON, UNITE, PCS, GMB, UCU and ALT. But did we have trouble getting past the full time officials of Unison and Unite and involving the rank and file of those unions! We did mass leafleting of hospitals and County Hall time and again, but still the full-timers turned up to meetings and very few rank and file.

The full-timers kept on coming to meetings and in fairness doing a decent job marching with us in defense of the NHS and fighting in June and later N30. We had 1500 marching in June and 3,000 marching on N30. Truro had never seen the likes of it before.

Unison ,NASUWT, NUT and CWU coughed up £5000 for us to put up a full colour, full page ad in the local paper urging the Cornwall Councillors to vote against privatisation, and we won!

The next week the Tory leader resigned off the Council and the Chief Executive, a published guru on local council privatisation, fled to a new post in New Zealand!

But when N30 was past and full timers turned off the taps, we were left high and dry. We debated long and hard what to do about the Unison full-timers long before this happened, but I don’t think we could have done anything else in the short time available.
Simply we need rank and file movements at the point of production if we are to be truly effective and we didn’t have them. One day we will. We won’t give up. Cornwall Anti Cuts Alliance recovered well with the Bedroom Tax Campaign.

Our democratic centralism and male chauvinism go hand in hand

I suggest our peculiar form of democratic centralism has played its part, along with other factors in creating the Comrade Delta phenomenon, (not he alone), and the foot-dragging of the CC which followed.

First, such a concentration of unregulated power as the CC holds, shared also with full-timers, is an open invitation in the exercise of abuse of power, and abuse of all kinds.

Why should abuse of women be part of the culture of our malfunctioning democratic centralism? Because the way we practice democratic centralism with a lack of socialist democracy, fosters unhealthy masculine and anti-socialist traits.

A tendency towards squadism emerges, male chauvinism (read stamping of feet at conference), glorifying physical confrontations on demos rather than seeing them as unpleasant necessities which are landed upon us by racist groups for example, intolerance of other comrades’ views in debate, marching military style in unbroken ranks through of clouds of tear gas, read Nice 2000, (magnificent in one sense but macho really, not a part of class struggle), stubbornness, an inability to say sorry; an inability to accept responsibility for one’s own actions, arrogance, an inability to hear someone else’s point of view, the downplaying of violence towards women as if it is not an issue worth holding the leadership to account for.

Yes, these are essentially male traits that go hand in hand with the abuse of power. And sadly female comrades can internalise these characteristics too. It has been around for 40 years. We do not have 40 years to sort it out. It needs to start with changing our peculiar form of democratic centralism right now, supported by therapeutic political work.

Comrades, a last thought. Do you know a comrade who will spend Christmas on their own? Please invite them to spend it with you, even if you dislike their politics! We are a community, no matter how split, and we need to heal. A political Xmas is the best experience there is. Nothing beats the 1974 Christmas Day I spent in the General Motors car factory in Dublin fighting for jobs. Trifle, turkey, Guinness and comradeship! (We won by the way).

DO THE RIGHT THING

Bunny (Canterbury), Rebecca (Portsmouth), Ollie (Colchester), Christine (Glasgow South)

When Rebuilding the Party faction committee members met with Charlie Kimber in early October, those comrades asked for proportionality of delegations to Conference to ensure the debate was thorough and that faction members would be able to take part in the discussions.

Faction Committee members were told that the CC can’t tell the districts how to vote etc. However, they decided they are going to suspend the rule (that MS invented) that if you stood as a delegate and lost you could not be invited as an observer (NC members excepted), and will now listen to requests for observers, and the nod and the wink seemed to be that key opposition figures would have a chance of being invited, Numbers limited of course.

In the north London district, the number of delegates allowed to stand for Conference was 43 - based on 430 members. Not only did faction members not get elected, but neither did non faction members, including a leading member of the UCU and the comrades involved in our work in the Middle East.

This was due to a pre determined strategy of the secret Undeclared Faction comrades, who were willing to take whatever steps were necessary, to ensure that those critical of the leadership and the handling of the Dispute were not elected, whether faction members or not. One of the Undeclared is currently being proposed as a CC member.

A similar picture has also emerged in Manchester, where a member of Unite NEC and other leading trade unionists were “blocked” by some who were also determined to prevent criticism of the leadership and the Dispute.

Consequently, a few of us decided we’d call on both the CC to honour their commitment to ensuring that key Rebuilding the Party trade unionists, branch builders, activists etc are able to attend conference as observers, and to call on comrades to support us.

The Faction Committee will be putting forward a small slate of comrades who need to be at conference to ensure we have the level of debate and analysis required for making the correct decisions that will affect our day to day work and perspectives. How strange would it be to have comrades who write key documents for the industrial department unable to attend? Or leading trade unionists, Bed Tax campaigners, UAF activists, branch builders, theorists and more, unelected and in many cases blocked because they have joined the faction or are seen as being “soft”?

Therefore, comrades, we urge you to send Charlie an email to insist the faction be allowed a delegation of observers to attend Conference.

To the CC we’re calling you out: Honour your agreement.

A REBUTTAL

Fourteen members of the district referred to in Simon’s article

We didn’t bully, we didn’t ostracise, we didn’t victimize.

Individually and collectively, we utterly refute the allegations made against us in Simon, Viv and Rita’s article [‘Moving forward means acknowledging mistakes...’].

When we read this factional article in IB2, unhappily (and due to the recklessness of its authors) leaked onto the internet including our names, we feel like we’re peering through the wrong end of the looking glass.

We can recognise details of the incidents that involve us, but with the roles of protagonists reversed, the motives imputed to us utterly false, and replete with gross exaggerations, distortions and in some cases downright lies.

We feel that the party needs to consider whether our Internal Bulletins should be used in this way. Surely our IB should not be the venue for comrades to make wild and false allegations against one another, that have implications for comrades’ employment and political activity.

We are placed in a quandary over how to reply. We could counter every detail in the factional article, and require comrades to sink into details of personal conversations, and personal conduct that most comrades rightly know nothing about.

We have decided not to do this, as to do so can risk dragging us all into tit-for-tat allegations and replies, and it might then be assumed that if one detail is not responded to, it must be true.

Given that we know the parts of the article that relate to us are false, we can only view with extreme scepticism the parts of the article we have no direct knowledge of.

We invite other comrades likewise to be very sceptical of this whole account of events, on which the faction are resting much of their claim for the need of a “political reckoning” inside the SWP.

If what Simon, Viv and Rita write represents a true reflection of W’s perception of us and our district, then we are honestly saddened.

However, the responsibility for putting this version of events into the IB, and online, is solely Simon, Viv and Rita’s.
Most importantly, we want to make it clear that we have never bullied or ostracized W.

Only a handful of comrades in the district had any idea that a woman in our district was involved in this case until Sadia spoke at conference in 2011. Still, in autumn 2012 very few had any idea of who W was. The faction have made sure to reveal her name to as many people as possible. The notion that she has been ostracized because of the case must be one that the comrades close to her have chosen to encourage. When comrades have seen W we have tried to be supportive.

Secondly, we have not victimized S and Simon for supporting W. All of us have had a number of concerns over these comrades’ activity in the district, and a number of differences with them.

Simon had a long record of letting comrades down quite spectacularly. His basic lack of honesty is typified by the section of his article regarding the 2011 conference. In his article Simon criticizes the standing ovation for M (which a number of authors of this article did not join in with, thinking it completely inappropriate) without mentioning that he enthusiastically joined in with that standing ovation – an inexplicable thing to do if you believed, as Simon now claims he did at the time, that M was guilty of rape or sexual assault.

S and Simon choose to believe all comrades’ differences with them since 2010 relate to the DC case. The rest of the party should not support this self-serving fallacy.

We want to challenge the presumption that these comrades’ actions are in W’s best interests.

By naming all of us, and specifying who the district organiser was at the time of these events, the factional article makes a mockery of W’s confidentiality, as it all but names the district W was in.

These identifying details do not appear in IB2, because they were removed by the national secretary. But the authors of the factional article wanted to keep identifying details in, and did keep them in the version of their article which they emailed to the faction, and which subsequently was published online. (Here we only include names of the authors of the article we reply to).

W may have agreed to this, but once confidentiality has gone, it cannot be regained if its loss is later regretted. We feel that the CC’s decision not to allow W’s request to address the January 2013 conference on this issue should be viewed in this light, rather than being seen as evidence of a cover-up.

This cavalier attitude to confidentiality is not new. Within 2 days of the DC hearing last autumn Simon phoned a comrade in his branch and told him details of the allegation, including W and M’s names. Following our aggregate in November 2012 Sadia phoned at least one comrade with details of the allegation, including W’s name. The night before the January 2013 conference another member of the faction in the district did a ring round of many of our district’s delegates naming W. Once confidentiality has been broken in this way it cannot be retrieved.

The pattern of behaviour demonstrated by the faction in the article we reply to, is to take every incident, impute the worst possible motives to it, then distort it to fit their narrative that the SWP would cover up a rape to protect a man in the leadership.

None of us did this. However often they repeat the lie, or smaller lies to back up the big lie, does not make it true.

Yes we need to improve our disciplinary procedures, yes we need to debate. But we will not accept the lie that we are people who cover up rape and bully women victims. We hope the rest of the party will also reject the lie at the heart of Simon, Viv and Rita’s article.

ON Factions

Debates in the party have been viewed through the lens of factional divisions.

The last year has seen the explosion of argument and debate in the party around a wide range of political questions including the nature of the party, internal democracy, feminism and oppression, social movements, structural changes in capitalism and others.

Some of the debate has been intemperate and below the standard we all expect. The reason for this is the existence of a permanent faction operating since the March 2013 conference. The effect of this has been to diminish the quality of the exchanges and to distort the meaning of contributions.

The debates on some issues will and should continue after the December 2013 conference but must occur in an environment without factions. The faction must dissolve after the December conference. We are for continuing debate. We are against any form of permanent factions in the party.

A Reply to Simon, Viv and Rita

Bob

It had never been my intention to write about my personal experiences of the last 12 months publicly but the article in IB2 by Simon, Viv and Rita changed my mind. The section that discusses W’s district is such a distorted account of what has happened in the district that I felt compelled to record my own experiences and views.

In the autumn of 2012 Simon brought comrade W to our branch meeting as a rejoined member. Everyone present, 5 or 6 people, was very welcoming and friendly, pleased that we had a new addition to our small branch.

She had not been a member of our branch before and didn’t know people well. One other thing Simon knew was that there was a case being dealt with by the DC that involved W. I hadn’t seen W for a long time, perhaps 2 years, she never attended the branch again and that was the last time I saw her.

Simon was phoning me on a daily basis over a period of several weeks, sometimes twice a day. He talked about the case at great length: previous to this I had no knowledge of the case. Taking these calls became very onerous and they were often at difficult times of the day. I didn’t stop taking these calls but it doesn’t surprise me to hear that other comrades found it too much pressure.

One day he told me what W’s identity was and said ‘I’m sure you’ve guessed’, in fact I hadn’t. He then said, of course I shouldn’t have told you as it’s highly confidential information.

I now felt in a difficult position and discussed this with a member of the District Committee. Shortly afterwards I was phoned by Pat S the Chair of the Disputes Committee. He was very concerned that confidentiality had been broken and that the identity of W had been revealed. I indicated that it was probably an accidental slip by Simon during a conversation, although clearly it wasn’t.

After this Simon asked me to meet with W so that I could hear her story. I didn’t mind meeting with her but if I listened to her side of the story then shouldn’t I also talk to Delta to hear his version of events? This couldn’t be the way to deal with such a difficult, serious dispute. I felt very uncomfortable and that I was being manoeuvred into supporting one side in the case. I didn’t think this was a proper way for Simon to behave.

Shortly after this, another comrade Keith phoned me and talked about the case. He asked me to meet with W to hear her story. I told him I didn’t think that this was a proper way of pursuing her complaint. He continued to press me to meet with her. I
didn’t know W well, she had not previously been in my branch and I had only ever had two or three short conversations with her.

Eventually I agreed to speak with W on the phone. Later she called me and made allegations against Delta. I expressed my sympathy for her situation but said that I thought talking through her story with individual party members was not a good way to proceed with her case.

In the period before the January 2013 conference a number of delegates from our district were phoned and the identity of W was revealed to them. I believe that there was a campaign to break the confidentiality of the case so that Delta could be named and the case could become a public debate rather than an internal dispute case. I believe this was a strategy that was pursued through autumn 2012.

Some members in the district didn’t know W’s identity until much more recently but in my experience those who knew treated her with respect. The situation was difficult as she sometimes approached members and wanted to engage in conversation about her allegations, in my case it was a telephone call.

This was facilitated and encouraged by members of the current faction. People thought that we shouldn’t be discussing the case in this way, knowing that it involved extremely serious accusations. It wasn’t that we ostracised W, we were never hostile to her, people still thought that it should be a confidential matter that wasn’t to be resolved by a debate involving everyone in the Party.

Shortly before the January 2012 conference Simon said to me words to the effect that ‘If the CC didn’t deal with the case the leadership would wonder what had hit them, that there would be a storm of online criticism unleashed that would engulf the leadership’. I didn’t take too much notice of this comment, it just seemed like the usual bravado. It now seems looking back that there was a concerted, planned campaign to turn this into a public online controversy and that Simon was part of this.

The ensuing chaos of the last few months is the result of this strategy. I think that a few people in the faction have driven this from the beginning but that most faction supporters have not been party to the appalling methods of a minority of the faction. I do wonder why the faction members and leadership don’t distance themselves from this behaviour.

The principle driving this seems to be that the issue warrants the methods used, the ends justify the means, whatever those means are. This view is predicated on the assumption that the accusation against Delta by W was proven, which it wasn’t. It is then in, my opinion, a morally indefensible position. The inadequacies of the DC procedures for dealing with this case, the responsibility for which lies with the entire Party, cannot justify the wrecking strategy that has been pursued.

I have experienced a number of intense factional periods previously but I have never before experienced such unscrupulous methods, distortion of facts and events and sometimes outright lies in pursuit of a political objective.

It is my view that a relatively few people are behaving in this way but that many other members of the faction are prepared to believe what they read online and repeat it without bothering to check if the facts are true. The consequences are that rumour, gossip, insults, unfounded allegations, personal slander, distortions and lies are threatening to replace proper, reasoned debate.

The political culture that has been nurtured by some members, colluding with individuals and websites hostile to the SWP, spreading distortions and smears must end. If this happens then I am optimistic; the objective situation is one in which we can grow in size and influence and this is demonstrated by the modest successes in my district over the last nine months, despite the internal difficulties!

TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY PRESS

Amy (Cambridge) and Mark (Tower Hamlets)

As we argued in our previous IB piece, the idea that a weekly, printed newspaper is where activists primarily get news is something that we need to break with.

The problems encountered by publications like this are not new ones, however what we have at our disposal today are means of trying to overcome them.

Such a publication cannot keep pace with rapidly changing situations - it is out of date as soon as it is printed, wasting the time and resources of the party.

Reports of an uprising that seems like it is going forward on a Tuesday evening, may have been brutally repressed by the state by Wednesday and by the time people are selling it on a Saturday sale events described will have moved on substantially. In many cases, those we are trying to relate to will have already read about all the twists and turns of what has happened over the last five days online.

Take, for example, out reporting around Hillsborough in 2012. The decision taken by the editor and deputy editor of Socialist Worker to not produce any online coverage of the report before it appeared in the paper meant that, while we eventually had a good front page and comprehensive analysis in the print edition, it was being sold 10 days too late.

‘News’ reporting should mainly be moved onto the Socialist Worker website. We should make far greater use of live blogging for political events.

It is not good enough that there was no report about the 29th September Demo until two days after the event. By that point there was little point reporting it as ‘news’. There was the opportunity to have a running stream of reports, photos and video while the demonstration was happening.

With this event, and many others, Socialist Worker journalists could have taken items from social media to supplement reports that they had requested from people. But we need more than just news reporting. As we stated in our piece in IB1, Socialist Worker does not have a monopoly on radical reporting, and we should not kid ourselves that it does. It can, however, play a role in [sharp analysis].

Contributors to IB2, responding in part to our article, have pointed out the importance of holding weekly stalls in town centres.

We agree that having spaces to discuss politics with people and see how our ideas cut with them is very important, but does not necessarily require Socialist Worker in its current form.

In our experience [my experience], the majority of people who leave a stall with a copy of Socialist Worker do so after filling in the donations column on a petition. This is interpreted as them buying the paper. It is hard to judge how many of them will ever read it.

We suggest that greater use is made of leaflets to complement a print publication. While they don’t provide the range of content that a print publication may, something that is 1-2 sides of A4 may stand more chance of being read. We need to find a way of turning buyers into readers.

The problem of not knowing who is reading pieces we write is one that is also encountered online. Some of this can be overcome through interactions on social media - who ‘likes’ or retweets pieces that are posted, who enters into a discussion about articles. Having spaces for comment on articles can be useful. These do not have to end up being the same as comment threads on comment is free etc, but could actually generate interesting discussion.

The design of the Socialist Worker website has improved in the last year, however the content has not changed to reflect this. Often pieces will urge readers to see the ‘box on the left’ as the copy has just been lifted from the paper version. We need to pay more attention to linking to useful content from elsewhere on the web, and better integrating other media, especially video into online pieces.

We should not limit ourselves to what is possible in a 20 page tabloid. There is a challenge in how to ensure that people don’t just read articles in isolation.
Linking to other articles on a page can help to encourage people to read more widely. Another idea that we could implement is to copy the ISO, and send out daily emails from the website which highlight a variety of articles, both new and ones that provide background to current events.

A crucial role of revolutionary media is developing people to be able to "train members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata of the population." One way in which to do this is for comrades to write articles and reports. Online media means we can use photographs and video to complement these.

We need to develop people to be revolutionary correspondents for the 21st Century. As well as training people to think about events politically, it means training people to write, take photographs, record interviews. This should not be something that just the ‘journalists’ do, but something that the entire party feels they are able to take part in.

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**United Against Factionalism**

**Jenny (Hackney Dalston)**

We are told that there are secret, hidden forces at work in the party, the ‘sectarian faction’ or ‘pro M faction’ (part of the CC plus comrades who have written critical pieces in the IB’s and so on) who have conspired to subvert our commitment to fighting women’s oppression.

The faction have yet to provide, at any point, one piece of evidence to support this allegation. Nor can they explain why sections of the leadership or the party as a whole would apparently abandon life long commitments to fighting oppression.

But the faction have named and attacked CC members and others, and deepened and extended the witch hunt in the party.

The argument is that there was that there was an organised cover up of a serious allegation, first made informally in 2010 and then after the allegation of rape in 2012, in order to protect an individual in the leadership and the reputation of the party, and in the process the party betrayed its principles regarding women’s oppression. The problem is that the facts don’t fit.

In 2010 a complaint was dealt with via mediation, rather than referring the issue to the DC, at the request of the woman who bought the complaint, and an apology was offered. If this was a ‘cover up’ who were the 3 CC members who dealt with issue and therefore responsible for this cover up? Are they the ‘sectarian faction’?

We are told the first DC case (which they did not uphold the complaint and did not recommended any disciplinary action) was a cover up and was essentially corrupted because there were too many CC or former CC members on the panel.

Yet one of the two CC members on the panel was central to the widely welcomed DC review which seeks to radically improve the DC process. Another former CC member who chaired the panel is a central member of the opposition. Are they part of the ‘sectarian faction’?

The ‘sectarian faction’ argument can create confusion and suspicion and divisions on the ‘CC supporters’ side. And it gives the faction a justification for their continued existence in the party.

The most effective way for any organised minority to conduct a fight for leadership is to divide their opponents. The faction attack one section of the CC and one section of the party with slurs and rumours, to more effectively challenge for leadership of the party as a whole.

They exploit the atmosphere of intrigue that is created by faction fights, where there are ‘insiders’ hiding at hidden secrets, documents flying around which have been read by some comrades but not others, endless internet chatter and so on.

The faction are attacking the so called ‘factional divisions’ on the CC. There is no evidence of factional division on the CC. They are not divided for example on the state of the class struggle, or anti fascist strategy.

The SWP is going through a profound crisis and there are debates and disagreements on all sides. Within the faction, within the CC supporters side, and doubt within the CC. There should be debate and at times tactical disagreement on the CC. That is the whole point of having a CC.

The faction are a minority who exist in violation of successive democratic votes and conference decisions. This shapes their approach to democracy generally.

One example of this is their criticism of the aggregates. Comrades who had not been as active in the branches often followed debate via friends or via all the face book discussion, various websites etc that were overwhelmingly hostile to the party.

In truth less active comrades were therefore more likely to be sympathetic to the opposition.

Well attended meetings and aggregates increase the democratic culture of the party. They allow the maximum number of comrades to hear all sides of the debate and crucially contribute to and shape that debate.

Remarkably the faction saw high levels of attendance as evidence of ‘a democratic defect’. They criticised aggregates for being ‘packed’ full of ‘paper members’ (although this was only a problem when the faction were not elected).

Some in the faction (in my branch for example) tells us that unless the faction get their way, unless the party issue an apology to the two complainants and change the political leadership to get rid of the ‘sectarian faction’ they will leave the SWP/split the party.

Others tells us that as the CC slate contains the ‘sectarian faction’ “This will ensure factional division remains part of the life of the organisation for at least another year” (Jim Wolfreys and others, ISJ 40) In all the bulletins, all the statements, all the sound and fury, nowhere are the faction saying they will respect and abide by the democratic decisions of the party at our forthcoming conference.

The party has the fever, what is the cure? Surely it is not a question of either political debate to address the underlying political issues versus disciplinary action in defence of democratic centralism, which is being ripped apart by a year of factionalism.

Surely what is needed is both. Permanent factionalism is a barrier to political debate. The faction have deliberately avoided political debate. To stop the fever we have to treat the symptoms but also the cause. We have to end permanent factionalism.

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**‘I Would Have Gotten Away With It, Too, If It Hadn’t Been For You Meddling Kids!’**

**Jonas (Tower Hamlets)**

In less than ten years you’ve seen riots of working-class youth in France and the United Kingdom. You’ve seen the explosion of student movements from Millbank Tower to Syntagma Square, and you’ve seen urban youth put themselves at the heart of social movements from Occupy to the anti-precari-
who took to the streets against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This shouldn’t surprise us. Every experience of rising struggle from Germany in 1918, to Egypt in 2011, has had young people at its heart.

Those struggles have captured those youth, who haven’t had their minds scarred with a lifetime of all the ideologically driven, reactionary ideas of capitalism.

Fresh minds that often see the World in black and white, and have the incomparable energy, in the midst of struggle, to push as far forward as possible, even when the struggle has stagnated, and they are facing the beast isolated and alone.

Those same youths who will gladly go toe-to-toe with the state because they see no future under the current status quo. These people are the subject of this article.

This article is an attempt to look at the conditions facing young people, their involvement in struggle, and the reality, of the last fifteen years, of the revolutionary left not failing to recruit, but inadequately achieving the integration and development of a young cadre in the Marxist tradition capable of leading struggles in the future and building revolutionary currents in their fields of struggle.

‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born’

The economic crisis has had tremendous economic effects on millions of people across the globe, in Spain for example, almost 5 million people are unemployed, affecting just under 50% of the population under the age of 25, and those who are in employment, are faced with short-term contracts and low wages.

This picture is not unique to this one country. The Euro zone as a whole faces over 20% unemployment, and this is reflected in Britain, where youth unemployment is at two and a half million, and general unemployment stands at 7.7%. As if this wasn’t enough, the sheer prospects of young working-class people finding any way of maintaining themselves or of even envisioning a promising future, are either non-existent or gradually diminishing. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition have tripled tuition fees, scrapped the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), and are increasingly scrapping all sorts of basic funding, from university grants to welfare benefits.

If you’re a student, unless you have the luxury of borrowing money off your parents, this means scrapping and scrapping just to pay the rent or getting a job. As Dan Swain writes, during “the ten years from 1996 to 2006, which saw all of the major changes to funding take effect, the number of students in work increased by 50 percent.” These jobs aren’t well-paid or stable; they are “highly precarious, low-paid and exploitative jobs,” often concentrated in the “retail, hotel and restaurant industries.” If this is a bad start, then the reality is that whilst “graduates could once hope for a job in some aspect of civil service or local government”, the Tory-Lib Dem coalition is determined to slash the public sector, so these days it is more likely that “most graduates will step straight onto a treadmill of low-paid administration or call centre work”, making the prospects for young people in Britain even worse.

If you’re not a student, which since the scrapping of EMA and the hiking of tuition fees, is likely, the situation can be more dire, consisting of less job prospects, endless benefit appointments and being left vulnerable to Tory schemes to bolster profit. Schemes like the ‘Work Programme’, which consists of mandatory work schemes and training days, with no pay, and the threat of young people “losing their benefit if they fail to comply” are evidence of the attacks on a whole generation of young people.

In this context, it is no wonder that you have seen the sorts of rebellions you have done across the globe, and in Britain as well. In 2010, no-one expected the mobilization of tens of thousands of students that we saw against the hiking of tuition fees and the scrapping of EMA. The children of work and labour struggle, the militant marches, the confrontations with the police and, most symbolically, the occupation of Millbank, the headquarters of Britain’s ruling party, was a massive shock to the ruling class, and broke the notion that austerity was necessary and could be delivered without any resistance.

Although the student struggle petered out into occupations, and more localized struggles and eventually ended in defeat, the idea that this explosion of struggle existed alone and in a vacuum should be rejected.

Whilst graduate employment often means that involvement in struggle can be limited, it also means that a level of sympathy can develop towards labour struggle, particularly on campuses.

The impetus it gave to an already, slowly moving labour movement in Britain can’t be underestimated. In the lecturers’ union, the UCU (University and College Union), the smashing of the consensus on austerity gave confidence to the battle over pensions.

Despite the struggle over pensions being sold out, it saw several important signs of strength and power, from the June 30th strikes and demonstrations, to the mass strike of November 30th. Whilst some of the limitations of those struggles are evident: the need for militancy to develop rank-and-file organization in the workplace, and a much sharper critique of the trade union bureaucracy, the inspiration of students, and their presence during all the significant labour struggles of 2011, is a vitally important lesson to learn from.

Especially if you look at how the most radical sections of that movement passed through three of the most important struggles of 2011.

The consistent solidarity provided by students during the victorious Sparks dispute was although at first quite skeptical, rather quickly became common sense, a confidence booster and practically a good addition of foot soldiers for militant demonstrations and picket lines.

Secondly, the arguments of student radicals in the Occupy movement made the notion of solidarity between the workplace and the streets crucial, with those same student radicals winning Occupy London to showing solidarity with the Sparks struggle and the November 30th mass strike, through joining pickets and demonstrations. Thirdly, we can’t dismiss the way in which ranks and reasoning cross-fertilized between the student movement and the riots that exploded later that year.

This brings me to the events of August 2011. On the 4th August, Mark Duggan was shot dead by police in Tottenham. Despite the media-driven lies that came out of this incident immediately afterwards, to most local residents, and similar areas of a large black and working-class community, the reality was quite obvious.

The response was predicted by many. A demonstration looking for answers the night after, led by the Duggan family, exploded into a riot. Why? Because the police were thought to have shown utter contempt towards Duggan’s family and friends.

The next week saw rioting right across London, in Hackney, Peckham, and then right up and down the country; Manchester, Birmingham and much more.

The riots consisted of major clashes with the police, the burning and looting of buildings, police cars and buses, but more important that any of this, it was that expression of class anger that had been building for years since the crisis, and years before the crisis.

It was what happens when that “desperately generation” hasn’t found their way out of their desperation, but have found the confidence and the anger, even if only for a brief moment, to lash out at those who are responsible for them being desperate.

940, largely Black and Asian, deaths in police custody, the constant harassment by the police in your estate or on your street, the racist stop and searches, the reluctance to start a post-school education you can’t afford, the anxiety and stress you feel waiting for your benefits, or repeatedly going to job interviews and getting rejected.

Mark Duggan was the immediate spark, and we need to carry on the struggle for justice for his family, but all these factors were the accumulation of the anger, frustration and bitterness that served as the political, social and economic basis for the riots.

As one rioter explained in a BBC interview at the time, “We’re from the slums of London, yeah. How do they expect us to pay £9,000 for uni fees? And EMA is the only thing keeping us in college. What’s stopping us from doing drug deals on the street anymore? Nothing!”

The riots died down and ended within a
week. The repression was severe with the arrests of thousands immediately after, and tens of thousands in the following weeks and months on disproportionate and sometimes unfounded charges and sentences.

Despite the narrative changing within the following months around the root causes of the riots, with many, even in the mainstream, identifying the root causes I have highlighted, this did not change the severity of the ensuing repression.

The reality is that there is very little that organized revolutionaries can do in the midst of a riot, but much we can do, prior to, and especially in its wake.

Defense campaigns are a crucial aspect of this, as Jonny Jones explains, “these are not only campaigns we should be involved with on principle; they also offer a way for socialists to begin developing roots in areas where riots occurred and to try to build up lasting political organization. It is difficult to intervene directly in riots. Our challenge is to try to think outside the box, and think about something that connects the frustrations of those who took to the streets in August with the power of organized workers who are now moving into action.”

This is imperative and it requires hard and long work. What are revolutionaries doing to relate to unemployed youth, through Unite Community? How are we relating to young workers in employment for organizing in the workplace, not just over economic attacks, but also through political campaigns?

A list of questions, of this sort, could be endless, but it is imperative we do these things to provide this revolutionary pole of attraction wherever there is struggle and organizing occurring, so we reduce the risk of leaving the struggle to forces to our right who hold things back, or even worse, to those forces on the far-right, who opportunistically want to capitalize off the frustrations of young people to the detriment of organized labour and minority groups.

**Refreshing our ranks**

The disillusionment with the Labour Party is hardly a secret. Youth disillusionment with mainstream British politics should be understood in the context of the last thirty years of neo-liberalism.

For example, for the Labour Party veering to the right under the tug of neo-liberalism in the early 1990s, it was necessary to expel the entryst Militant tendency. An obstacle to this being achieved was the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) branches, so they were wound down.

As Neil Davidson writes in his recent article on neo-liberalism, “One of the key successes that neoliberalism has achieved for capital has therefore been to render inconceivable alternatives to the economic policies established by the initial regimes of reorientation—or at any rate, alternatives to their left”. This isn’t a mistake. A conscious effort by sections of the British bourgeoisie in the late 1970s, led by Margaret Thatcher, led to several big confrontations and clashes between an already weakened labour movement and the Conservative Government of the time.

This led to the defeat of some of the big battalions of organized labour, like the Miners, and laid the basis for a more sustained, but careful attack on wider society, with an increased focus on the “gradual commodification of huge new areas of social life and the creation of new institutions specifically constructed on neoliberal principles”.

This has had the effect of, not just shifting the Labour Party and the center of British politics further right, but also in changing the face of British politics to, rather than the big stage battles between the left and the right, to a politics “devoted to expending more or less informed commentary and speculations on essentially meaningless exchanges within parliaments and other supposedly representative institutions.”

The effect this long-term shift has had on the Labour Party is considerable. Whilst, it still has it links to organized labour, the working-class base of the Labour Party has substantially withered and become dominated by a professional middle-class, and the community activist roots it once had, have now disappeared, despite small appearances by some Labour left-wingers and those Local Labour leaders at demonstrations against fascism and austerity.

A part of the neo-liberal project has been that the economic purposes have gone hand in hand with the deconstructing of the former organs of ‘civil society’ and with the shifting of the mainstream political landscape rightwards, combined with the disillusionment of millions, particularly young people, who might have voted Labour if they were alive forty years ago, a level of apathy that was existent even then has grown considerably.

As Chris Harman writes, the decline in political and cultural organizations like the Labour Party or the Church points to the fact that “advanced capitalism leads to a centralization of ideological power, to the atomization of the masses—with the crucial exception of workplace-based union organization—and to a weakening of old political and cultural organizations.” This in reality means that “the number of effective structures of ‘civil society’ between the individual and the state has fallen” historically, and when you include the fact that Harman was writing in the late 1970s, when the balance of class forces and the level of union organization looked, not revolutionary, but certainly a lot better than we are faced with today, this poses challenges for revolutionaries.

Why is this decline in support for the Labour Party and labour organizations important? Firstly, because the common sense of the average young person today, isn’t informed by any left-wing or labour tradition. Secondly, the idea that collective organization can change the world isn’t there, and is replaced by apathy, and thirdly, the opportunism of organizations like the Labour Party, develops an understandable hostility to political organization generally.

This apathy is evident in the level of people of the ages, 16-24, voting in the last three general elections. In 2001, it was 39%, in 2005, it was 37%, and in 2010, it was 43%. This can be explained by the fact that in 2005 there was a disaffection with eight years of Blairite rule, two Imperialist wars, a stepping up of racism in the form of Islamophobia, and the continuation of Margaret Thatcher’s neo-liberal policies.

In 2010, I think the small, but important increase in young votes, was reflected in the militancy that hit the streets in November that same year, with many young people fearing what the Tories would do to their education, not wanting more Labour, and putting their trust in the Liberal Democrats, who would eventually go on to sell their hopes as well.

It is also worth noting, that with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia’s satellite states, the legacy of Stalinism, combined with some of the ideological narratives garnered by neo-liberalism, a suspicion of the left led has developed.

However, apathy is a problem revolutionaries have to think very carefully about. When I was drawn into the ranks of the left, and wasn’t a Marxist, my mentality was very much “the Tories are scum, the Liberal Democrats have sold us out and Labour has sold us out, you’ll sell me out too”. This is a real phenomenon, and it is something revolutionaries can only tackle by being the first in the struggle and the last to leave the battlefield. It is only something we can tackle by being the best class fighters, by being principled, “squeaky clean”, sharp, engaging, and committed to workers’ democracy, for the basis of a new society, but also in our own organizations.

This lack of political participation can also be seen in the trade union movement.

Trade union membership for those between the ages 16-24, has largely declined over the last few years. However, 2013’s statistics could hopefully supply a rebuttal to recent trends with some struggles in the unionized, private sector, such as the Hovis factory victory, and some pushes for unionization drives in Unite.

How does one explain the lack of young workers joining trade unions? It is partly because of the war against the organized labour movement, waged by Thatcher. Partly because of the lack of combativity, and low levels of class consciousness that have been enforced by the ruling class in their offensive against the trade union movement.

But also because, when there is a lack of rank-and-file action, trade union leaders don’t necessarily feel obliged to act, unless they are strengthening their own position;
thought out meetings, that can lead to direct actions on companies, Government departments and the like, that are known to be further pummeling the unemployed and those on benefits, or on Workfare schemes. Not in crazy acts of substitutionism, but by relating to wider forces and consistently building networks.

3. Revolutionary forces are limited, however, objectively, we are in a very similar period to the 1930s. The Communist Party, particularly in places like East London, built-up great respect for their community activism.

As Catarina Principe, from Portugal, writes, “The Bloco needs to use the immense capacity of its activists to build local branches capable of organising broad campaigns to defend local institutions and public goods. Especially as local elections approach, this could prove phenomenally successful. At the same time the Bloco needs to be more present in the movements and strengthen solidarity networks to, for example, prevent evictions or organise collective kitchens. This would not be with the aim of replacing the obligations of the state but to be able to in practice communicate that collective problems (like unemployment, poverty, hunger, the lack of housing) cannot be dealt with individually.”

How are comrades involving themselves in their Tenants Associations? How are we building relationships within our neighbouring? Are we selling our publications and leafletting our estate, at the very least, once a month? No. We need to start.

4. Universities are still sites for student and labour struggles. The Sussex occupation and the HE strikes in November 2013. Revolutionaries need to be building anti-oppression and anti-fascist networks in response to incidents, we need to be relating to trade unions where we haven’t got revolutionaries embedded in the staff unions or the UCU. We also need to maintain independent revolutionary organization such as caucuses and meetings, whilst initiating radical publications that can involve wider forces, but fight for revolutionary politics at the heart of them.

5. Revolutionaries need to be at the heart of the movements relating to the most militant, often the most youthful sections.

This means, if you’re involved in the anti-fascist movement, how do you relate to the most militant forces who want to confront the fascists at every turn, whilst also keeping account of the reformist forces, the trade union bureaucrats and the community leaders, in order to attract their bases to a more militant, left-wing approach. This isn’t the easiest thing to achieve, but it’s the thin red line that revolutionary socialists have to tread, in order to push the struggle forward and win real victories for the class.

Ghosts from the past?

I’ve spoken somewhat about the period we face, and the effects it is having on youth, and some of the social explosions that have emerged. However, I am an oppositionist within the crisis-ridden Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and I would be doing a disservice if I didn’t talk about youth in revolutionary organization. The revolutionary left has a rich history, and more often than not a poor one too, but it is from both, in which we need to learn in order to, put it simply, do things better, because let’s be clear, we are never going to do things perfectly.

For reasons of time and space I am going to focus on the history of the organization that I am a part of. Formed in 1950 around Tony Cliff and his analysis of the Soviet Union as a bureaucratic state capitalist regime; a small organization, the Socialist Review Group (SRG) attempting to break radically from both Stalinism and orthodox Trotskyism, was, within ten years around 200-300 members in size.

With the exception of theoretical work and recruitment, the SRG’s activity consisted largely of work within the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), key campaigns for radicalized or left-wing young people.

The “membership was almost entirely composed of people of YS [Young Socialists] age – under 26. There were a handful of veterans of the SR group (in their thirties) and Cliff (45) was very much the “old man”. By the early 1960s, the organization, now called the International Socialists (IS) had grown from what it had been in the early 1950s and mainly consisted of “largely young workers, industrial or white collar”. A tale by Ian Birchall sheds some light on the organization at the time, “I was in a student group in Oxford. In 1964 when Nelson Mandela was jailed the South African Ambassador was invited to speak at the Oxford Union. We organised to disrupt the meeting, then attacked the Ambassador’s car. As a result a number of students, including Tariq Ali, were disciplined by the University. We then launched a campaign against the University’s archaic disciplinary procedures. This could well be seen as the beginning of the student movement in Britain, preceding the LSE occupation of 1967. IS members were right at the heart of all this. However, we did it on our own initiative; we didn’t think the rest of the organisation would be very interested. As far as I know, there was nothing about it in Labour Worker.”

With a focus on young workers in the LPYS, the work of the IS’ student cadre was rarely seen as important until 1967 with the eight-day occupation of the London School of Economics, because several students were disciplined for organizing a “campaign against the appointment of a director who had collaborated with the
racist regime in Rhodesia”.

Whilst Cliff often had a single-minded orientation towards youth in general, these events quickly drew him to the conclusion of the importance of students and the campuses as a tool for building revolutionary organizations. Cliff and the comrades who looked to the campuses weren’t wrong either. A year later simmering battles had exploded into mass struggle across the entire planet, with rebellion against Soviet totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia, the escalation of the Vietnam war, Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination leading to huge urban rebellions across the USA, and most importantly, the shaking of French society to its core, by the biggest general strike in human history up that point.

Young workers, students, and unemployed youth were at the heart of these explosions. There is no doubt that the IS understood these struggles in a way, that not much of the left did, even if it did overlook the possibilities that could be realized in the coming decade. Nevertheless, because of the orientation it made, the IS was able to seriously capitalize off these struggles not just politically, but also numerically with its membership increasing from 477 members to “something in excess of a thousand.”

The IS, whilst recruiting well on the campuses and maintaining rooted student organization, was now orientating itself towards young workers. This orientation came at a great cost (a faction fight and an eventual split), with the IS losing some experienced, older workers who were often Shop Stewards, as well people in the national leadership, such as Jim Higgins. However, “with the benefit of hindsight, it appears that Cliff was more in the right than the opposition. If the IS had continued to orient, as Higgins wanted, on the layer of experienced workers, it would have been condemned to disaster.

The characteristic strikes of the latter 1970s – Trico, Grunwick, Garners – were not led by ‘experienced militants’. That layer of the class was seriously weakened by changing patterns of employment, and later by Thatcherism, and it took the CP with it. Moreover, since Higgins was narrowly orientated on the trade union movement, he might well have missed the opportunities offered by such developments as the Anti-Nazi League”.

The following years of the IS, and then the transition to the SWP were driven towards sections of young people. The women’s liberation movement attracted large swathes of young women workers. The Right to Work (RTW) campaign, a very young unemployed milieu. The Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and Rock Against Racism (RAR) the same milieu, not to mention, thousands (and at high points, millions) of punk listeners, mostly of a young age, and young workers who set up various different anti-fascist groups across different sectors of industry, e.g. Building workers against the Nazis, Health workers against the Nazis, etc.

Let’s not forget Marxism as well. An event, copied from the Communist Party of Great Britain’s ‘Communist University of London’, the “initiative and organization had come from the SWP student committee (with strong encouragement from Chris Harman), and initially the event was aimed primarily at students.” This event went from this, to becoming the SWP’s annual flagship event, containing a whole number of speakers on all sorts of political, economic, social and cultural topics.

With young workers and unemployed activists being attracted to the organization throughout the solidarity work for the Miners’ strike of 1984-5, or the Poll Tax riots, according to most accounts, it wasn’t until the 1990s, that the average age of the SWP declined. As one comrade, who joined in 1991, at the age of 18, said to me, “I thought the party was incredibly old and out of touch.”

Reading the experiences of IS/SWP members in its formative and, often defining years, you begin to see how much they contrast with the experiences of today’s current, or recently ex-young cadre.

**Real recognize real**

The SWP has been an organization that has recruited large numbers of radicalized young people throughout all the recent explosions of struggle. The problem is at least 80% of those people are nowhere to be found anymore. Where are all the young people we recruited through the Stop the War movement? Where are all the young people we recruited through Respect?

We only retained a minority of these comrades, some falling by the way side, been burnt out by the constant, unexplained twists and sharp turns, and the rest have left or been forced out by the leadership and its representatives.

We have to be clear about the reasons for this. 1) An unhealthy and undemocratic internal culture. 2) A largely unaccountable leadership. 3) And, as a result of the two, the complete inability to be able to deal with new ideas from new struggles, without condemnation and an immediate defence of the International Socialist tradition. We had the opportunity to confront this in 2008 with the Democracy Commission, in the correct struggle against liquidationism.

What happened instead? One section of a rotten leadership decapitated another, and we “bent the stick” right back the other way into sectarianism.

The reality is in the last episode of the SWP’s on-going crisis, over 400 members have resigned, the vast majority of those being students, young workers and unemployed comrades.

The SWP is now in a state of cyclical crises ‘because of the leadership’s botched handling of two cases of sexual harassment and rape against a former leading member. Expulsions, rape myths, and verbal assault have been the norm for many current and ex-SWP members in the last year. The question for me, in this part of the article, is when younger comrades, in particular, started to put forward a critique of the organization, why were they ostracized and told they had ideas they didn’t hold, all in the name of defending the ‘tradition’.

Lenin once said, “It is far more difficult – and far more useful – to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open, really mass and really revolutionary struggle do not yet exist.”

This is a huge part of the problem in the SWP; dedicated revolutionaries who for thirty years have struggled to hold together an organization in one of the bleakest periods of industrial struggle.

It is no easy task, and I salute those who have done it, but let’s be real; the low level of struggle has had an unbearable impact on the SWP. It has stripped away initiative; it has made the branches over-reliant on a recyclable leadership that for the most part, hasn’t seen the inside of a workplace for years and has tried to defend their organization ferociously. Now they believe they are defending it from infiltrating enemies; autonomism, feminism and movementism.

This is evident in the following testimonies. A comrade who joined the IS in the late seventies when he was 18, had this to say about the organization and its culture:

“We were welcome as students, we were welcome as students joining a workers’ organisation, if that makes sense. The welcome was genuine - younger workers liked a smoke, everyone drank like fishes, and there was absolutely no sense of walling off the students from the wider district. But we had more to learn than we had to teach, and that was fine with us, given the quality of the people who were doing the teaching.”

How is it then that almost forty years on, an FE student has this to say about the organization she used to be a member of:

“When I joined I was a practicing Christian and no one ever tried to argue with me, or give me things to read. This ended up leaving me feeling disoriented because I was so conflicted.

“I eventually chose (needless to say what I chose). Even then because I was a school student and then an FE student, there was never a serious attempt to cadre-ize me or even just give me something to read… which is why when a crisis arises and you begin to find out more about the lack of democracy in the SWP, it becomes a rebellion against the form of democratic centralism rather than the corrupt leadership because it is not that younger
members specifically aren’t won to Leninism or democratic centralism, it is that they have never been introduced to it properly.

“So when a comrade who supports the CC is saying I will meet up with any- one who wants to talk about Leninism amid a faction fight it’s too late, because you have not waited this long for some- one to introduce you to it; for it to be distorted and bogus.”

This is an indication of a party so distorted by the material factors of the period, its inability to cope with the period, and the analysis that stems from that, that most young members have gone through the SWP, and then out again shortly.

As one comrade has explained, he joined the party in 2007, was involved in a number of big explosions on his campus, but his SWP branch, which was “very small”, was maintained by “five members all over the age of 45”. This comrade outlines that he was lucky to have some older, experienced comrades in his SWSS (Socialist Worker Student Society) group, especially one international comrade, with experience in student struggles, who pur- sued “detailed work” with the younger comrades, giving them “books and articles to read, in order to discuss politics and raise the political level”.

This is brilliant and shows an example of what we should be doing with younger members in revolutionary organizations, however for most young members of the SWP, particularly off the campuses, this isn’t a reality.

As this comrade explains, the local branch was more “excited by young peo- ple”, then the other way round and student comrades were able to help out the local branch, doing sales and relating to younger people they had around them. Although by and large, the “actual structures”, with the exception of those in London, often lacked any serious organisation, which made a “branch relevant to involve your- self in”, much more difficult.

The comrade also goes on to note that a lot of comrades fall by the way- side because unless you’re in a particular fraction, or go and work full-time for the centre, many younger recruits, especially off the campuses, fall out of activity, because those structures simply do not exist. One of the worst problems related to this being that most of those comrades who are looked upon to be developed and “taken seriously”, are more often than not, “white, middle class, straight men”.

The need to recruit, retain and recip- rocally develop young people on the revolutionary left is crucial if it is to sur- vive. The question of leadership becomes a vital one when we think through how this is done in practice.

‘We are the party of the future, and the future belongs to the youth’

Facing the revolutionary left is the reality of having to constantly think about how we regenerate our ranks in such a difficult period. Thanasis Kampagiannis, a Greek comrade, writes “for newer generations of activists, essentially the youth, this is expressed in an attraction to street politics, student movement eruptions, autonomist ideas, new radical anti-oppression move- ments and so on.

The revolutionary left has precious ideological capital to offer within these evolving processes, but it has a difficult and patient task in order to deliver on that potential.” This is a correct assessment of some of the challenges we face; however, I want to go through how we develop that approach.

The disaffection with mainstream politi- cals and political parties discussed earlier breeds something the left has seen much of in its history. This problem is a product of the “totteness of reformism”. This is ultra-leftism. While nowhere near on the scale of the March action, it is a real phe- nomenon and a political problem that leads to mass arrests, injuries and the like.

However, as with all political prob- lems there are more productive ways of approaching them, than have been com- mon on the history of the revolutionary left. In a debate at Marxism 2013 between Ian Birchall and John Rose on the German Revolution, in reference to the German Communist Party, the boycott of elec- tions and trade unions and the later March Action, Birchall addressed the roots of ultra-leftism and its characteristics.

He argued that ultra-leftism will occur “in every rising tide of struggle”, where large numbers of new people are “drawn into struggle”, with no experience of com- plex situations or defeat and think they can “achieve a lot more, a lot more quickly”, thus overestimating the level of class con- sciousness of the mass of people, based on the level they’ve reached themselves.

He goes on to argue that ultra-leftism breeds two strands; the first are the “moan- ers”. This bunch are much like the various sects who spend so much of their time attacking everybody else that they don’t do much in practice, and so there purism reaches a level of such abstraction that it becomes irrelevant. The second bunch are the “head-bangers”. These people form the ranks of Bolshevism. They are the type of ultra-lefts who want to break into Uni- versity Vice-Chancellor doors during an occupation. They are the type who charge rooms and throw smoke grenades at pres- tigious foreign politicians who have been involved in some act of repression against their own people.

They are the ones who don’t just want to complain about the system; they actu- ally want to tear its head off. The approach revolutionaries adopt towards these people; you fiercely argue with them, but stand by them in the face of your class enemy. Their anger and bitterness towards the system is something the revolutionary left needs to tap into, and foster, because comrades, let’s be blunt, more young, angry, anti-capital- ists can only be a good thing for us.

As John Molyneux argues in Marxism and the Party, a combat organization “has no room for a layer of passive card hold- ers or of privileged, secure bureaucrats. Its membership must be active and self-sacri- ficial, and is likely therefore to be young.”

Another factor during struggle is the battle of ideas. There are varying trends within different struggles and movements. There is Anarchism, Autonomous and left reformism, just to highlight a few.

I disagree to varying degrees with aspects of these tendencies in the move- ment. I disagree with some Anarchists on the nature of the state, but I agree we need to reject it. However, this shouldn’t be ones starting point and it isn’t an impediment towards joint activity.

The united front approach requires we work with forces both to our left and our right; partly to win the struggle, but partly also to relate to wider forces than ourselves, and win the best militants to Marxist politics.

You do not do this by turning people who differ from us into an enemy. You do this by relating to each other on common ground and arguing out the differences and the similarities. During the heydays of the Communist International (Cominters), the leadership tried hard, and with much success, to win mass workers organiza- tions and the best militants in the class to Communism.

These militants came from varying ten- dencies, such as Syndicalism, Centrism, Social Democracy etc. There were two approaches to winning these militants to revolutionary Marxist politics. The first was that of the Comintern President, Gregori Zinoviev, who in relation to the French Anarcho-Syndicalists, attempted to win them by lambasting their politics in an underhanded, sectarian manner.

These arguments need to be had, but there is a pointless, destructive approach, and there is the second approach. Leon Trotsky, leader of the Bolshevik revolu- tion, in comparison to Gregori Zinoviev, was more fruitful. As he said himself, “It is my contention that your entire past activ- ity was nothing else but preparation for the creation of the Communist Party of the proletarian revolution. Pre-war revolution- ary syndicalism was a Communist Party in embryo.

Conversely, active participation in the building of a genuine Communist Party means the continuation and development of the best traditions of French syndicalism.” The French Syndicalists affiliated to the Comintern and were crucial to the building of its French section. Now we live in dif-
ferent times today, and while the revolution in Egypt has offered us inspiration, it hasn’t developed any organs of workers power yet, let alone a Soviet state. However, the method and the approach of Trotsky here needs to be taken into account. We need to argue openly on what we disagree on within the movement, if we are to build our ranks, but more importantly build the struggle, but a sectarian approach will get us nowhere.

Finally, if one is serious about the development of young revolutionaries that can lead struggles than we have to think about the question of education. I am all for meetings and educational discussions. However, the way in which we think through these hubs of education and debate must be attentive to new people.

Yes, revolutionaries with years of experience have a great deal to teach younger revolutionaries, but nobody is infallible and the methods which we use to develop young revolutionaries today, could be better. In The Prison Notebooks, Antonio Gramsci discusses education in much detail, saying, “the educational relationship should not be restricted to the field of the strictly ‘scholastic’ relationships by means of which the new generation comes into contact with the old and absorbs its experiences and its historical necessarily values and ‘matures’ and develops a personality of its own which is historically and culturally superior.” In East London, we have started something like this. We have launched a Marxist reading group where five to ten of us meet every couple of weeks to discuss a book in the classical Marxist tradition.

So far, we have discussed The Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels and Rosa Luxemburg’s The Mass Strike. The reason this is useful is because we have a local, more often than not, younger comrades do the introduction to the reading group.

Prior to the session, we buddy this comrades and another up together, in order to help them out and encourage them. Then they lead-off a reading group discussion which involves comrades fluidly discussing the text and its relevance today, without a strict chair, but with a mediator who can make sure no one person dominates the discussion, and no one person is left out.

This should serve as an example for comrades, as an aspect of what we can do, if we are to develop a young cadre and get to the essence of what Gramsci means when he discusses an “educational doctrine and practice, according to which the relationship between teacher and pupil is active and reciprocal so that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher.”

However, education does not just come from discussion. Struggle is the first school of education, and to learn the lessons of struggles, requires actual democratic centralism.

Duncan Hallas argued in Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party, that “the self-education of militants is impossible in an atmosphere of sterile orthodoxy. Self-reliance and confidence in one’s ideas are developed in the course of that genuine debate that takes place in an atmosphere where differences are freely and openly argued.” This is a clear requirements for the development of a young cadre. A revolutionary organization that is confident, open and receptive to disagreements.

Too many steps backwards, what steps forwards?

The British revolutionary left is in turmoil. I’ve pointed towards several aspects of British capitalism where embedded revolutionaries have the potential to relate to people younger than twenty-four. Let’s do that.

Its importance lies in what John Molyneux wrote about the Bolsheviks. In 1907 approximately 22 per cent of the party members were less than 20 years old; 37 per cent were between 20 and 24, and 16 per cent between 25 and 29… At the decisive moment the youth carried with them the more mature stratum and even the old folks.’… Politically, these young men may have provided more dynamic and vigorous leadership for the Bolshevik faction.’ Certainly the youth of the party was another major factor in freeing it from conservative routine.’

Revolutionaries today run the risk of making themselves irrelevant. The SWP, for all the great it has achieved in the past, has been completely incapable, from the anti-war movement to the student movement, of developing a serious young cadre that it is able to retain even for as long as five years. This is a huge problem and is reflective across the revolutionary left. If we don’t begin to address this problem and if we don’t begin to regenerate our ranks, than the future of revolutionary Marxist politics is worrying.

However much my experience in the last year of the SWP has tempted me to flip all of what I’ve learnt on its head and start writing a pamphlet along the lines of Right-wing Communism: a Senile Disorder, I must say, over the last two years being a revolutionary socialist, I have learnt a great deal from older, more experienced revolutionaries. Some of those have now unfortunately destroyed the immense respect and trust I once had for them; others have only strengthened and renewed that trust and political respect.

Nevertheless, despite not having the energy, and often the time, for as much struggle as they would like, older comrades will be essential for re-building the revolutionary left, and as one comrade relayed to me quite bluntly, “I don’t hate capitalism any less than I did when I was 25; in fact I hate it more because I’ve seen more of just what it does to people.”

References

THE FUTURE
Jonathan (Oxford)

In spite of the arguments, it looks likely that the conference will decide not to apologise and to re-elect much the same CC. This will decisively weaken the party, because:

At the start of the year, we had 2,400 dues paying members. Of that, maybe 1,800 were active. This year we lost about 450 of those. After conference about half the opposition will leave – 150 people. Probably 150 to 250 others not in the opposition, demoralised by the fights, will leave or stop activity. That will leave just under 1,000 active members.

Those comrades will face a daunting task. Our name is dirty in the labour movement, the colleges and the movements. The issue is not going to go away. People are not going to forget. Wherever we get involved, comrades will face questions – not from sectarians, not from rival left groups, but from working class people. Your anger at the opposition will be irrelevant to your answer to their questions.

You will have to say, “I am sure we did the right thing. We have nothing to apolo-
gise for.” To say that, you will have to be very sure inside. Are you?

The point is not delta. It is not the opposition. It is the process – the way the party handled people who said they had been raped or harassed. You know what the process was in the SWP. Can you justify to yourself, and to the people you love, not apologising? If not, you may be very angry with the opposition now, but in the long run your uncertainty will break you politically.

Moreover, the party will be much smaller, and older, and our name will be dirty, so we will find it hard to lead in united fronts on a national level. More and more we will be on the floor, looking up at the top table, and we have little experience of that. Comrades will feel weak, and know it is because they somehow made a mistake this year. The result will be frustration, sectarianism, and sadness. And those feelings will feed a cycle of decline.

I ask you to think again.

PS. A correction to my contribution to IB 2: I have talked to comrades and gone back and looked at my notes. I do not have enough sources to be sure that all five of the hard liners in the CC were against the recommendations of the DC review in September. I stand by the rest of what I said.

2. By activities that maintain and regenerate non-workers outside the production process – i.e. those who are future or past workers, such as children, adults out of the workforce for whatever reason, be it old age, disability or unemployment.

3. By reproducing fresh workers, meaning childbirth.

Now quite clearly capitalists need human beings to work, they need the next generation of workers to be reproduced. The ruling class do want this to happen in the most cost effective way. But there is something mechanical about the above quote which ends up downplaying the complex nature of the family.

The reproductive process is not the same as the production of commodities. The family unit, in whatever its form, is part of the superstructure, which supports the economic base of capitalism. The family is not the same as the means of production.

“The distinction between base and superstructure is a distinction between social relations which are subject to immediate changes with changes in the productive forces, and those which are relatively static and resistant to change. The capitalist family belongs to the latter rather than the former category, even in its ‘economic’ function of reproducing the labour force.” - Chris Harman

The social relations that are involved in the reproduction of individuals vary according to the needs of the capitalist class. The way in which children are brought up – is something that the ruling class intervenes in. The family itself has changed over time. During the early industrial revolution, the working class family was almost destroyed. However, the ruling class soon realised that the family helped play a central economic role:

“If the capitalist class was to maintain its extraction of surplus value from the working class, then its interests lay in a certain restructuring of the working class in order to create a more skilled and more educated workforce, which was better cared for and healthier. This could increase the rate of exploitation.” Lindsey German – Sex, Class and Socialism.

“In 1844 the Factory Act was introduced - "women were placed in the same category as young people and forbidden to work nights or for longer than twelve hours." ..... “In 1847 a further Act called for a ten hour day for all women and young persons, to take effect from 1 May 1848.” Lindsey. German – Sex, Class and Socialism

The reduction of hours “encouraged the view that women should not have to work. This in turn strengthened the idea that women should be in the home – even if most women worked outside it.” (Lindsey German – above). However this ‘protective legislation’ was something that was welcomed by the working class, as it provided a greater period of respite.

We cannot just look at the family as an identical process to the production of goods in the factory – it is not. The family operates as a double edged sword, not as a straightforward one-way function. It has an actual appeal to millions of working class people as a place of rest, care and comfort. Not only that, but the ruling class also promote the “ideology of the family.”

The 20 and 21st Century have brought an unprecedented number of women into the workplace. Women have got a greater degree of economic independence. The legacy of the women’s liberation movement has changed women’s expectations of sexual relationships. In turn, greater numbers of men have also changed their expectations about sexual relationships.

The gains of the LGBT movement has also meant it is now easier for people to live in non-heterosexual relationships. Ideas of traditional gender roles have certainly weakened since the 1950s. Divorce rates are much higher, less people get married. An increasing number of people have children outside marriage. More people have non-heterosexual relationships. More people choose to co-habit. And a growing number of people choose not to have children at all, whether in relationships or outside of them.

However marriage still retains a certain level of popularity, even if the number of people getting married has decreased considerably since 50 years ago. Many people still get remarried after they have divorced. Increasing numbers of women may opt for “non-traditional” wedding bridal attire, but they are still marrying even if wearing different bridal colours. More people are selecting the registry office as a place to marry. Marriage retains an appeal, partly because of how the ruling class push the ideology of the family, this includes encouraging tax breaks for married couples (see the BBC article http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24309634 “David Cameron unveils marriage tax breaks plan”).

People can also believe that the process of marrying someone is a way of “adding a degree of security to one’s life” in an outside world where they have very little control. The ideology of the family can appear to fit perfectly with millions of people – as a small private retreat where you can shut the door behind you on the world outside, and share your space with a few trusted others. A stable family life with marriage, remains an ideal for many people, even if the actual reality of their lives differs from this narrowly defined ideal.

The fact that single mothers get scapegoated – as “reckless, promiscuous, scroungers.” show that the ruling class are
always prepared to negatively judge women who bring up their children without being in a relationship with a man.

Unfortunately these reactionary ideas have had an influence on the rest of society. On the question of marriage, gone are the days when women are driven out of their communities for bringing up children outside marriage.

However today’s newspapers will talk about “Vicky Pollard.” And grumble about working class, unmarried women who have children by different fathers.

The message that the tabloids and politicians promote is: “it is not illegal to raise children outside marriage, they will no longer put single unmarried mothers in a Magdalene home, but they want to try and make women, particularly working class women feel guilty about living their lives outside of an “ideal” which they are trying to promote. We can also see a similar approach when successive governments talk about how single parent households “encourage social breakdown of society.”

The Tory party, are the political party that unambiguously serves the needs of the British ruling class and still promotes a certain view of women and LGBT people even if they are now more subtle (although not always) in their message. The Tories still allow religious organisations a “get out clause” so that they can refuse to conduct marriage ceremonies for lesbian and gay people.

Senior figures in the religious establishment still promote the idea that women are subordinate to men, and bemoan the decline of marriage. We are starting to see changes in this area - we are beginning to see Women and LGBT clergy, which is to be welcomed. However the law allows religious organisations discretion on whether or not they wish to employ Women and LGBT people, i.e. the freedom to discriminate.

Not all women have children inside a two parent family, or have children at all, but they are still affected by the stereotypes that the ruling class promote. Millions of people internalise these ideas. We live in a society where we do not control what resources are produced and distributed, we are forced to compete with each other in the workplace. The material reality is that women do most of the childcare, and are more likely to be in jobs which involve caring for others. The existence of this material reality makes it easier for many people to internalise the idea that women should be judged by how well they provide services to others, and rather less as individuals in their own right. It is this process which leads to the objectification of women.

I also think that because social reproduction theory downplays the complex nature of the family, there is a tendency for it to ignore, or downplay the role that the family has on men. This can lead to viewing women and men in isolation from each other within the household, and open the door to the idea that all men benefit from women’s oppression. Even if this is not the intention of everyone who agrees with social reproduction theory.

Many men (and not a few women) have sexist ideas, sexism cuts across all social classes, but the unequal burden of caring responsibilities is in place because the ruling class want it, regardless of what working class men want / or do not want.

For example if a woman earns 20,000 a year and her male partner earns 30,000 a year, one of them may be forced to cut their hours to spend more time looking after the children. This will almost certainly be the woman. This does not necessarily mean her male partner is sexist.

If a person earns 30,000 a year for working 37 hours a week, if they halve their hours so that they can spend more time caring for dependants it means that they face a salary loss of 15,000 per year. Whereas if their partner earns 20,000 a year for working 37 hours a week, halves her hours - they will face a salary loss of 10,000 per year. This is why it is mostly women who go part time because it costs less to the household as a whole for her to cut her hours, than what it would for her partner to cut his.

The problem is the sexist boss who pays the woman less because they devalue her job, and the state which does not provide subsided, collective childcare. Sexist ideology and unequal conditions certainly contribute to many working class men feeling superior to women, but it is possible to break people away from sexist ideas.

In order to successfully challenge sexism, and win unity amongst the working class we should start from the position that sexism benefits the ruling class - both men and women.

Many anti-Opposition comrades have been behaving in bizarre, counterproductive and fundamentally apolitical ways, for example refusing to even speak to comrades in the Opposition.

Some SWP members within the Opposition have written very ill-judged pieces on their blogs. Like many comrades in the “middle ground”, I felt pain and bafflement as the situation deteriorated. I have friends on both sides, and in the middle ground.

I offer here a tentative explanation of some mechanisms underlying these counterproductive behaviours. I hope this might help the healing process after Conference.

**Cognitive dissonance**

“Cognitive dissonance” is a term in psychology which refers to the discomfort experienced by a person when simultaneously holding two or more conflicting cognitions (i.e. ideas, beliefs, values or emotional reactions). This may happen when reality contradicts previous beliefs.

In order to reduce their discomfort, people tend to reduce dissonance by altering existing cognitions, adding new ones to create a consistent belief system, reducing the importance of any one of the dissonant elements, or even by denying aspects of reality. This process may happen outside the person’s conscious awareness.

A young female comrade, “W”, accused “Delta”, a much older male, experienced, excellent, admirable, trusted, and invaluable member of our Central Committee of sexual harassment and rape.

That accusation led to marked cognitive dissonance for many comrades, including members of our Central Committee. The accusation felt unbelievable, so they did not believe it.

But this disbelief clashed with other beliefs they held, e.g. that women hardly ever make such accusations untruthfully, and that women should not be treated as in bourgeois courts, where it is often the woman herself who is put on trial, through questions about drinking, sexual history, etc. This clash of beliefs led to more cognitive dissonance – so some comrades “forgot” this aspect of our politics, and insisted that she wasn’t telling the truth; many went further and said that women often make false rape accusations. For months many denied the very existence of a second complainant.

Furthermore, “loyalist” comrades had to face the fact that hundreds of members of the SWP (perhaps a quarter of the active membership) believed that there could be some truth to the allegations, were outraged at how our leadership were dealing with the issue, and some of them were organising against it. The CC expelled four members for discussing whether to form a faction (first time in my 40 years of membership that expulsion...
is used in this way).

The number of oppositional members initially swelled, but then markedly reduced, as hundreds of them (including most of our students) left the party.

Sour students

The fox, unable to reach the grapes he desired, told himself it didn’t matter, as the grapes were sour anyway. This fable is an example of the “solving” of cognitive dissonance.

The CC and their supporters told themselves, and us, that the students had never really absorbed our politics – as if that meant that their loss was neither avoidable nor devastating. (Much less dissonant than “we really screwed up here – in spite of embodying a distillation of Leninist politics”).

Sour “inactiveists’” and sour “movementsists”

But what about the longstanding comrades who had undoubtedly absorbed our politics? Why have so many of them left in disgust and despair? And why are so many members still insisting on an apology to the complainants? Well, oppositionists don’t actually do anything, they just want to debate rather than build.

But what about the leading intellectuals, leading trade unionists, and serious branch builders in the faction? Well, they have become influenced by movementism because of the political and industrial situation.

The CC have been telling themselves, the party, and recently the worldwide readership of the ISJ, that their management of the complaints against Delta were not really the issue. This is both bizarre and profoundly disrespectful to hundreds of comrades who formed a faction specifically to address the party’s standing. In fact, the only other issue which unites the Rebuilding the Party faction (and its predecessors) is a concern with party democracy and the perceived need for greater transparency and accountability by the leadership.

The CC refuse to believe that a substantial proportion of the party’s membership, as well as leading comrades in the IS tendency internationally, and former friends of the Party on the left might be right about the party acting improperly in these disputes (cognitive dissonance is really uncomfortable). Our politics on women is sound, so we cannot possibly be doing anything wrong. To even admit a mistake, by apologising to the women, could open the door to an admission that there might be a problem with our politics on women (well, they don’t actually say the latter, instead they say it could “re-open the case”).

They tell us that the “real” problem has been “creeping feminism”, “breaking with Leninism”, or “movementism”. Even more bizarre is the CC’s contention that the main damage to the party has been done by “leaks”. (It would seem that what damages our reputation isn’t our behaviour, but rather how many people find out about it)

Some of the anti-oppositionists want the Rebuilding the Party faction to silence their disquiet and get on with building the party. Other anti-oppositionists want to get rid of (how many?) members of the faction (a novel version of “the main enemy is at home”?) They look forward to a smaller “pure” party, unaffected by feminism or movements, and loyally looking to the CC for guidance.

The Opposition has seen itself as protecting the party’s genuine traditions – of anti-sexism, tribunes of the oppressed, inner-party democracy, a party and CC able to apologise when it gets things wrong (for a marvellous example of Cliff’s ability to apologise publicly see article below p 24 of Pre-conference Bulletin 2, October 2013), able to learn from mistakes, and conscious that winning votes within the party is less important than winning the arguments.

Comrades in the Opposition insist that they are opposed to permanent factions, but in this case, they argue, they just had to keep organised in view of the exceptional risk to the party’s traditions (perhaps an example of dealing with cognitive dissonance?).

Probably a similar argument about exceptional risk to the party’s traditions keeps fuelling the counterproductive (and inimical to our traditions) behaviour of comrades who refuse to even talk to members of Rebuilding the Party.

Meanwhile, Delta resigned from the Party shortly before the second complainant’s case was heard (after months of resistance). The Disputes Committee (presumably with Central Committee approval) considered that, because he had resigned, stating that “there is a case to answer” was sufficient.

In fact, Delta has two “cases to answer” – possible sexual harassment and undoubted profound damage to the SWP due to his not resigning and/or keeping a very low profile a year ago.

And the CC, by not advising him appropriately on this issue, by failing to take account of the very close vote at the January 2013 Conference, by not facing reality, and by failing to address the very uncomradely behaviour of their supporters, also have a case to answer for undoubted profound damage to the SWP.

“Projection”

This psychological term refers to individuals or groups attributing unacceptable characteristics only to the Other, not to themselves (so that, for example, they are only good, while the Other is only bad). We may blame only the Other for problems between us, or attribute only bad motives to the Other, and only pure motives to ourselves.

One is more likely to fall into this psychological mechanism when under stress, or feeling attacked.

So comrades who a few years ago could work together, and would have defended each other from attack by people outside the party, may well be perceiving the “other side” as the main enemy, all bad, and needing to be got rid of. This mistrust between groups of comrades must surely be as damaging to us as whatever Delta may have done. (Why should the class trust us, when we don’t trust each other?)

Contradictory consciousness

This is a Gramscian concept, and refers to the fact that an individual’s theoretical consciousness may be contradicted by his actions.

An example would be a worker who has believed that strikes are a bad thing – but is in fact himself now on strike. (This may lead her to change her mind about strikes forever - or to believe that her own strike is somewhat different). Her beliefs were influenced by ruling class ideology, while her behaviour is influenced by her fellow workers’ activity and her current situation. Gramsci (and we) are obviously interested in the example “this way round”, i.e. workers’ collective self-activity results in behaviour which is more enlightened and class-conscious than one might expect from the (ruling class) ideas in this worker’s head; better ideas may follow.

In the case of Delta, who had an excellent, coherent and clear understanding of women’s oppression and objectification, I would argue that contradictory consciousness happened “the other way round”, i.e. reactionary ruling class notions about women were no longer influencing his ideas (as for many years he’d had theoretical clarity), but they may well have influenced his behaviour (if indeed he is guilty of what he is accused of).

Just as importantly, most of his supporters have similarly clear ideas about the SWP’s politics and traditions regarding women’s oppression, about the need for principled behaviour, about the need to win arguments rather than win votes, about the need to be influenced by the class (and even by movements) as well as the need to influence them ourselves in a revolutionary direction.

Yet their behaviour has been what one might expect from a bourgeois party, or the Church (they vilify members for expressing disquiet about alleged sexual abuse, and/or about how the leadership has dealt with it; they consider any criticism as undermining of the Party itself; their priority is to avoid “leaks”).

They know that “the police should not investigate the police” – but saw it as acceptable for Delta to be judged by people likely to be biased in his favour (Marxists are human beings, and thus susceptible to
bias, conscious and unconscious), and with rules biased against W).

Most of Delta’s supporters know that no individual, however valuable, is irreplaceable, and no individual should be put above our principles. But the Opposition’s concerns were labeled “a witchhunt”37, though the Opposition’s concern had not been to drive him out, but rather to get an apology (and better behaviour in future) from the leadership and the party.

Projection may lead comrades on all sides to continuing unhelpful behaviours, such as refusing to work with “all bad” opponents. While Delta may no longer be a party member, he may well continue to be politically active. Even if he is guilty of what he is accused of, he is not “all bad” – he may be flawed, and not welcome in the SWP, but I would argue that we should not refuse to work with him.

Even if Delta is completely innocent of everything he is accused of, the party leadership and many “loyalists” are undoubtedly guilty of appalling behaviour towards the complainants38, and of the most terrible mismanagement of the ensuing crisis in the party.

And even if Delta is guilty of everything he is accused of, it is not primarily his behaviour which has damaged the party. His behaviour would have had only limited consequences, if the complaints had been managed differently.

While irrational ways of dealing with cognitive dissonance may be understandable, they need to stop. The very damaging atmosphere in the party has to change. Our Central Committee should have been leading the change. Instead, they have been trying to solve uncomfortable cognitive dissonance (at times by denying reality), while spiralling further into it.

Those who must lead the change are the Central Committee we will elect in December.

ENDGAME
Jim (Euston)

‘There are no emotions left,’ Oscar Wilde once remarked, ‘only extraordinary adjectives’.

In response to a series of very serious allegations made by Jonathan N in IB2, the Central Committee (CC) wrote ‘A Response to Jonathan’. It appeared immediately after his piece: ‘This article contains a series of accusations about the CC and others. We robustly contest these accusations which are based on supposed knowledge rather than facts.’ The response itself contains nothing to substantiate the refutation of what Jonathan wrote. Only an extraordinary adverb - ‘robustly’. No dialogue. No justification. Merely an assertion of authority.

Words with elusive meanings made the news in early November. It was reported that Sergeant Chris Jones of the West Midlands Police Force, one of the officers responsible for ‘plebgate’, ‘fully’ recognises and regrets the distress caused to Tory MP Andrew Mitchell. So although he ‘can’t apologise for something that I haven’t done,’ he does ‘regret the disproportionate distress it has caused.’ It is an established convention that the word ‘regret’ is used when the intention is to make the kind of apology that can be spun as either a full apology or as a non- apology, depending on who is talking and who is listening.

Some people are wary of apologizing for things because they think doing so re-opens old wounds. In the SWP, for example, many comrades argue that issuing an apology to the woman who brought a complaint about rape and sexual harassment would mean ‘re-opening the case.’ The woman concerned has said she does not want to re-open the case. Both parties in the original dispute have now left the party.

The In Defence of Our Party (IDOOP) faction formed in February with the aim of getting the party to provide ‘full support’ to the two complainants did not want to re-open the case.

The Rebuilding the Party faction - formed in September with the aim of translating this support into an apology as part of rebuilding the party’s reputation - does not want to re-open the case. The argument does not reflect well on comrades. Would they claim that when Pope John Paul II apologised to Galileo, he was really trying to re-open a debate about cosmology?

A group of comrades have written in a document, ‘Facing Future Battles Together’ (FFBT), that, ‘No one would claim that the SWP is the final, perfected form of the revolution’. This is true. Most people, however, might expect any organization that had identified shortcomings in its disputes procedures to be capable of providing a straightforward, unequivocal apology to the people who had suffered as a result of them, particularly if they were women bringing cases of sexual harassment in a revolutionary party.

The Catholic Church’s apology to Galileo came in 1992, 350 years after his death. There is no reason for the party to wait as long before doing the right thing.

If there is one reason why so many hundreds of comrades have been involved in the opposition this year, and why so many have been driven out of the party, it’s precisely because getting movement on basic questions (acknowledging mistakes, investigating how they were made, apologizing to those who suffered from them, etc) has been such a long and arduous process, fraught with hostility and dissimulation.

The pattern is now all too familiar. A decision is taken that a significant minority disagrees with. The minority is castigated and all kinds of motives attributed to it. Its proposals are met with anger, insinuation and distractions. Yet its arguments are eventually taken on board, often only partially and usually many weeks, many tens of thousands of words and many resignations later. No political explanation is provided for changing course. The crisis continues: January, March and now December.

The CC clearly believes that allowing the ‘second woman’ to have her complaint of sexual harassment heard represents a significant achievement, requiring ‘effort and ingenuity’.

That this should be so reflects not so much the practical difficulties of organizing a hearing but the extent of the political degeneration currently affecting the party. Yet Alex C and Charlie K, in their instant response to the responses to their ISJ article, claim that faction comrades are ‘escalating their demands’ around the dispute. The only material change to what opposition comrades have been arguing about the dispute since February is the call for an apology to the two women – entirely consistent with their initial call for full support for the complainants.

It should be evident that the reason why the faction has had to focus single-mindedly on the issue of the DC cases is because, from the beginning, information was withheld from comrades by the CC, or distorted.

Mouse away the waters in this way gave rise to a whispering campaign against the women complainants. Echoes of this can be found in both IB1 and IB2. Various formal and informal complaints about specific instances of sexism by CC supporters have been made, going back to the early attempts to denigrate the complainants, none acted upon.

It is this refusal to condemn sexism except in abstract terms, or to face up to the gravity of the unraveling crisis around the dispute and take swift action, that has produced such a sterile debate and required the faction to focus incessantly on the facts of the case and its aftermath.

Part of the weariness created by the dispute derives from the relentlessly circular arguments directed at the faction. Under the terms of the party’s constitution, factions can be formed for the following reason,

‘If a group of party members disagrees with a specific party policy, or a decision taken by a leading committee of the party, they may form a faction by producing a joint statement signed by at least 30 members of the party.’

This is what the IDOOP faction in February and the present Rebuilding the Party faction has done. 500 comrades in February and over 300 comrades since September have united around the mishandling of the dispute and the specific mistakes the CC and the NC have made in trying to address them.

What brought these comrades together was not a common perspective on the
entirety of the party’s politics. Agreement was forged around the leadership’s state of denial around the seriousness of the crisis affecting the organisation and the political steps required to rebuild the party and its reputation.

Of course it may have been possible to engage in longer discussions, thrashing out differences, reaching agreement and producing uniform perspectives on UAF, the People’s Assembly, UIR, and the Bedroom Tax, perhaps even taking into consideration aspects of UK foreign policy as well.

In ‘The Fever and the Cure’ (IB2) the CC argues that this is what the faction should have done. But this would have meant building a party within a party - precisely the reason why permanent factionalism is condemned by all sides in this debate, and most vociferously by the CC.

It is typical of the circular arguments thrown at the faction that it is condemned on the one hand for ‘permanent factionalism’ and on the other for not building a party within a party, or permanent faction, with agreed political perspectives on every issue under the sun.

In any case, the faction’s time has largely been spent trying to break through the state of denial engendered by the CC majority’s decision, when the issue first broke, to take a partisan and factional stance over the defence of the disputes committee and drive this through the party. Once set in motion, this dynamic has proven hard to stop.

Part of the tragedy of the present situation is that this dynamic represents a much greater and more serious threat to the party’s politics than, for example, the faction’s lack of public pronouncements about the development of relatively marginal, unofficial trade union initiatives like pop-up unions. Failure to recognize this is one of the reasons why the party is tearing itself apart.

AC and CK claim that, ‘We had hoped that the review’s report would offer an opportunity to have a serious discussion of how to ensure that we never experience a crisis of this kind again. From this perspective, the faction’s attitude has been very disappointing.’ It is true that the faction’s demands have been fairly prosaic and have tended to focus on the blindingly obvious steps required to deal with the dispute.

Yet AC and CK make no reference to the thousands of words written by faction comrades in the first internal bulletin, or over the many months preceding its publication, that have repeatedly addressed the question of how we got into this mess and how we might avoid such crises recurring. Welcoming ‘serious discussion’ is one thing, engaging in it is another.

AC and CK then express disdain for the ‘contemptuous’ and ‘sarcastic’ attitude to their invocation of ‘the spectre of movementism’. But they ignore the political objections to their analysis of the influence of ‘movementism’ on the dispute crisis.

It’s worth spelling out one more time why the authors’ use of this formula to attack the faction is so problematic. AC and CK describe a number of splits from the organisation, beginning with the Respect crisis, and claim that ‘the logic of the situation drives those breaking with the SWP in a movementist direction’.

Leaving aside the question as to why around a third of the party membership should have lost their belief in the centrality of the working class at precisely the time the dispute issue broke, this argument also obscures the fact that the twin problems of adaptation and sectarianism are not new. The problem of adaptation, or accommodation, was a feature of the party’s relationship to the new opportunities thrown up over the past two decades, as outlined in a longer piece in IB1 (‘Roots of a crisis’).

The dissolution of the branches and weakening of the organisation’s internal life meant that the party’s ability to provide a counter-weight to adaptation was diminished. What remained was a residual and widespread desire to defend the organisation when it was perceived to be under attack. In the present crisis this reflex has morphed into a worrying sectarian tendency (IB1 contains ample evidence of this). Equipping the party with the means to regenerate its internal life and bolster its ability to counter the tendency towards adaptation was a central preoccupation of the democracy commission. AC and CK claim that,

‘In some ways the organisational changes [proposed by the democracy commission] were less important than what they expressed. The inner-party struggle that developed in 2007-9 around the demand for an accounting for the Respect debacle involved a shift in power away from the CC and the full-time apparatus that it controls towards the membership and the lay National Committee.’

It is true that the organizational changes proposed by the democracy commission, and unanimously adopted by the party as a whole, were indeed rendered significantly less important than their verbalization.

‘This, as we know, is because the changes were not implemented. There is no evidence, moreover, that the NC has acted independently of the CC since 2007-9. It was consistently kept in the dark about differences developing on the CC, both before and after the democracy commission’s recommendations were adopted.

There was no discussion of why John R and Lindsey G had left the party, or of the wider implications of the split. Neither were the political reasons why Chris B had left the CC and the organization properly discussed at NC. Prior to the January 2013 conference the CC slate initially included those with dissident positions on the dispute. Days before the conference their names were removed from it.

Conference was told that there were ‘nuanced differences’ between the majority and the minority. ‘Movementism’ was certainly not identified as any kind of problem. It was instead the need to defend the DC report that the CC emphasized in all its communications to the party.

Whatever claims are made about a shift of power away from the CC to the NC and its ‘lay membership’, the CC majority exerted its considerable influence over the composition of the NC in January 2013 by producing two recommended lists at conference. One was an ‘official’ list, the other an explicitly factional list comprised exclusively of comrades prepared to defend the DC report. At the CC majority faction caucuses at conference there was again no mention of the problem of movementism. Only the need to back the CC line on the dispute.

None of the allegations made by AC and CK in their ISJ article, about the cult of superiority apparently being engendered in student comrades, were raised at the January 2013 conference. As the crisis around the dispute has unfolded, however, it has been revealed that students were apparently,

‘integrated into the SWP on a movementist basis that encouraged them to see themselves as separate from and superior to the rest of the party, part of a student vanguard that could lead the working class as a whole into struggle against austerity. This helps to explain why so many student members of the SWP abandoned the party in reaction to the DC controversy.’

If this was the case, and if, since 2007, ‘the logic of the situation drives those breaking with the SWP in a movementist direction’, why was there no mention in the three years after Millbank, in any party publication, or at any national party event, of this danger?

Why was the student organizer apparently complicit in developing this vanguardist ethic retained on the CC slate and no mention made of the elitist way he had allegedly been carrying out student work? Why were no fears expressed about either movementism or vanguardism in the session that outlined student perspectives for 2013? Had the culture of the party become so hidebound that any mention of such huge political chasms was a complete taboo? Or is the ‘spectre of movementism’ a retrospectively concocted distraction from the fundamental differences that have arisen over the dispute?

In IB2 the CC correctly argues that ‘given the nature of the crisis in the party, and in particular its deeper roots, removing the opposition from the membership would not resolve the underlying tensions’. Differences have to be argued out politically.

The faction has identified two related problems: the mishandling of the dispute and its aftermath, and the degeneration of the party’s political culture that has given rise to successive crises.

The latter is a collective and ongoing problem requiring serious attention. Yet the tactic of labelling those challenging the leadership’s role over the dispute as ‘move-
mentist’, ‘pulled by feminism’ or ‘breaking from Leninism’ merely underlines the extent to which the leadership is exacerbating, rather than easing the problems with our internal culture.

By consistently attributing ulterior political motives to those trying to break down intransigent attitudes over the dispute, it is the CC that is ‘hyper-politicising’ it. It was not the faction that attempted to make a link between the disputes committee, its distillation of forty years experience, and the entire Leninist tradition.

In March the IDOO faction, formed around a handful of straightforward demands relating uniquely to the dispute, was accused of wanting to create a British Syriza, of breaking with Leninism, of betraying the tradition of the Paris Commune and the Soviet Revolution. This was rhetoric that sweetened the pill of concessions in March, contributing to a dynamic that is threatening to poison December.

It may be comforting to persuade ourselves that the common denominator unifying anyone leaving the organization, or indeed dissenting from the ‘party line’, is an abandonment of the notion that workers form a universal class capable of emancipating the whole of society. This argument certainly has considerable traction within the organization. In their FFBT document a significant group of longstanding comrades argue that,

‘A common thread in many of the debates is a tendency to combine pessimism about the ability of workers to achieve a breakthrough with a drift towards voluntarism (e.g. support for pop-up unionism and the breakaway at the Tower Hamlets UAF demo) or at least hostility to any criticism of such a trend.

This is linked to an exaggeration of neo-liberalism’s impact in weakening working class confidence and organisation. Inevitably, this has consequences for arguments over party democracy, structures and the role of political leadership - accentuated by an adaptation to ideas and arguments on a left where reformism and movementism are dominant.’

Such pronouncements deploy a debating technique central to the CC’s mode of operation over the past year – the logical fallacy: Richard Seymour believes that neo-liberalism has entered the soul of the working class. He was a member of the IDOO faction. Therefore all faction members exaggerate the impact of neo-liberalism on the labour movement.

One disadvantage of distorting arguments simply on the basis that they come from faction members, or of attributing to them views they do not hold, is that it narrows the scope for deepening understanding of the shape and texture of class struggle today, a significant shortcoming in a revolutionary party.

The ‘centrality of the working class’ is increasingly becoming a kind of liturgy, intrinsically linked to the authority of the party leadership. Yet at the heart of the present crisis is the question of how class unity is shot through with questions of oppression that require specific and concrete resolution rather than routine genuflection before abstract principles. This is the central issue at stake here, not UAF or Ul or Richard Seymour’s blog.

Hundreds of comrades have chosen to remain in the SWP because we agree with the claim made in the FFBT document that it remains ‘the strongest weapon individual comrades hold in making their aspiration to change the world a reality.’

Our aim in the Rebuilding the Party faction has been, throughout this pre-conference period, to try to demonstrate that the deep pessimism among a minority of comrades – that the party is ossified beyond repair – is unfounded.

Such an engagement would have been impossible to contemplate if faction comrades believed that they were the principled few among a sea of former apostates.

We were encouraged by the disputes commission report, the acknowledgment – mostly privately but sometimes publicly – by some leading comrades that they had changed their position on the dispute because they saw that they had been misled, and that they recognized the need for an apology to the two women both for its own sake and because of the signal this would send to the wider movement that the party was facing up to its problems.

FFBT, however, is an attempt to impose limits on the scope for internal regeneration within the SWP. It is a diplomatic, not a political alliance between ‘middle ground’ elements within the party and those who have until now adopted a harder, more sectarian position. The alliance is based on a ‘soft’ split perspective: dissident elements should not be expelled but need to understand the parameters within which they are expected to operate, or leave:

‘the choice we cannot evade is the kind of party we are to be. If the majority decision at conference on this question is not one that everyone feels they can accept then it may be that different strategies and perspectives need to be put to the test in another organisational form. Even in this event it is important that any parting of the ways takes place on the basis of a clear political analysis of what form of organisation we need in the current conditions of class struggle.’

These parameters include the assumption that the second complainant should be satisfied with the grading apology given by the CC in relation to her employment status.

They also repeat the highly contentious argument that an apology to the first complainant would imply a re-opening of the case: ‘any ultimatum, or demand for a form of “apology”, that effectively reopens the first case should be rejected’. The woman concerned has left the party and has made it clear that she does not want to re-open the case.

Assuming that the comrades are not imputing motives to her in order to serve their argument, then the only way to re-open the case would be for the CC to do so. Since the CC has also made it clear that it does not want to re-open the case, the argument is both self-serving and self-defeating. It derives entirely from internal party considerations.

The FFBT document follows the CC’s lead in pretending that only one faction has been operational in the party this year. No mention is made of the meetings or factional organization developed by those seeking to explore ‘how majority decisions can be defended’, or the sectarian block of ‘CC ultras’ that has developed within this faction.

This state of denial is precisely what has defined aspects of the party’s internal political culture over the past decade or so. It follows the pattern that emerged after the Regent crisis – the way to deal with a crisis is not to confront the issues head on and resolve them but to seek managerial solutions: to dissolve problems in broad abstract generalisations, to smooth things over privately and diplomatically, or to find mechanisms to deal with things without resolving them. For example, AC and CK note that,

‘The 2009 Democracy Commission, which sought to review the SWP’s internal procedures and culture in the light of the Regent crisis, noted the unpreparedness of party structures for sharp tactical disagreements on the leadership.’

Fair enough. This is followed by a lament that, ‘Alas, the remedies it proposed were not sufficient to prevent the development of even more severe conflicts over the past year.’ What they fail to mention is the reason why these remedies were ‘not sufficient’ – because they were not implemented. One example of this is the recommendation that CC members bring their divisions to the wider party. The practice of keeping differences hidden, the commission noted, ‘does nothing to prevent rumour and gossip within the party or on the internet. Rather, such “not in front of the children” style secrecy only encourages and perpetuates rumour and gossip.’

Likewise, the commission noted that ‘comrades who happen to be in the minority should not be crushed to the point of humiliation…. Nor should there be fear as - with reason - there has been in the past, of exclusion, isolation or ostracism for the expression of dissenting views.’

Had these two measures been implemented, rather than simply unanimously adopted at a special conference in 2009, many of the problems of the past year could have been avoided. This would have required a conscious political decision by an interventionist leadership to counter past practice. It did not happen.
So the FFBT signatories are right to argue that the decisions made in December ‘will necessarily entail a choice as to the kind of party we are to be. That outcome will not only be shaped by what we decide but also by how those decisions are reached and then accepted by all members’.

If the way these decisions are to be taken is to be on the basis of the FFBT document then the kind of party ‘we are to be’ will be very similar to the party we have been for the past decade.

The exercise being prepared for December is one where the central issues underpinning this crisis are obscured by a focus on the imputed shortcomings of the faction, which should have developed positions on pop-up unions and ‘squaddism’ rather than concentrating on the issues which its members signed up to at the faction’s foundation.

This is a shame, because the motivation behind the FFBT document is clear: to rein in some of the more sectarian elements of the majority and unite them behind more rational positions.

There is a dangerous complacency to the positions outlined by the CC and its supporters. AC and CK argue that the party’s participation in the Bedroom Tax protests, UAF, the People’s Assembly and the NHS demonstration in Manchester are proof enough that the party suffers from neither retrenchment nor isolation from the wider movement. Are they right?

This would assume that the boycott of Marxism by virtually all outside speakers was a blip, a one-off event.

It also assumes that the arguments currently being deployed to win an internal battle will have the same currency in what the FFBT signatories call ‘the outside world.’ A useful test of this is to imagine the reception the CC motion (circulated for discussion at conference) would get at work or college or among friends.

For all the advances it contains, acknowledging mistakes and expressing ‘regret’, it reads like an abstract tract far removed from the language or concerns of most working people. More seriously, for those watching and waiting in the wider movement, it will only wash politically among those who hear what they want to hear in it.

The kind of party we are to be is being foreshadowed in this pre-conference period. Faction motions are being met in some areas with calls to ‘delete all’ before being replaced by entirely different motions.

As in March, faction candidates are being systematically voted off delegations, along with those considered ‘too soft’ on the faction. In North London, one of the biggest districts in the party, this meant that not a single faction comrade was elected onto the 43 strong slate, including the party’s Unite faction convenor, currently leading a national strike.

Also voted off the conference delegation were three non-aligned comrades who had voiced criticisms of the leadership, including two longstanding members who have played a crucial role in the party’s work on the Middle East, along with the left’s most recent candidate for UCU general secretary.

All of the 43 elected had made identical statements about opposing permanent factionalism and respecting conference decisions. Similar experiences have also been played out in Manchester and Birmingham.

Those who accept that the faction fight in the party, between a declared and an undeclared faction, should be conducted on the basis of asymmetrical warfare (where one side’s existence is ignored) are about to reap what they have sown. December’s conference is shaping up in ominously similar fashion to the spectacle that drove so many from the party in March.

The CC and its supporters acknowledge that this crisis has roots in the way the party has developed over the past two decades. Yet the only negative aspects of all this appear to be condensed in the faction: its members need to stop talking about the dispute and focus on other questions.

‘What will you do when you lose?’ has been the question asked of the faction by the CC about conference since July.

For all the talk in the FFBT statement about issues being decided at conference, its outcome appears to have been decided long in advance. It is not the faction that is talking itself out of the SWP, it is the split perspective developed by the CC and its supporters that risks the ‘tragedy’ AC and CK fear. If the pre-conference period becomes the farce already played out in North London and elsewhere, that tragedy will become a reality.

**WHAT PHD STUDENTS HAVE BEEN DOING: A RESPONSE TO MALCOLM**

Amy (Cambridge), Robin (Euston), Dan (Norwich), Jamie (Lewisham), Louis and Alexis (Islington)

In his piece in IB2 Malcolm (Huddersfield) states that “Some prominent faction members on the other hand missed a trick in the universities. They could have been recruiting postgraduate teaching assistants to the UCU and building in the UCU”. As members of the faction who have been involved with organising postgraduates in our universities and within UCU nationally, we feel it would be useful to highlight some of the work that we have been doing.

We have managed to recruit significant layers of PhD students to UCU, meaning that in Cambridge and LSE, for instance, postgrads were the ones forming the majority of several picket lines in the recent HE strikes.

We have been members of local UCU branch committees holding positions that represent postgraduates and hourly paid staff and as membership secretaries.

We have been the ones organising activity on the ground in response to UCU days of action on casualisation in a creative way, for example the Goldsmiths’ iceberg. We have held, for the last two years, a position within NUS representing postgrad research students and have primarily used that position to raise the issue of casualisation within NUS and with UCU.

Nationally, we were integral to the production of the NUS national survey into postgraduate employment. This highlighted discrepancy across the sector, and also widespread exploitation, particularly with the bursary system of payment and awards.

We used the national survey to hold meetings on campuses around the country. Where we have members, that have built the union within a new layer of workers.

On two occasions we spoke to UCU fraction meetings on how our UCU branch officers could use the national survey as a recruitment tool among their graduate workers. We are unaware of any other SWP branch officers that tried to do this.

We have undertaken consistent work for the last 3 years. It has not always been easy; one particular problem we faced is the formulation of demands that unite people in a sector defined by inconsistency and fragmentation. Despite this we feel that this has been worthwhile, and we have come out of it with some important lessons.

Far from seeing a PhD as a “gateway... away from Trade Unionism” our continued activity within UCU, has sought to organise among PhD students, oppose casualisation, and develop the new layer of militants within universities. Rather than us missing a trick, Professor Malcolm seems to have missed the activity that we’ve been doing.

**DEFCOM 2: AVOIDING MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION**

Adam (Hackney)

A reply to Paul (recently moved to Tower Hamlets). I think Paul’s article in IB2 is a thought provoking and well meant piece, although optimistic in some areas, I think his suggestions are well put, and eminently sensible, although I do disagree with some elements which I will go on to explain later.
Firstly I’d like to thank Paul for his honest assessment of what’s going on, he quotes from IB1, about the composition of the 2 factions, declared and ‘undeclared’. ‘… 200 signatories… the ‘opposition’ of the former IDOOP faction, raising questions about the Delta case, party structures, party democracy, the relationship of leadership bodies to each other and the wider membership, and the scope for meaningful and frank debate within the organisation. In the other, around 100 signatories… to which seems to simply state generalities around party principles as in a ‘Where We Stand’ column, and asking for the expulsion of those to comrades who continue to belong to a permanent faction should be expelled.”

[My emphasis]

It is refreshing to hear an appraisal like this at present which I recognise. Although I believe now that 310 comrades have signed the faction statement.

I agree with the structural changes Paul stresses. However I’m not so sure of how Paul expects to see these recommendations enacted in the current situation. The CC, and Alex and Charlie in their ISJ article, don’t appear to want to be conciliatory, or move beyond forming straw men developed around assertions on issues about, students’ movementism, democratic centralism, or feminism, these real issues are used as distraction, a narrative designed to evade the pertinent issue of the DC cases, apologies, acknowledgement, (including explanation), and accountability for what has happened. The version of “apology” in the recent CC motion is bound up with “collective” regrets, internet usage, and a heavy dose of retribution too.

This lack of pertinent discussion about the actual issues, instead, preferring as Paul quotes, to discuss “generalities”, is the MAD policy which is being forwarded. Not to say that generalising outwards and looking at current conditions isn’t valid, but when used to mask or distract from internal debates and sideline important and contentious issues, then they are clearly being used to unfairly slurf the opposition, and not as genuine responses to the parties political needs, instead turning valid topics of discourse into factional sticks to beat back and deflect criticism. It is a dishonest practice, and serves to win a fight, not a political question.

Although Paul seems to agree with the concept that there is a MAD policy, he doesn’t have any solutions to our immediate problems, how to maintain the SWP with its current membership? How to deal with the DC cases? Although he does, like the faction, recognise that apologies are essential. The onus must be on the CC to allow, rather than frustrate reconciliation in the party.

Paul says we should not have permanent factions, I think virtually all comrades in the opposition would agree.

Over this last year factionalism has become a problem and major point of breakage in the party, and Paul points to quotes in the excellent article by Dan in IB1, referring to how systems of permanent factions don’t work very well in other organisations, but Dan follows this with an observation about the SWP:

“These are certainly negative features. But on the basis of this description, we ought to admit that, despite banning them, the SWP has had the worst aspects of permanent factions for at least 6 years, and probably longer”

Which he then goes on to explain in more detail.

But I don’t believe Dan is suggesting we should have permanent factions, he’s just making the observation that we’ve had them as undeclared and destructive forces over recent times, despite the ban. And these factions have been centred around the leadership, not the membership.

But it is also true to say that factions (of regular members) can and have, in the last year anyway, helped keep many comrades including myself still in the SWP, without it, be it characterised as “permanent”, “unconstitutional” or whatever, I’d have resigned after Special Conference, as many other unfortunately did.

I know this won’t phase some comrades so much, and some would welcome it! But for myself I’d be extremely sad to have to go, and politically difficult to let go.

It would be much better to have factions seen in a better light, and to hold them in political respect as differences and alternate perspectives, not as what has happened over the last year, where the factions and leadership have been cast as opposing Super Powers in a fight to the death. A direction pushed from the centre not the faction.

But in our situation now, it does look like that is where things are, and this is the situation we find ourselves in. But I don’t blame IDOOP, or RT factions for this. As quoted above, what the faction is asking for is: “…the scope for meaningful and frank debate within the organisation.”

In my opinion that needed debate has been denied in various bureaucratic and administrative ways, and the opportunity for ‘maximum debate’ has been squandered purposefully by those wishing the MAD scenario. So unfortunately we now find ourselves in a position where Mutual Assured Destruction, is far more likely than Mutually Assured Respect.

In the section on widening the proposals of CC to NC Paul is accurate indeed and paraphrases well from the IB1 article “Learning Lessons from the Last year”. And Paul makes the very valid point that:

“We seriously need to widen political discussion that informs who is proposed for our leadership. Widening the body of proposers to the NC would be a step forward.”

These proposals along with others Paul suggests seem perfectly in line with agreed proposals of the democracy commission, it says:

“Democracy is not an abstract question for a revolutionary socialist party. In this period our democratic structures have to be based around maximum participation and debate…”

The culture in the party needs to change and adopting the commission fully would aid this. If the commission was agreed, as it was, after what seems to have been the ‘maximum of debate’, then why have these recommendations not been enacted with the ‘maximum of unity’ already?

I agree with all that Paul says here in this section and as analysis he is correct, but there are no realistic solutions offered for the path we’re currently traveling on.

I think the reason the solutions are not there is because of Paul’s timidity in going after what he really wants; a change in the way the leadership operates, better democratic decision making involving wider layers of comrades, CC minutes, blogs, accountability to the membership, and a less sectarian attitude to movements, united fronts and others we work with.

This is all brilliant stuff, but this will inevitably mean, in the currently created situation, confronting the CC head on. As everyone has said, this cannot go on for another year.

So I would suggest it is essential that Paul and others of this opinion should unite with the Rebuilding the Party faction in order to examine those changes we believe are necessary for the future of the SWP.

Paul finishes with something more I agree with:

“I think that the reason why I joined the original IDOOP faction, to review disciplinary procedures, has generally been put in place for a better process in future. I also view favourably other proposals raised to address increasing internal debate and democracy, including publishing CC minutes and a blog.

“We must be adult enough to recognise that people do have differences of opinion and nuances of position (god knows the last year must have demonstrated that!), even on the CC whom we should certainly not expect or wish to be an infallible monolith.”

I know that our differences of opinion and nuances are something that we at least will be able to discuss in a comradely fashion even if others won’t. But I believe that for the party to survive in any fit state then the leadership, and some of the more sectarian ideals being offered by comrades, need to
change, and change quickly.

A quick current fix to encourage more democracy in the party, would be to have a proportional form of representation for delegates to conference, perhaps based on a percentage of attendees to aggregates. This is claimed as “elitist”, by some, but to have the maximum debate within the party it would seem necessary; as the democracy commission noted:

“There should be some regard for proportionality: comrades who happen to be in the minority should not be crushed to the point of humiliation… Nor should there be fear as — with reason — there has been in the past, of exclusion, isolation or ostracism for the expression of dissonant views."

The leadership has already vetoed proportional votes, despite the oft quoted mantra of “maximum debate, and maximum unity in action”. And unfortunately exclusion, isolation, and ostracism have already become a feature over the past year.

And by the time this reaches IB3, many aggregates will have already taken place, and even this small but meaningful step towards a more democratic set of principles and ideals will have been quashed. Unless districts can encourage that “maximum debate”, which is so necessary to rebuild the party, we won’t have that debate at conference in any meaningful way. The consequences of which are likely to be devastating for individuals, and the membership of the party as a whole. This is not a threat, but the reality for many comrades, who over the last year have been excluded, isolated, and ostracised, but above all failed by the party that we desperately want to still be a part of.

We’re now at DEFCOM 2, and the clock is counting down rapidly to annihilation. If you get to conference make your vote count, because it’s likely that many who would like to be there to make those necessary arguments, won’t be.

THE LEICESTER EXPERIENCE

Jackie (Leicester)

Recent history

It needs to be acknowledged by all that it has been a difficult 12 months for the Socialist Workers Party nationally and for the Leicester Branch of the SWP.

I want to focus primarily on the experience of the Leicester Branch. The difficult and since highly publicized dispute between two party individuals I believe provided a catalyst for a number of issues that have been bubbling under nationally and also issues that had been bubbling under in the Leicester district.

Leicester situation

My perspective of Leicester Branch of the SWP around 3 years ago was one of a small group of mainly male comrades who met weekly for discussions, under took a regular Saturday sale and intermittent industrial sales.

Outside of this smaller periphery of comrades who were in the party but did not feel comfortable in attending Branch meetings and felt that the Branch meetings lacked the crucial element for any revolutionary party the link between theory / organization that fed into activity.

Whilst the theoretical discussions at these meetings were valid it appeared from ‘an outsiders’ perspective that the debates relied on a high level of knowledge of history and theory.

Feedback from none members and some members were that they felt that they could not speak at these meetings as they ‘did not know enough’.

Therefore for some members Branch meetings were therefore an event that you attended out of loyalty rather than a place of important debate and a point of organization of intervention into the outside world.

The branch starts to look outward

There were a number of external factors that changed the nature of the Leicester Branch that gave a new confidence to peripheral members and resulted in a number of new recruits to the SWP.

• The emergence of the EDL and subsequent EDL inspired demonstrations in Leicester.

• National demonstrations in London over public sector pensions and the national one day strike of Public sector workers on November 30th.

Comrades who had felt themselves on the periphery suddenly found themselves taking a lead in organizing the first demonstration against the EDL under extremely difficult circumstances, where most of the major trade unions, the Local Authority and the Mosques along with a parachuted in Hope Not Hate, executed a ‘Stay at Home Campaign’ on the day the EDL were due to demonstrate in Leicester.

The embryonic UAF the small left in Leicester and a number of brave individuals nevertheless organized and successfully pulled off a counter demonstration. This give a massive boost to comrades confidence in their ability to win a hard arguments with people outside of the party. It also pushed members into finding a new layer of activists outside of itself which are not part of the established left in Leicester.

Similarly the campaigning of comrades to build the Anti Austerity Demonstrations in London and building for Nov 30th invigorated comrades and gave them a new sense of confidence.

Leicester SWP was able to recruit new members because of the party perspectives that we look outwards for people who want to be part of a fight-back. Women comrades in particular felt that they were able to play leading roles in the Branch far more confidently than before.

Divisions but a lack of debate

Throughout this time it would be untrue to say however that everything was wonderful in the Branch. With hindsight I am able to pinpoint a split in the Branch between those comrades who felt that theoretical analysis should be the primary consideration of the party and those comrades who felt that activity and intervention in the outside world was the way to build the party.

In reality there has to be a balance between the two and a clear understanding of the connectivity between theory and practice. The Branch did not have this balance right and this has led to an internal struggle in the Branch which has yet to be resolved.

The Leicester Branch is a relatively small Branch and very early on there was a clear divide between those that were critical of the CC’s handling of the now infamous dispute and those that chose to believe that the internal mechanisms within the party were operating effectively and that the debates surrounding this dispute should be had at pre-conference aggregates.

And by large the division within the local Branch emerged initially over the handling of the high profile allegations. Over time it became apparent that there were larger divisions around the general direction of the party which have now been reflected clearly in IB1. However these wider debates did not emerge at pre-conference aggregates in Leicester.

Around the time of the national conference and special conference however the focus of the debates began to change from handling of the disputes committee to much wider debates around the future direction of the party, how we operate democratic centralism, the party’s politics on women’s oppression, success / failure around UAF and criticism of the party’s industrial perspectives. I will address these from a Branch perspective briefly.

• The way the SWP operates democratic centralism works and has been proven over and over again throughout the history of revolutionary movements, SWP. What has been lacking in the Leicester Branch has been the ability to have real discussion and debate which then leads to unified action.

• There are more active female comrades in Leicester Branch than there are male comrades, this is because the SWP analysis around women’s oppression is right and female comrades have no problem arguing the party’s perspectives with other women
and men outside of the party.

This does not mean that sexism does not occur in the Branch or the party, of course it does as sexism is deeply rooted in all aspects of capitalist society and the only way it will be eradicated is through the process towards creating socialism.

• Activity around UAF built the confidence of the Branch and demonstrated to our members that against massive odds if the arguments are strong enough you can win a layer of people to towards a particular standpoint. No, Leicester does not have an autonomous UAF Branch but we are now in touch with a layer of activists who have been won to the idea of UAF and UAF has a huge amount of respect in the city.

• The Leicester Branch has put into practice the party’s industrial perspectives. Have been active around the JF Brookes dispute in Leicester and around the Coors Molson dispute in Burton on Trent and more recently interventions at the Hovis factory in Leicester and around the FBU and teacher strike.

The Branch was able to organize a successful Unite The Resistance launch Rally in Leicester. The Branch has pushed out and is beginning to develop an industrial base. This at the moment is by no means rooted but progress has been made.

• The Branch has organized a series of educational in Leicester with national speakers. This has created space for comrades to discuss larger theoretical underpinnings of our politics.

Lessons to be learned in Leicester

• There is no culture of real debate in the Branch, as a consequence political arguments have not been won. All debates and discussions must be bought to the Branch meetings and hammered out thoroughly in a manner which befits any decent revolutionary organisation (listening to others points of view, responding in a comradesly manner and behaving in a non-oppressive way toward comrades with whom you have disagreements).

There will be hard arguments ahead and we must be prepared to have these arguments as well as continue to operate as one unified Branch

• Comrades both inside and outside of the factions have spent precious time looking inwards at the ‘problems’ of the party. A small number of activists have worked hard to keep the Branch operating but at times comrades have felt demoralized and this has affected the way we have responded to events in the outside world.

Debate and clarity is essential in the party but not at the expense of dropping our activity. Theory without its interrelationship with activity and the ability to learn from testing out theory in practice means we will fail to learn at all and we will be unable to move forward.

Permanent factions within our party will lead to terminal fractures within the organization and will destroy our ability to act as a united party which seeks to intervene in the outside world.

• The periphery we had 12 months ago which was created out of the hard work of Branch activists has been lost. However this has occurred not because of the perspectives of the party but through a smearing of our party’s reputation around fighting against women’s oppression.

Going back to basics

• There is general acknowledgement that damage has been done to the party, some members new and old have been lost. In smaller Branches like Leicester where Branches have been most affected we have over the past 12 months attempted to revisit the basics of re-building the Leicester Branch.

• All members should be expected sell the paper irrespective of members being regarded as ‘intellectuals’ within the party. Paper sales are crucial for identifying new members and building our periphery, Where it is not possible to sell on a Saturday sale comrades need to identify personal sales of our publications and these sales should be mapped by the paper organizer. Industrial sales are crucial at the moment and comrades need to be serious about establishing keys sales. Sales at colleges and universities cannot be ignored as the students of today will be the workers of tomorrow.

• Branch meetings and particularly public meetings need to be well advertised using face-book emails and on sales. Not forgetting of course that a conversation with Branch members or people on our periphery is often the decisive factor in attendance at meetings.

There are no short cuts to building the Branch. Branch meetings need to be lively events that are well chaired to keep the debates focussed and to create an atmosphere where everyone feels they have something to contribute and no-one person dominates the discussions.

Established comrades have a real role here in making people feel welcome and ensuring important debates continue after the meeting in a friendly and fraternal manner.

• Comrades need to ask the question ‘Do you want to join the SWP?’. This will help but the work starts after someone joins the party and does not stop at the point that they join. There will be a whole range of issues that people may want to raise and we need to be ready to address these issues.

• Most comrades have extremely busy lives holding down a job, looking after our families and fitting everything else in between. We need to be imaginative to ensure that all comrades have the opportunity to be involved in our politics in some way. At the same time we all have a responsibility to find some time to read our publications to sharpen our politics for the fights ahead.

The role of the CC

Hindsight is a wonderful thing it allows us to re-examine events that have taken place. Of course with hindsight we have had time to put together all the pieces of the puzzle which when complete of course allows us to have a much clearer view of the whole sequence of events and where those events finally lead.

Members of the Central Committee have come under fierce criticism during the last 12 months. Firstly over the handling of the disputes, mentioned elsewhere in this contribution.

It is clear from my own evidence attending both conferences, at Marxism and through statements and articles put out by the SWP that the CC has made concerted effort to discuss and debate the issues that have arisen over the last 12 months.

It is clear the CC have listened to criticisms hence the review of the disciplinary procedures and the range of debates still taking place in both the Socialist Review and ISJ. This does not feel to me like an out of touch bureaucratic CC who does not listen to its membership, in fact quite the contrary.

It would be arrogant of all parties concerned to say no lessons have been learned. We all have something to learn from the previous 12 months.

Finding a way forward

• There needs to be an acknowledgement by the factions that changes have been made over the disciplinary procedures as a direct result of the serious complaints made. This must be seen in a positive light and it must be acknowledged that these changes will strengthen the organization.

• Comrades in the factions who are arguing for permanent factions have another opportunity to debate this at our sovereign body (National Conference).

Whatever the outcome of the democratic decisions made at conference all comrades must abide by this decision. If comrades cannot do this then it is time for those comrades to consider their position within the organization. I believe if the factions then continue to act as informal factions which act as a block to party democracy and sabotage party activity then the party must seriously discuss how we are to deal with this at a Branch and National level.

It is now time to consider all of the facts, find some balance between our differences and what we have in common. Hurt feelings and bruised egos need to be put to one-side and we need to consider the future of our organization.
LEICESTER AGGREGATE ACCUSATIONS – A RESPONSE

Dave, Mike, Becky, Cath and Jacqueline (Leicester)

We would like to take issue with a few comments made in Andy (Leicester)’s IB2 contribution. In this, Andy stated the following:

“At the annual conference in January our delegation reflected the political make up of our branch (or at least its active members).”

There are two important points here that Andy omits. Firstly, although at the time of our January conference aggregate, the faction was already operating to some degree as a bloc, or independently from the branch as a whole, the wider membership (including the branch committee) had no knowledge of its existence at the time – this is completely alien to the concept of democratic centralism and open political debate.

Secondly, because we were assigned 13 delegates to conference, and were unable to fill all of these, everyone who put their names forward to attend conference was able to go, which would have rendered any debates that we could have had (if the faction had been honest about its intentions) purely academic.

The point being that the only comrades who knowingly voted for the factional position at this aggregate were the members of the faction themselves.

Andy’s contribution goes on to say:

“The branch committee had worked hard to ensure that the aggregate was packed with members who were not critical of the CC (many of whom had not been seen at branch meetings for years). As a result, none of the dozen or so members who had signed up to the factions were elected to conference and around half of them resigned from the SWP in the aftermath of the conference”

The branch committee actually worked hard to ensure that as many members as possible attended the aggregate and therefore were able to hear the arguments and vote accordingly. If this constitutes packing the meeting, then we are guilty as charged.

It is true that there was unevenness amongst the comrades in attendance in terms of their level of activity. Some of them were more active in the local Unite Against Fascism group, some had not attended many branch meetings, some did paper sales, others did not, some did not pay subs (usually because of financial circumstances) etc.

However, Andy should remember that this is also true of the comrades that the faction brought to the aggregate, and also the meeting to move the motion for a special conference a few weeks before this. No such accusations were made on our part when this motion was passed by a narrow margin – we accepted the decision.

The meeting was also attended by several comrades who had no position as yet on the issues raised by the faction.

The comrades who attended the aggregate and showed an interest in the issues facing the party were regarded by us as important members of the organisation who had a right to hear the arguments, contribute to them, make their own minds up, and vote. How else are we to decide who goes to conference? Choose those delegates who have read the most books? Those who pay the most in subs? Those who always take part in the Saturday sale? No other method makes any sense.

On the night, we won the political argument – that is why the faction failed to win any delegates, and we were able to mobilise more successfully because our arguments were more coherent than those being presented by the faction.

ON FACTIONS, UNITY AND SPLITS

Rob (Newham)

In recent contributions to the IBs, blogs and in meetings, faction members have argued that: a) they are not a permanent faction; b) as a genuine faction they are defined by unity on one specific issue, and the fact they hold different positions on other questions is not relevant; c) the disputes committee issue justifies a breach of the ban on factions outside conference period i.e. ‘majority votes cannot be the end of the matter’. A range of sources has been cited in support, including Duncan Hallas.

The first problem with this is that any serious faction fight or split in a revolutionary organisation always has political roots and any resolution will of necessity require they be addressed.

Political differences and breaks are often obscured to a greater or lesser extent by immediate issues or by the bitterness of a faction fight itself. Given the animosity generated by our current crisis it is doubly important we argue out the politics underlying the crisis at the same time as moving to resolve the issues raised by the disputes case. The nature of these political divisions has been discussed at length in contributions from the CC and others and it is not my intention to cover the same ground here.

However, they lead to a crucial point we do need to address. What sets the current crisis apart is that political divisions have coalesced with the arguments over the disputes committee case. It is the way in which they have fused that has made divisions in the party so polarised.

It is important we resolve failings in our disputes processes, especially in cases involving complaints of sexual misconduct; however this cannot be achieved in isolation from the political divisions and permanent factionalism that now wracks the party. It is now evident that fundamental differences exist over the kind of party we seek to build.

If the entire opposition continue to insist that the only issues at stake are the manner in which the complaints were dealt with and alleged failures of leadership, and that no debate on political questions is possible until these are resolved, there will be little possibility of fully addressing the crisis.

It is in this context that we need to address the argument about factions, permanent or otherwise.

Some of the arguments advanced to deny the ‘permanent’ character of the current faction are pure sophistry, e.g. that since rules were introduced in March precluding permanent factions, the current faction cannot be permanent!

However, others are more serious. Citing Duncan Hallas Anidency B for example claims that a genuine faction is characterised by ‘unanimity on the specific question, diversity on all others’… whereas a permanent faction is ‘characterised by generalised opposition over all questions and a highly developed internal structure aiming to split the host organisation rather than win an argument within it.’ (http://revolutionarysocialism.tumblr.com/post/55862273324/duncan-hallas-on-permanent-factions).

But this is misleading. Duncan was referring to the highly deliberate factional operation of the Trotskyist Tendency which was formed as a result of a unity call to revolutionaryism made by IS in the 1960s, as a result of which Workers’ Fight entered IS as a fully formed factional operation.

Ian B similarly argues against any notion that the current opposition constitute a permanent faction, concluding: ‘A permanent faction … always has the logic of an organisation within an organisation.’ (Socialist Review, June 2013). The problem is that for a section of the opposition this is precisely the logic (and practice) of their position. The ‘exceptional situation’ where majority decisions ‘do not count’ now extends to student work, UAF intervention, selling the paper, holding alternative educationals, subs and the appeal. There are so far very few in the faction who are prepared to declare that factional activity will cease after conference.

In the current faction fight it is true that a broad faction, encompassing different aims and politics, has coalesced over the disputes case. However, we cannot stop
there. This is a faction that includes a large number who do indeed wish to mount a generalised opposition, together with those who still retain a commitment to building a Leninist party. Up to now however it is the former camp that has dictated the line of march, while the latter adapt in order to preserve factional unity. We saw this very clearly in the case of the ISN split and a similar process is in danger of repeating itself now.

Unfortunately the second camp seems to be in denial; they insist that membership losses are due solely to the way the dispute was handled. But from any honest examination of their blogs and political positions, it is clear that a section have already decided at all but would rather engage in abuse, slander or ‘trolling’ on facebook. This simply closes down meaningful debate and reflects the logic of those heading towards a split. We can speculate as to numbers but it is quite clear that a section have already decided to leave the SWP and a good number have declared the intention to do so.

The opposition may disagree on a range of issues but they share a common practice in which comrades can agree to disagree, and a tendency to privilege individual political views and freedom of action over democratic and collective decisions. ‘Good’ political leadership is increasingly seen as ‘representative’ whereas a leadership that fights for a political strategy is viewed as ‘anti-democratic’, authoritarian or even destructive of spontaneity and initiative.

In his article, ‘The Roots of the Crisis’ in IB1, Jim addresses the fallout from Respect in order to argue that we faced a period that engendered substitutionism on one hand and that subverted the relationship between the leadership and membership on the other. In addition he lays a charge of ‘sectarianism’ without pointing to any concrete example in the outside world. Unless by ‘sectarianism’ he means disagreeing openly with people we work alongside? This analysis is not good enough.

Jim appears to contextualise what he characterises as the entrenchment of top-down leadership. However, he evades the fundamental question of the pressures on the membership as a whole to adapt to the dominant political currents around them. After the Respect crisis I remember a very active comrade, now a member of the current opposition, reporting back from conference to argue that the problem was one of autocratic, top-down leadership. She represented a generally accepted view in the meeting, and I believe one widely held in the party at the time. I argued hard that this was no explanation on its own; first, the three leading members of the CC concerned had been at the forefront of the mass movements and unified fronts since Seattle and we had to look for a political explanation. Second, it was untenable to think we were ourselves somehow immune from the political pressures of adaptation that had affected leading comrades so deeply, and unless we addressed this we would pay a price. Clearly being right in the abstract is no substitute for addressing a problem in the concrete.

The discussion as to what form of structures and leadership we need is therefore perfectly legitimate. However, this has to be determined on the basis of a political debate that addresses the relationship between party and the class struggle and includes intensive discussion of the real political divisions in the party.

The opposition therefore face a dilemma. Those who wish to remain in the party and are prepared to concede that permanent factionalism must end can only do so at the expense of a split with those in the faction who will settle for nothing less than a different type of party altogether. To maintain that the only issue in question is the dispute is to evade the necessary political choices that have to be made. This is a recipe for the most damaging of splits, not only for the party but also for those who leave. Again the predecessors of political compromise and adaptation speak for themselves. In addition a split on the basis of an apolitical hatred of the SWP is to tip into a sectarian abyss.

We need to move forwards to resolve the issues arising from the dispute and continue to debate important political differences, untrammelled by permanent factions. The alternative is for the faction to continue in the attempt to force a fundamental change in the SWP as a Leninist organisation and overturn the leadership, while avoiding the political debate that would be required to justify such a historic break.

In focusing upon the differences within the opposition, the faction will cry that the majority are divided between ‘ultras’ and ‘moderates’; they argue the CC is irredeemably split; that there is an ‘undeclared faction’, etc.

They overlook a key difference. It is true there have been very sharp disagreements amongst the party majority, including within the leadership. It would be surprising if it were otherwise considering the depth and character of the crisis. However, what unites those in the majority is a shared and absolute commitment to building the Leninist party, to democratic centralism, and ending a process of de facto change in the SWP through permanent factionalism. On this we constitute ‘one side’ despite the clear differences between comrades’ contributions in IB1. Yet it is on these fundamental political questions that the opposition are divided. What unites the majority is precisely the question ‘What type of party?’ What divides the faction is precisely that question.

Something very important follows from this analysis. To make positions taken over the disputes case the defining issue when deciding the make up of the leadership bodies of the organisation would be fundamentally mistaken. We have to ask what the differences are over our analysis of the class struggle and the nature of our intervention in that struggle.

The real collective test of the party will be over the next year, in resolving the failures of the disputes process, effectively debating the political questions that have emerged during the course of the crisis, and putting our political perspectives to the test in our intervention. Only once we have all begun to extricate ourselves from the bitterness of the faction fight can we make a genuine assessment of the way ahead. The faction’s demand that heads roll is based on the distortions of the factional prism. It also reflects a refusal to debate the political questions at stake in making such decisions or the record of the party and the leadership bodies in struggle.

Here there is a lesson for the organisation as a whole. We need to forge a unity upon political terrain: upon agreement on the type of party we are trying to build. This is not to take a ‘middle road’ position on the faction fight. On the contrary, it is to insist that a crisis that has political roots can only be resolved politically. Positions taken over the past year, viewed through the distortions of a factional prism of the kind we have experienced are a very poor guide indeed. The proposed slate for the CC offers an opportunity to put ourselves to the test where it really counts: in uniting to rebuild the party over the year ahead and emerge from the deepest crisis in our party’s history in order to play the role we all seek for it.

LOST IN SECRETS?
Sam (Birmingham Handsworth)

In the last Internal Bulletin, Jonathan N from Oxford made a series of accusations about the current CC, concluding that we in the SWP have got ourselves into this mess surrounding the Disputes Committee because ‘we are lost in secrets’.

Compare this with an article in the same Internal Bulletin by Simon F. Viv and Rita that; in the words of the Rebuilding the Party faction statement of Sunday 27th of October that implores the party membership to read it, revisits the original Disputes Committee case in graphic detail despite the insistence of the Rebuilding the Party faction that ‘this is not about reopening [the complainant’s] cases. It is about doing the right thing by comrades who have been mistrusted.’
Jonathan, Simon F, Viv and Rita are comrades of long standing who have assumed positions of responsibility within the party, the latter three entrusted with supporting W in bringing her complaint against Comrade Delta.

In their contributions to the last IB, however, I feel that both parties have exemplified an air of superiority in their contributions, in that both of the articles essentially argue that the rest of the Party should trust their versions of events which the rest of us did not witness and have no means of verifying.

When Jonathan argues that we are “lost in secrets” for example, he does so having made allusion to a variety of damaging claims against some members of the current CC without providing any substantiated evidence for those claims.

Indeed, the closest he comes to providing any semblance of ‘proof’ of the incendiary allegations he has made is simply to insist that “I know this. Charlie and Alex know that I know. Most of the people at the centre of the party know it, and Alex and Amy and Charlie know they all know.”

Sadly for Jonathan, he makes these claims in the Internal Bulletin to a much broader audience than those ‘at the centre of the party’, and in doing so seems to have forgotten that a dogged insistence that he knows something to be true is not sufficiently rigorous nor conclusive enough an argument to convince the rest of the party of its veracity.

I am arguing that we are ‘lost in secrets’. Jonathan has in fact contributed to the contentious climate of myth-making and spurious gossip that has arisen within the party this year by first making a barrage of damaging claims but then refusing to substantiate them with facts, encouraging the membership to believe these claims because he is a party member who is ‘in the know’.

For those of us who do not consider ourselves ‘in the know’, however, unsubstantiated fact is simply not good enough, especially considering the gravity of the allegations Jonathan has made.

You will notice that at no point during my criticism of Jonathan’s article have I claimed that what he has said is untrue. My challenge to Jonathan is to prove his serious allegations concretely with reference to more than just his interpretation of what he has seen or heard.

If he can do this then he should have put this evidence to the party in his second Internal Bulletin article, and in omitting this evidence (should it exist) Jonathan has acted irresponsibly.

Simon F, Viv and Rita’s article, at first glance, seems to provide a stark contrast to Jonathan’s in its detailed narrative of the events that surrounded Comrade W’s testimonial to the Disputes Committee, carefully referencing the people, times, dates, places and contexts surrounding the hearing and its aftermath in minute detail.

Despite their surface insistence on ‘factual’ detail, however, the article still includes many unsubstantiated claims about the case that the authors have not provided evidence for beyond personal testimony (i.e. their insistence that it happened).

The claim is made, for instance, that a comrade harassed W in calling her a silly little girl. When insisting that a comrade has harassed a victim of rape, evidence should be provided for this beyond personal testimony.

In the article, however, the authors insist that “each attack on comrade W and her supporters was reported to the CC”. Here, again, the authors have confused reporting an incident with proof that the incident occurred, whilst simultaneously neglecting to allude in their article to any evidence they have collected to substantiate their claims, despite berating the fact that in the relevant district ‘rumour and gossip were allowed rather than political clarity’.

For political and procedural clarity to be achieved, Comrades must not build arguments based solely on their belief that other comrades should trust their version of events, but should instead present evidence to the Party’s discriminating and intelligent Comradeship in order to convince them of their claims.

If the authors believe the CC to have evidence of the harassment that was alleged to have taken place in W’s district, they should have encouraged the CC to reveal it in their article or to have detailed it themselves so as to provide a point of factual reference.

After reading both articles one is subject to a myriad of competing personal testimonies that the authors cannot substantiate.

To include them in an Internal Bulletin is therefore both patronising to the membership, and ironic given the first author’s insistence that as a party we are ‘lost in secrets’.

There is no ‘secret’ to winning over comrades to your arguments, whether factional or political; to do so you must provide the evidence to convince them.

Postscript:
The above article was written before the leaking of Simon, Viv and Rita’s article to the Socialist Unity website on October 30th. The ‘uncensored’ version of the article provided no more factual evidence than the anonymised copy edited by the National Secretary and included in the Internal Bulletin.

Regrettably, what it did include were the names of those accused by the authors of committing unforgivable actions in supposedly harassing someone who was taking a rape complaint to the DC.

I will not indulge in gossip-mongering in speculating (without evidence!) as to how, for a second time, our Internal Bulletin documents have been made available to Socialist Unity.

What I can say for sure however, is that the names of those Simon, Viv and Rita allege to have harassed a complainant in a serious Disputes Committee case are now on the internet for anyone who wants to read them.

These Comrades have livelihoods of their own, and in implicating them in the harassment of a rape victim in an article that has been circulated amongst the general public Simon, Viv and Rita have subjected them to a much greater harassment than anything that was supposedly done to them.

I do not object to Comrades’ names being circulated in the public domain because we in the SWP are a ‘nothing to see here’ cult.

My objections are founded in my belief that it is simply immoral to use your former standing as representatives in a Disputes Committee case as license to name Comrades in accusing them of unpardonable trespasses in any medium – especially under the auspices that your former positions of trust entitle you to do so without providing evidence.

Opportunists and sectarians will doubtless use Simon, Viv and Rita’s document as a slur on the Comrades named, regardless of whether or not the accused will be able to exonerate themselves in the future. As such, it can only be argued that the fact that their names have been shared amongst a wider (and potentially hostile) audience than those who will be able to hear their interpretations of events could cause untold damage both to the Comrades named and the Party of which they are members.

Making unfounded claims in an IB article cannot, therefore, be justified under the pretense that it champions W’s cause in trying to achieve closure over the damaging experiences she underwent as a result of the shortcomings of the original DC case, or that it helps the Party to move forward at a crucial time in its history. Quite the opposite.

The authors will of course insist that it was not their intention to make these names public. In light of this, Comrades must then ask themselves the question- what was the authors’ intention in making unfounded claims, even if their intended audience was only made up of Party Comrades?

Again, I will conclude this Post-script by reiterating the point I made in reference to Jonathan’s article.

If the authors have proof that their claims occurred, they must reveal them. If they haven’t, their claims simply shouldn’t be considered as part of the internal procedures of a revolutionary Party, even in a period as fraught as this one.
UNITED FRONTS, CAMPAIGNS AND PARTY BUILDING

Pete (Bristol South)

Steering a path which combines campaigning activity with party building is an ongoing debate within any branch and district of the party. The term United Front is frequently bandied about with reference to all sorts of campaigning activity undertaken by the party. I think that it will reduce confusion in debates about such activity if we are clear about the precise nature of united fronts. This is not to negate other forms of campaigning, but I hope this will clarify some of the parameters of the discussion.

United Fronts

The classic united front is one where revolutionaries work with reformist organisations, in action, around a particular limited issue. The intention is to gain influence over large sections of the working class and to present revolutionary ideas as an alternative to the ‘common sense’ ideas of reformism.

This depends on the existence of reformist organisations with a mass base within the working class. The SPD in Germany before and after WW1 is a classic case. The Labour Party in the 1950 had a membership in the millions, and although it never had an explicitly Socialist programme, there were very many democratic socialists within it, who believed that capitalism could be gradually abolished through ever greater redistribution of wealth and nationalisation of industry. The rest believed in making capitalism more humane through reform.

The current Labour Party with less than 160,000 members, many of whom are councillors, and many more have given up any hope of real change or improvement, is far from the same beast.

The classic united front was argued by Trotsky in relation to opposing the rise of the Nazis in Germany and Fascism more generally. This was a particularly sharp argument as the Communist Party had taken a position in Germany that the SPD was a greater threat to the workers movement than the Nazis. Trotsky believed that a united resistance to the Nazis by the rank and file members of the Communist Party and the SPD could stop Hitler. It is one of the tragedies of history that the ultra-leftism of the CP contributed to the failure of the German left in the 1930s.

The key aspect of united fronts is activity. It must have a clear objective on which both reformists and revolutionaries can agree. Opposition to fascism is an obvious example. But there must also be some level of agreement on method. The Anti-Nazi league of the 1970s argued for confrontation rather than mere ideological opposition. This meant mass protests to stop the Nazis taking control of the streets, rather than organising protests miles away from where the Nazis marched. This caused tension with the reformist organisations but many rank and file members of the Labour Party and unions followed our lead on this. However, we opposed small group or individual confrontation with Nazis, which was terms squadiism, since it played into the hands of the Nazis and alienated some of the mass support which the ANL was gaining.

During the Stop the War Campaign, the Labour leadership had become Neo-Liberal and there was much resentment at this from former rank and file members of the Labour Party and in the unions. Thus a mass of people with reformist ideas, but no organised leadership of that tendency, found a specific, limited issue on which they could campaign with revolutionaries. Given the membership within the reformist left, revolutionaries (ourselves) could play a disproportionate role of leadership and strategy. The scale of a whole series of demos prior to the invasion of Iraq is testimony to the effectiveness of our intervention alongside others. Although it was necessary to adapt quickly to the potential of this movement, the suspension of much branch and party organisation in the period cost us very dearly.

Where are we now? The only organisations with which we can have a classic united front are the unions. The pensions dispute a couple of years ago, the NHS protest on the 29th September, and the recent teachers strike were classic united fronts in three respects:

1) There was a specific objective on which reformists and revolutionaries could agree.
2) There was a specific form of action, the strike or demo.
3) At the grass roots level revolutionaries often (but not exclusively) took the lead and gained influence over many workers who had essentially reformist ideas.

The problem in all of these cases was that the union bureaucracies were capable of demobilising the action and revolutionaries didn’t have the influence to continue without them (as we sometimes could in the 1970s). Having the ability to resist such sell outs depends on the size of the revolutionary organisation and its level of implantation in the movement.

Campaigns

In most campaigns, we are not working with organised forces of the reformist left, even when particular union branches or Labour Party branches support, they are frequently unable to mobilise significant numbers of people in activity from amongst their own number.

Campaigns like the Bedroom Tax campaign depend upon revolutionaries to create the activity which draws in individuals who are angry about the particular issue and/or are disgruntled with the Labour Party and the lack of resistance to austerity. It is also often easier to call meetings than to engage people in activity. After a recent Peoples Assembly meeting of over 300 in Bristol, an activity in the City centre called by the Peoples Assembly attracted two SWP members and one ex-Labour party member! Clearly some activities, including those of the Peoples Assembly will attract significant numbers and we should ensure that we respond appropriately. But however good a meeting, however broad the platform (although it should be broad) a united front requires involving a wide range of people with reformist ideas in activity alongside revolutionaries. We should assess campaigns on the basis of how many people we, or other organisations, can mobilise.

This does not mean that we shouldn’t launch campaigns which we hope will turn into united front type operations, but we should be honest about them, and recognise that the ‘pump priming’ of comrades initiating campaigns can sometimes turn into a form of substitutionism where SWP members substitute themselves for a real campaign, failing to involve significant numbers outside our ranks and where we hide our politics in the hope that others will become involved. We should always be open to campaigns initiated, and organised by others who may draw in significant numbers.

Every Saturday we campaign against Zero hours, NHS privatisation, or whatever else on our paper sales. It is decades since anyone challenged our right e.g. to campaign for the NHS because we are not health workers.

People expect socialists to campaign and to sell their paper, and they will buy the paper in good numbers, despite disagreeing with our belief in the need for revolution, although some will be interested and become involved in the party.

The point of campaigning under another banner is that it facilitates the involvement of a significant number of people from outside of our ranks (and I don’t mean a small number of local sectarian). Within these campaigns we should always be clear about our SWP affiliation (no one is shocked when we say so).

We should sell the paper to the other activists, many will buy one. It is a very good paper!!! It is not unusual for the comrades most involved in a campaign to represent the campaign rather than the Party (as a founder member and secretary of Bristol Socialist Alliance I understand the problem) but we must find ways to assert our politics within these organisations. We must always carry the paper with us and offer it to people after meetings.
Party organisation
The key to party building is clarity, visibility and consistency. We must be clear that whilst we campaign over particular issues, we do not believe that the problems faced by working people can be solved within capitalism.
Taking the wealth and potential of the world for ordinary people is not optional but necessary. We must be visible, on the streets, campaigning with Socialist Worker, in campaigns where we work with others, in our workplaces. We must be a consistent pole of attraction with a weekly branch meeting which is advertised and has a political introduction and discussion followed by a serious discussion of local activities and campaigns, not just a list of events.
In initiating and supporting campaigns we must not drop our politics in order to become more acceptable. There will always be a tension between revolutionaries and the prevailing ideas. Part of our job is to win people to our ideas.
We must not do campaign activity at the expense of paper sales, we must do both. We must not drop branch meetings in order to attend campaign meetings, we must do both.
Of course there are occasions when we must adjust when and where we do things, but it is all too easy to hide the paper, to cancel sales, to go to a bigger campaign meeting and drop the branch meeting.
An occasional adjustment can become a habit and can lead to liquidationism, as happened in the aftermath of the big Stop the War Demo. We should also avoid the idea that we use SW as a form of abstract propaganda which we only sell to a few sectarian or ex-members who agree with us 90% already.
Rather, we should be using petitions etc to connect with the issues of the day on the streets. This is the difference between selling 4 or 5 papers and 15 – 25. This has been 90% already.
Revolutionaries should always look to work with wider layers of the movement, but not at the expense of building the organisation. Abstaining from the movement would be disastrous, but so too, would dissolving into it.

defend worker’s revolution and struggles. To that end, a revolutionary party has to engage with and so be affected by circumstances as they are under capitalism – in order to change them. No one yet has ever so much as lifted a wardrobe up a staircase without having to get hold of it and stoo p a little out of shape.

Without that end – of engaging with the world and attempting to act together to change it – there is no problem whatever in abstract endless discussion and intellectual semantics. There is no problem with quoting out of context, ignoring evidence, playing on the multiple meaning of words, personality assassinations, rumour-mongering etc. as these are an end in themselves if all you care about is winning an argument and proving a point.
If you are not bothered about engaging with the world or don’t believe that collective action is the only way to effect ively do this – then why not just carry on chatting? There are plenty of organisations who organize thus although they haven’t achieved much. They are probably very comfortable places to be and to intellec tualise within as nothing anybody says matters that much as there are no organisational conclusions – nothing to be done – (in answer to Lenin’s question.) – let’s just carry on the gossip.
For the years I’ve been in the party – since 1985- there’s always been the tradition of comradeship – as distinct from friendship – (although some comrades do blur into friendships and other relationships despite all the pressures of being a Red)
The concept of comradeship is important as it means we can have heated arguments about ideas and practice without falling into accusation and counter-accusation or personality assassination or take disagreement as a personal attack.
We don’t have to recruit or win people to our position by subterfuge – because winning the argument and being voted Intellect of the Year isn’t the point- getting it right – between us – so we can act effectively and together, is the point. So we do have to limit the length of time for a discussion and then go for a vote in order to be able to try the decision out in practice and revisit it – otherwise the discussion – if not tried out in practice can just become an exercise in words- in the best traditions of bourgeois thought as they have no interest in changing reality.
Winning the argument is subordinate to getting it right – as in factually correct and appropriate to current conditions – which are always changing – in order to intervene in practice and get it right. This is how the party functions and has functioned.
Take away that end and there is no reason not to go into endless rounds of argument and, shamefully, to use debating techniques worthy of any bourgeois courtroom in order to defeat the ‘opposition’. These techniques – honed in Public School debating societies and used by politicians and barristers (particularly politicians who used to be barristers) include weapons like: quoting out of context – where anything someone said or did can have its meaning twisted; ignoring evidence or suppressing evidence; emphasising repetitions and playing on the multiple meaning of words, personality assassinations, rumour-mongering etc. as these are an end in themselves if all you care about is winning an argument and proving a point.
We have always argued in the SWP – in order to get it as right as we can in the world – when we in it – and then where points, prove ourselves mighty intellects, or win a case for our legal company’s prestige and profit. The stakes are far higher than that.
Otherwise we could be named the Per petually Perfecting Party or similar as we sought to just expel or distance ourselves from the world we are trying to change and the spectrum of ideas it throws up.
We could just perpetually denounce each other instead of engaging with disagreements or relating to the rest of the world – most of which is uncomfortable non-revolutionary. It might even be fun and less risky in the short term of one lifetime- but I don’t think it would make much history.
Instead of engaging with it and all the ideas and arguments and contradictions and seeking to both learn from them and to challenge them in an ongoing process – the purpose of which being to intervene effectively and forward the interests of our class most effectively by acting collectively – we could just turn inwards and try to iron out every imperfection in each other as an end in itself – with no end in sight except more of the same.
The faction (Save our party) hardly mention our interventions, our contact with reality- the evidence - in their bulletins / motions. The paper, SW, is a product of the SWP and in particular its leadership – a leadership for which the rest of us do vote – they have not forced their way into being leaders – a point which seems to miss some folk completely.
Yet, as evidence that the leadership and the party are not the twisted self-seeking corrupt inept tyrants the Faction seems to think, the paper is completely ignored in their complaints. The faction seems to have no issues with the paper at all. Or what we do in interventions. The faction says nothing to suggest a way forward or constructive criticism or appraisal.
As the SW-paper is the main means by
which the SWP seeks to intervene in our class that the faction does not seem interested in intervention nor the paper seems odd. Maybe because this evidence does not suit their case – so it is left out of the picture they seek to paint? A courtroom trick we have all seen before. Without evidence, anything is true.

Obviously, we are all fighting for a world where hierarchy and leadership will be outdated concepts but we do not try to pre-empt that world or pretend that it is possible to do so this side socialism – or we are merely opening our throats to the ruling class’s well-organized teeth.

Anybody who thinks we can do without structure and leadership – a leadership which has to be accountable and effective and the structures of the party to ensure this – is in a fantasy safe-bubble where the powers of capitalism aren’t really all that bad. Leaking party documents to the media and calling for the police to be trusted would seem to indicate some of this naivety if not outrightrice.

Ideas, words, arguments, assertions and decisions – all need to be accountable to reality – to evidence – in order to mean anything at all. Or they can be twisted to mean anything at all. The faction wants to denounce and carry on to retributions to no clear purpose and as an, apparently, perpetual process. Perpetually perfecting – which is what the party does anyway by constantly reviewing what we do/have done – without having to draw up permanent lines of division and embitterment.

We are not in the business of trying to build an island of socialism ‘in the sea of capitalism – to expel or cut ourselves off from argument with ideas we do not accept . We don’t just try and recruit ‘good’ people who are already in agreement nor do we distance ourselves from battles which do not make the shape of real revolutionary struggles.

Nor do we resort to accusation, counter accusation and personality assassination instead of arguing and going through evidence and trying to get it right. Human as we all are, comrades as we all are and as we all are, living in, engaged with and affected by the ideas and contradictions of capitalism at all times.

Arguing with each other and challenging behaviour and ideas as well as people around us is a necessary part of building a revolutionary party able to do what is needed. Separating into permanent factions stops this happening as we then each belong to a position to defend and the factions then become the focus of discussion – instead of the tidal rhythms of other arguments and experiences we hopefully bring to the discussion from intervention, individual experience, understanding and problems.

Being in permanent factions also simplifies things and dangerously so. People who join with all sorts of ideas and disagreements – as I did – don’t need shunting into factions or recruiting into different parties within a party.

Every individual in the party carries a different experience, range of opinions and level of confidence – iron that out into factions? Won’t we each end up in our own faction? Isn’t it better to have the factions – to put across the differences – then draw a conclusion and get back to carrying on with the arguments with each other and intervening as per normal?

Ending factions does not end argument – it never has, it just ensures that all the arguments are had not just one or two as defined by the faction leaders. (Yes, they have leaders too – all movements do. Are they accountable?)

Another principle I’ve struggled with lately is the one that says: ‘The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class’. This has been proved time and again – there are no short-cuts. But we are an organized part of our class – we are not a separate part. We are hit by the same onslaught which blows where it pleases around us – we can organize and discuss and act – but we cannot magic class struggle out of the hat nor pretend we can substitute ourselves – yet – for the TU bureaucracy or wipe out the effects of years of defeat on our class.

We are not well enough rooted in our class to make a big enough difference. (If we spend all our time discussing internal fascinations we never will be)

The level of class struggle has been very low in GB for the past 30 years. This can be frustrating, disappointing and we can end up looking for alternative means to change the world and apparent short-cuts such as nationalism, fascination with parliamentary parties and celebrities, blaming the party and its leadership for the collapse in class struggle after 1979, and movements which do not depend on workplace action for their momentum – (which makes them both exciting and short-lived – and, again, disappointing – the Poll Tax was smashed but Council Tax not so, the anti-war movement helped to slow down but did not overturn our rulers’ war plans – capitalism continued).

Obviously we are a part of and support those struggles but we know they have to be connected to and led by organized workers to win outright or to generalize... All of these ‘shortcut options’ can be more appealing than selling papers – on streets, outside or inside workplaces, or going along to the Anti-bedroom Tax meetings, union meets or building workplace unions (especially when the Union leaders have done such a magnificient job of making unions seem useless).

Especially when people around us can be as disheartened as we are and not apparently able to emancipate anybody. Especially when the strength of our class, in GB, is not generally apparent. We can get tired of pointing elsewhere or of raising awareness of victories which are kept out of the media most people rely on.

But if Marxism as a theory is not tested everyday by contact with the struggle it can be reduced to an intellectual wordgame as an end in itself – which is what the perpetual attacks on the CC and the SWP seem to be. Some also seem to have illusions in the police and the state and the media; they seem to be surprised and hurt that the SWP is not popular with the establishment and seem eager to believe lies which are told by those institutions.

We can hardly emerge onto the stage of politics as the biggest party on the Left without becoming a hate-target of the establishment and all who support it.

The Labour party leadership used to be attacked - but not now that it poses no threat and says nothing that would upset the right. Were we ever going to grow and not be so attacked with the right using all their usual weapons against us?

Scargill, Benn and others have all been vilified and lied about in the media – were we ever not going to get a share if we were becoming big enough to be noticed?

These are all arguments to be had, to be sure – they always are – people don’t join the SWP and suddenly realise all there is to know about how capitalism works – but they are arguments which cannot be had across the lines drawn by the faction which seems hell-bent not on addressing the realities of capitalism and of organizing under it but on blaming the party leadership for all ills, setbacks and difficulties.

Other evidence is our record of expelling members for unacceptable behaviour – when this is proved – and our record which continues of intervention and fighting for the rights of the oppressed. All of this is ignored by the faction for no clear reason except it helps their case to ignore it. I don’t think courtroom wordgames and abstract arguments can help us in the struggle.

All branches need to ensure that all comrades are involved with, as far as their personal circumstances allow, in engaging with people outside our ranks – whether in paper sales and conversations with people, contact visiting, union building, as well as workplace sales, picket line visiting and taking part in campaigns as they arise in an attempt to help campaigns to grow and to connect them with workplaces – and vice versa - and that the people and questions and arguments from these interventions are given priority in Branch Meetings in order that Branches are hospitable to people outside our ranks and the complexity of reality rather than the simplified formulas of abstract debate which can become meaningless – or be twisted to mean anything and that people who agree or disagree are not expected to line up in this or that faction – outside of conference times.

The SWP is not perfect and hopefully never will be - because it is a living entity not a dead abstraction and it is the contact with our class which enables us to breathe and our ability to engage with each other in comradely debate, accountable to reality – not abstract mud-slinging and rumour, which makes us matter.
NO MORE SILENCES

Colin and Leo (Lewisham)

To a large extent we grew up in the SWP. Besides being seduced by the big politics – the possibility of linking together the miners strike, the fight against the first Iraq war, the battle against racism for example with a project of socialist revolution – the party helped to socialise us (and thousands of others).

In attending meetings, sales and spending time with other members we learnt how to speak and live as socialists. Our project for revolutionary change could not be divorced from how we behaved. When we spoke to each other it had to be in a language that reflected our fight against sexism and racism, and our wish to build a world free of oppression. Though our activity as members of the SWP is not ‘pre-figurative’, (we do not try to build socialism in our branch meetings or in the neighbourhoods where we live and in our workplaces) but we strive to behave like socialists everyday.

Our politics also has to dazzle and inspire, fit with the experiences of the world that we are struggling to change. As we learn to lead and act as conscious revolutionaries’ questions, concerns and doubts are inevitably raised.

But in the past in the name of the party, faithful to the organisation’s unity and politics we were frequently reluctant to speak up. When we were loudly and aggressively dismissed for raising concerns about a particular approach, or criticised a certain direction that we (rightly or wrongly) questioned, we grumbled amongst ourselves and hoped that an upturn in the class struggle would revive the party’s democratic culture, silence the hectoring, aggressive voices.

Our decision making forums too often had become internal rallies, extensions of our annual Marxism festival, seen as a way to educate and lecture party’s activists. Dissent was discouraged, when it was raised there was often a hurricane of dismissal, or an assertion that the comrade/s did not understand an issue, had failed to grasp our politics or ‘lost faith in the working class’!

The result of this hardening and stiffening of conferences and aggregates turned our democracy into a hollow shell. The effect could be felt through the party’s structures, and in our branches.

At its worse questions would not be asked, instead contributions were made that would repeat, as closely as possible, the speaker’s points. Endless positive accounts of our engagement meant that if your experiences did not follow the pattern you fell silent, or inactive.

Certain comrades would develop a reputation for ‘miserablist’, labelled ineffective by organisers and ostracised. Straight lines were drawn through districts and branches, between reliable activists, trusted cadre and those not entirely dependable.

This generated an atmosphere in the party that tolerated hectoring, aggressive positivity and a sense of our leadership beyond reproach, the individual members of the CC removed from open criticism. As the methods of practicing accountability – open and fraternal debate – did not meaningfully exist, the CC became avaried of party criticism and assumed an almost supra-human aura of invulnerability (or more often came to be seen as indispensable).

Many of us were silent, proud to be in a party that was clear politically and constantly brought our ideas into the realm of practice.

But the trickledown of the party’s mode of operating internally affected all of us: the CC, organisers, and branch members. At one time or another we all lowered our heads, shrank from raising doubts, questions or criticisms, or worse actually behaved in ways that were reprehensible – dismissing or denouncing such and such or so and so. Loyalty was what mattered, loudly announced commitment to the party’s leadership.

It is our opinion that it was from these corrupted habits and methods that the current crisis sprung. In the process we have seen both a repeat of the appalling patterns of denunciation of comrades who have attempted to speak out, as well as the most extreme and damaging example of where this manner of operating can lead. What started as bad habits has grown into, in the worst cases, appalling practices.

Although we are against casting all of the past into question (our entire theoretical heritage) we believe that if the major abuses in the party have hardened, there will not be the open and doubting environment which Marxist analysis needs to flourish.

Too often we have been presented (and silenced) with false choices, suggesting either the party is healthy and looks out, or we turn inwards and focus on divisive issues.

We believe that this is a dangerous dichotomy; rather, a healthy revolutionary organisation is constantly involved in a process of review and questioning, in order to make the internal atmosphere of the party vibrant and responsive to our successes and failures. There must be an equal premium placed on doubting and disagreeing in the party, as well as engagement with the class struggle.

If we don’t succeed in creating the right tussle of practice and internal involvement and review then the party will remain an unattractive political home to the thousands that we hope to attract.

Much has been written about accountability in the party, but this must be addressed through processes that operate in our largest decision making body. Conferences must cease to be rallies, and become forums for openly correcting mistakes. If the party does indeed make more ‘mistakes than you’ve had hot dinners’, as Cliff was fond of saying, then these need to be expressed and examined at the time.

The CC seem only prepared to accept that mistakes are made ‘historically’, which are then addressed through CC manoeuvres, or an internal CC coup (a sort of deflected democracy). The party must develop ways of allowing members to hold the leadership to account.

For too long we have been unprepared to challenge the functioning of the party. We believe that the party crisis expresses the particular and shameful circumstances that shook the DC, but the background to these problems have existed (and helped generate the current crisis) for much longer in the party. We must never return to the silences of the past, nor go back to a time when doubts, questions and criticism were regarded with hostility rather than welcomed as prerequisites to a vibrant revolutionary organisation.

‘NEITHER ONE NOR T’OTHER BUT SUMMAT ELSE’ – SOME KEY ISSUES

Mick (Barnsley) and Barry (Bradford)

Our industrial politics

The present period in the class struggle is one of intensifying volatility. Grangemouth has to be seen as an obvious low point but other recent conflagrations have been much more positive.

The account in IB2 of the magnificent victory at Hovis shows not only a victorious outcome but one where our comrades were able to make a real difference. Another similar event took place with the Tesco drivers again with our comrades in South Yorkshire through Unite Community Union showing how our intervention make the difference in helping to develop winning strategies utilising very basic trade union activities like effective picketing.

Neil D makes a quite scurrilous allegation that some of our members have more in common with the bankers than with ordinary workers presumably due to their so called gold plated pensions. We have to take issue with this but it does perhaps mask a very real problem.

The private sector, particularly manufacturing, has been a terrain which has been very difficult to work in as an industrial militant. There are obvious reasons why workers have been unwilling to fight attacks by the bosses. Principally these factors are economic, but after 84/85 the lack
of confidence in being able to win a conservative and bureaucratic trade union leadership and the anti trade union laws have been serious and permanent obstacles to getting action off the ground.

The bosses though are not completely in the ascendency. Just as we don’t have the recent experience of launching strikes they don’t have the experience of combating them. Developments like the increasing international nature of production greater productivity through increased mechanisation and ‘just in time’ methods make them vulnerable to industrial action giving our side more leverage workers of course don’t know their own power but again of course isn’t this always the case. In this context we require the greatest possible clarity on our strategic as well as tactical objectives.

In this context the most significant issue at the January conference was not the Disputes Committee report. It was the split down the middle in the Unite fraction, over support for Jerry Hicks or Len McCluskey in the General Secretary election. That half the fraction wanted to support McCluskey showed an alarming slippage in an understanding of our industrial politics. These are a unique feature of our political identity. Together with the theory of state capitalism, they make us different from any other Marxist organisation.

Our industrial politics were developed out of the experience of the Shop Steward’s movement of World War 1, through the rank and file movements of the 1930s and beyond, to our own experiences in the 1960s and 1970s. They are founded on the recognition that the self-emancipation of the working class is based on the workplace, and will be exercised through some form of workers’ committee.

This has been developed through a host of international experiences, notably the Milan workers’ councils of 1919-21, whose nature and potential were brilliantly analysed by Antonio Gramsci in the magazine Ordine Nuovo. Gramsci saw the councils not only as weapons of class struggle, but also as the ‘molecular cells’ of the new society. Our party has written about numerous other similar experiences in countless publications.

It follows that we have an ambivalent attitude towards the national structures of unions. We don’t see them as a core mechanism for the transformation of society, or even for the overthrow of the capitalist state. The Russian experience demonstrated that in a revolutionary situation even the most militant national union found it difficult to move beyond conceiving of itself as a body representing the immediate interests of its own members.

This means that (excepting any other fundamental political differences) we will always support a viable rank and file candidate against a candidate from the bureaucracy.

This is despite how left or progressive such a person may be on a range of issues.

We do not do this in a sectarian manner. We will work with such people on a range of issues where we are in agreement, and we support them against the right. We stand against them in elections to rally people to our fundamental ideas and objectives. Not to do so would generate confusion, and end up with us being dragged along behind these left officials. This could have cataclysmic consequences in a revolutionary situation.

It would have been pretty bad for us in the aftermath of Grangemouth. What would we have looked like, having cheered McCluskey only a few months before?

What really worries us is that the CC has not seemed (outwardly) to have been that terribly concerned about this. For some reason they seem to view politically nondescript London literati as a more serious threat to the party than a major split over our core politics in the Unite fraction. This is another reason why we urgently need yomn know what is going on between members of the CC. Which leads us on to….

The problem of the CC

Our version of Democratic Centralism and even the slate system of electing our Central Committee has been lauded as the reason why we manage to consistently punch above our weight.

We would argue that the main reason for us being able to do this is due to our politics developed over many years, and the membership which interprets and carries them through. We do this in every intervention, meeting argument and paper sale. In all of these and more ‘It’s the members who done it’.

What mechanism do we have for holding the Central Committee to account?

We have had it asserted that 5 members of the members of the current Central Committee placed the wellbeing of itself and in particular one admittedly crucial member of it above that of giving support and even a fair hearing to 2 women comrades accusing him of sexual misconduct and in so doing have thereby brought the party into disrepute.

We have yet to hear their side of events but if the accusations are well founded they should brought to account and not be allowed to hide behind the collective responsibility of the Central Committee and the omerta which this tends to engender.

In rejecting both sides of this internal dispute we feel that ‘Summat else’ should be put in place.

Charlie and Alex also in IB140 make this welcome comment

‘The 2009 democracy Commission which sought to review the SWP’s internal procedure and culture in the light of the respect crises, noted the unpreparedness of party structures for sharp tactical disagreements on the leadership. Alas the remedies it proposed were not sufficient to prevent the development of even more severe conflicts over the last year’.

Through a new Democracy Commission we should ensure that structures be put in place to see to it that we can hold the Central Committee to account. We can only make suggestions as to how to do that.

We still believe that replacing the slate system with individual elections would make for a more accountable body with some oversight by the National Committee together with CC candidates having to make an election statement.

This would mean that candidates would offer themselves for election primarily on their tactical and strategic understanding and objectives Otherwise we are in the situation of assuming that CC members have a specific set of ideas on issues, without being exactly sure that this is the case. This was obviously not true in the Respect crisis, and the CC’s low-key response to the Unite fraction split leads to concerns that it wasn’t exactly true there either.

On Thursday 31st October, workers at two of Oxford’s largest employers – the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University – were out on strike as part of a national dispute.

At Brookes, there were pickets on every gate across several campuses. The UCU is weak there, but Unison members ensure every entrance was covered. At the University of Oxford, where UCU has a very right-wing leadership, the lecturers’ picketing was concentrated on the admin building, but Unison and Unite members were to be seen at various colleges and institutes across the city centre.

It was not only the lecturers and support staff that were to be seen. Students from the Uni, Brookes and Ruskin College – where lecturers and support staff had not been called out, due to the anti-union laws – organised visits to the picket lines to express support, and, in the case of Ruskin students, to offer tea and coffee.

The culmination of the morning’s pickets was a rally in the Town Hall, called by all three unions. This was extremely well-attended, filling the Council Chamber to overflowing.

When the meeting was opened to the floor, several SWP members were among those who made contributions, and they were enthusiastically applauded.

The day’s most pleasant surprise came
directly after the meeting when, as we were all leaving, students marched past the entrance to the Town Hall, sweeping lecturers and support staff into a demo of around three hundred, which marched through the city centre and ended with an occupation of the lobby of Exam Schools.

The mood of the march was militant, and even revolutionary, with the students leading the chanting. The energy was inspiring, and university workers who had been up since 6am suddenly found themselves reinvigorated.

The politics were certainly not “movementist”, as the streets echoed to slogans such as “workers and students, unite and fight”, “cleaning workers and lecturers did not cause the deficit – bullshit, come off it, the enemy is profit” and, in an interesting variation, “They say cutback, we say strike back”. The students were clear about the key role of the working class and where the real power to resist lies.

At the Exam Schools, an impromptu meeting was held, with speaker after speaker making good, political points. A lecturer from the University, an SWP member, also spoke. As it was announced that a lecturer would speak the gathering burst into wild applause. The content of his speech was also enthusiastically received. It was clear that there was a considerable desire for a more coherent revolutionary politics than just what movementism has to offer.

The demonstration and occupation therefore shows that there is considerable potential for the SWP to build amongst Oxford students. Except, that is, for one small thing: the dispute that has been tearing our organisation apart for the last year.

The demonstration was largely organised by ex-members of the SWP, although the two surviving members of SWSS were also involved. Most of these ex-members are those we have lost as a result of the Disputes Committee decisions and the CC handling of the situation.

It could be argued that it doesn’t matter that they are ex-members, that the important thing is that the students have the politics and are prepared to take the initiative in support of workers in struggle. A demonstration organised by ex-members of the SWP who still have SWP politics might not be so different from one organised by current SWP members. There is, perhaps, some merit in this argument, but in the final analysis it is flawed. It ignores the fact that, in the absence of organisation, political understanding can drift or fade away. A spontaneous leadership and an ad-hoc organisation is no substitute for a revolutionary party.

A revolutionary party has to integrate the anger, the militancy, the combativity of the working class and its potential allies with Marxist theory. It can’t be just about working-class militancy - or anybody else’s militancy – and it can’t just be about theory. It has to be about both. And it has to be organised.

The situation on strike day encapsulates the current key problem of the SWP. We need to be able to relate to, and involve in the effort to build a revolutionary party, those like the students who organised and participated on the demonstration. It’s no good having the correct analysis without the correct people relating to it. But, as long we don’t resolve the problems that arose out of, what most people now seem to agree, were flawed Disputes Committee investigations, then we aren’t going to be able to relate to these students. As long as this situation continues there’s going to be a gulf between ourselves and forces we need to be bringing into the revolutionary project.

The potential exists in the real world for us to build. But as long as we don’t resolve these problems then we won’t be able to or at the very best will find almost insurmountable problems in our way.

That’s why strike day was both exhilarating and extremely frustrating.

UNITY AND RECONCILIATION – A VIEW FROM THE ‘MIDDLE’

John P (Oxford), Jon W (Essex)

The SWP is going through a protracted period of intense internal debate. In many branches across the country comrades have been involved in heated exchanges regarding their concerns for the future of our party.

The tensions raised by the differing opinions of various camps, has in some cases lead to the loss of comrades previously loyal to the SWP. At a time when the working class is facing the most vicious attack on its living standards for generations, it is vital that a solution is found as quickly as possible.

We feel that the polarisation of the opposing forces has led to a regrettable stalemate and entrenchment where reasonable debate has become impossible.

With this in mind, the intention of our proposal is to identify the common ground between the opposing views, and from this starting point to work together towards a future acceptable to all comrades within the party.

The ‘middle’ ground within the SWP, we believe, may actually represent a majority in the party and we feel that it is essential that our voice is heard.

We utterly abhor sexism and are concerned that alleged sexist behaviour by a leading member of the SWP did not lead to swifter action. This is even more poignant when seen in the light of the SWP’s revolutionary tradition in fighting against women’s oppression. Thus, we feel that an apology to the women involved and an honest accounting of the mistakes made are pivotal in order to move on from the current polarised positions. There is no shame in admitting errors and staring truth in the face. Only through the latter can we ensure the same mistakes are never repeated.

There has been much debate about the extent to which recent debates about the SWP’s handling of this disciplinary case reflect other underlying political differences within and outside the SWP, about the way forward for socialist politics. We do not disagree with this.

Unlike some, we are very optimistic about the potential of the current political period and feel that, far from workers having succumbed to neoliberalism, they are in fact enthusiastic to see some kind of fightback. This can be clearly demonstrated with the 50,000 strong NHS demonstration in Manchester on 29th September, the mass Black teachers, lecturers, fire fighters and postal workers struggles and the election campaigns of Jerry Hicks and Ian Bradley.

At such a time, we feel it would be a tragedy if the revolutionary left were to move away from its focus on the working class, which remains the only force with the power to truly challenge capitalism. In this respect, we feel that the current political direction of the SWP is generally correct, including the focus upon the Socialist Worker to build the party, the tactics of the UAF and the overall perspective of the united front, whether this means working with Labour politicians to fight the Nazis despite disagreeing with them on many other questions, or applauding Russell Brand’s attack on the capitalist system while criticising some of his attitudes towards women. Such an orientation is of the key reasons why in general the SWP, far from being a toxic brand, continues to have a huge resonance with workers as shown by the positive reception we have met in practically all forums we have taken part in...

We also believe that the dangers of moving away from a revolutionary orientation upon the working class are shown by the various divisions emerging within some of the initiatives recently held up as an alternative to the SWP, such as the People’s Assembly and Left Unity.

While we welcome these initiatives and indeed have very positive experiences of working within them, we also feel that the divisions within such initiatives are likely to increase, not lessen, since they reflect real political differences about the best way forward in the current period, and also a pessimism about the potential of the working class as a force for change. This makes the presence of revolutionary socialists within such initiatives more vital than ever.

But it is precisely because of this need to reestablish the importance of a focus on the working class that the SWP must show it...
has properly recognised past mistakes within its organisation. The current crisis within the SWP has led to hundreds of members leaving, many being students. This is an extremely regrettable loss.

As well as illustrating the damaging consequences from the fallout of the mishandling of the disciplinary case, it also demonstrates our failure as a party in developing a properly constructive but critical dialogue with many students. Nevertheless, we do not think our relationship with students is irreparably damaged. A serious rebuilding effort in universities is essential and we are glad to see this process already taking place.

We believe that there needs to be greater space for criticism and debate in the SWP, without the fear of ostracism and victimisation, as part of true democratic centralism. For instance, conference could decide to set up a party blog on the internet, which is over-seen by a democratically elected committee to ensure it is used responsibly.

This would not only encourage honest and comradely debate, but also increase the confidence of members in the party’s attitude to inner party democracy. It would also help to establish a genuine space for debate, rather than this proceeding via an ad hoc process, often accompanied by uncomradely and personalised accusations that only divide the movement and help the capitalist system we so abhor.

We must elect at conference a Central Committee, National Committee and Disputes Committee which can properly represent and acknowledge past mistakes. For example, delegates could arrive at a ‘Unity Slate’, comprising of representatives of opposing groups, in order to deliver a CC that is able to unite and lead the party. It is only through the synthesis of opposing views that a resolution to this impasse can be reached and unity can once again be established. However, this can only happen if comrades are open and honest about their political differences as to the way forward for the revolutionary movement, rather than trying to pretend that recent divisions in the SWP only concern the handling of the recent disciplinary case.

In order to overcome the entrenchment within the party, we believe that some of the demands put forth by the opposition (apology and accountability), should be taken extremely seriously, while maintaining the importance of continuing to build the SWP on a democratic centralist, interventionist and combat organisation footing.

We seek to once again establish the SWP at the vanguard of the struggle, where every comrade can have the confidence to fill their role as a tribune of the oppressed. This can only happen through a process of unity and reconciliation.

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**PERMANENT Factions?**

**READ MY Lips**

Simon (Huddersfield)

Let us be clear, no matter what your opinion of the current crisis in the party and its causes, no-one in the Rebuilding the Party faction is arguing for re-structuring the party to entrench ‘permanent factions’ in the party.

No-one in the Rebuilding the Party faction is supporting the idea that we should have factions which exist permanently, year after year, with their own permanent separate structures, their own permanent separate newsletters or bulletins, their own permanent separate pages in Socialist Worker, Socialist Review, or International Socialism. No-one in the Rebuilding the Party faction is arguing that we should elect members to our leading bodies as representatives of this or that ‘permanent faction’ or ‘platform’. So comrades, let no-one falsely claim or pretend otherwise. That is what ‘a regime of permanent factions’ would look like. They would exist for more than one year, perhaps indefinitely, and be ‘institutionalised’ into the party structures. No-one in the Rebuilding the Party faction is proposing this.

Over the last year there have been a number of factions. The Democratic Opposition was formed in the lead up to the January 2013 Conference, and then disbanded. The Democratic Centralism faction was also formed in the lead up to the January 2013 Conference and it also disbanded afterwards. The In Defence of Our Party faction (some 540 members) was formed in the lead up to the March 2013 Special Conference and was then disbanded. The Democratic Renewal faction also formed in the lead up to the March 2013 Special Conference and was then disbanded afterwards, when most of its members left en bloc. Despite serious and strenuous efforts to prevent it, many ex-members of the different factions left the party in the run-up to and in the aftermath of the Special Conference, as the crisis in the party continued to develop. Some joined the International Socialist Network or other left groups, others dropped out of politics altogether.

This does not show the existence of ‘a secret faction’ or a ‘permanent faction’, but shows rather that the developing and ongoing crisis in the party led to the formation of a number of different factions, by different members, at different times, as a response to internal events. In times of such a crisis, factions are inevitable, and should be seen as part of the process of the party addressing the crisis, not condemned as its cause.

In the run-up to the coming Conference, at the start of the current 3-month pre-Conference period, the Rebuilding the Party faction was launched, and now numbers more than 310 members. Some members of the Rebuilding the Party faction were members of a faction earlier in the year, but others did not join any of the previous factions.

So, let’s get it right: there has been a period of crisis in the party, which has been marked by the formation of a number of different factions in response. All this shows is that there has been a period of ongoing factionalism, caused by an ongoing crisis in the party. It does not show the existence of a ‘permanent faction’. Moreover, this period of factionalism is not the cause of the crisis in the party. That crisis has not been caused by the actions of some ‘permanent faction’ popping up at various times under various different names.

Rather, this period of factionalism has itself been caused by the growing crisis in the party. Some people need to turn their telephones round the other way. All talk of ‘the faction’ having existed for all of 2013 or even longer reflects ignorance of the facts, or a convenient and wilful distortion of them.

You should ask yourself why people are peddling this myth. I suggest that they want to do two things: one, to divert attention from the part they themselves have played in generating the party crisis; and two, to shift the blame for the crisis onto those who want to hold them to account for the role they have played.

In fact, the charge of ‘permanent’ factionalism should be ‘returned to sender’: there has indeed been a ‘permanent faction’ in the party for a number of years, and it has been made up of those who have organised to defend MS at any and all costs, and by any means. They are the true ‘secret faction’, a network in the party which to this day remains active but undeclared. Five of these ‘permanent factionalists’ are on the current Central Committee.

The party constitution: a convenient myth

Whatever any individuals in the party might think about whether the party should have ‘permanent’ or ‘institutionalised’ factions, the Rebuilding the Party faction as a group is not proposing that.

Of course, earlier in the year, before the Special Conference, a faction did organise ‘outside of the usual 3-month ‘pre-Conference period’. But this fact is not evidence to show that it is a ‘permanent faction’. Nor is it evidence to show that members of that faction are in favour of ‘permanent factions’.

The right to form a faction on a temporary basis, at any time of the year, in response to a wrong decision being made by a leading body of the party, is simply not the same as the right to form ‘permanent factions’. People need to clean out their ears, start thinking straight and think clearly about this.
The Central Committee’s all-encompassing ‘loyalty test’ motion that was carried by the Special Conference states that “some comrades decided to form a faction specifically around the Disputes Committee case” and used “a spurious interpretation of the party constitution represented a break with our traditions.”

But on the contrary, what was quite spurious, was the position of the Central Committee on this question. The In Defense Of Our Party faction quoted the SWP constitution of the time, which stated quite clearly:

If a group of party members disagrees with a specific party policy, or a decision taken by a leading committee of the party, they may form a faction by producing a joint statement signed by at least 30 members of the party.

And it goes on to say:

Debate continues until the party at a Special or Annual Conference reaches a decision on the disputed question. Permanent or secret factions are not allowed.

There is no mention here of ‘only within the 3-month pre-Conference period’. That is why it refers to the question of having a Special Conference to resolve the disputed question. If this was not the case then the Constitution would not have made any reference to a Special Conference at all, as all issues would have been resolved by the Annual Conference alone.

To rule, as the March Special Conference did, that the party can only ever allow a faction to form inside of that 3-month pre-Conference period leading up to the annual Conference, was a serious mistake. It was a move designed specifically to undermine opposition to the Central Committee and was based on its own convenient but “spurious interpretation” of what the Constitution should have said. That is why the Constitution was changed.

Did those who wrote the original pre-March 2013 Constitution make a mistake? Did they really mean this rule should be applied for just three months of the year? No. And here’s why: the party needs to respond to a serious crisis within it or a dispute over politics in a timely way.

The class struggle can move very fast comrades, and we cannot delay addressing important crises in the party until the next ‘pre-Conference period’. History will not be so obliging as to wait patiently while we do. To rule that we all must ‘wait for October’ until we can address a crisis or major dispute in the party when it occurs inconveniently in one of the other 9 months of the year is an example of crass bureaucratic idiocy.

If the party makes a serious mistake, a mistake which causes a serious crisis for the party, should we just let everything fester until the next pre-Conferences period? No. That is indeed exactly why the Central Committee called the March Special Conference. But let us be clear, comrades, without the In Defense of Our Party faction using its right under the then Constitution, we would not have had that Special Conference.

The change made to the SWP Constitution at the Special Conference in March 2013 should be reversed. That change was carried by a ‘loyal majority’ of delegates who were who were mobilised to ‘defend the party from attack’ and rallied to the CC’s side.

This change to outlaw the formation of factions outside of the narrow 3-month ‘pre-Conference Period’ was a retrograde step. It was a change that was made for convenience because it suited the purpose of the CC at the time in its attempt to clamp down on dissent. It was based solely on this rationale, no matter how much the CC invoked the party’s ‘tradition’ to justify it.

The Constitution now reads:

(10) Factions
If a group of party members disagrees with a specific party policy, or a decision taken by a leading committee of the party, they may form a faction during a pre-conference period by producing a joint statement signed by at least 30 members of the party.

A faction will be given reasonable facilities to argue its point of view and distribute its documents. These must be circulated through the National Office, to ensure that all members have the chance to consider them.

Debate then continues until the party at a Special or Annual Conference reaches a decision on the disputed question. Permanent or secret factions are not allowed.

The long-standing provisions of the SWP Constitution up to this point were that factions could be formed by 30 members in response to a decision of any national body of the party. Under the pre-March 2013 Constitution, such a faction would be dissolved after the issue over which it was formed had been decided at a Special or Annual Conference.

The SWP Constitution should now be changed to read:

(10) Factions
If a group of party members disagrees with a specific party policy, or a decision taken by a leading committee of the party (e.g. the Central Committee, National Committee, Party Council), they may form a faction by producing a joint statement signed by at least 30 members of the party.

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The case of the snail in the Ginger Beer Bottle: A reply to Scylla and Charybdis

Mikhi! (Bury & Prestwich)

Paul provides a careful and interesting analysis of many of the material forces that are currently tugging on our party, but what about the rudder? A more complete analysis of the dangers needs to examine the subjective as well as the objective and to do that we need to look at the question of leadership, and in particular the conduct of that leadership.

Gradually we are beginning to see the emergence by our leadership of an acceptance that errors, albeit unspecified, have been made, but alongside that admission a concomitant defence appears to be developing – that of hindsight. What is perfectly plain now was opaque. How should that
defence be judged?

We can usefully borrow the concept of “duty of care” developed over the years in civil law which says that you must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your neighbour. Put another way there is a positive or affirmative duty to protect a particular class of persons against a particular class of risks. Failure to take care risks a claim in negligence.

Following this analysis our party and its members are the CC’s neighbours; that it then has duty of care to every single member and to our party as a whole is I suggest an uncontroversial proposition; it is in them that we are asked to trust.

Similarly, that there has been harm cannot not be too contentious - the loss of 450 mostly young and energetic members. What could have happened had the time and effort that has fuelled the factional divisions been directed outside our party? This means to be significant, receipts to the appeal stand almost 50% lower than at the same time last year, and indeed may turn out to be more determinative than any amount of patient persuasion. These objective measurables appear to be not in dispute.

Subjectively harm can also be discerned, not only has the faction fight become the prism through which all is seen, yet more troubling is the emergence of a corrosive cynicism, why else are lengthy rules sets out its defence by invoking hindsight, members are the CC’s neighbours; that it was not as a matter of fact foreseen by the SWP before the DC had finished its hearings”. In those circumstances containment was always going to be impossible, and can only be considered as reckless. A CC selected at random by lottery from all members could not have fared worse.

The CC does not deny responsibility, an important admission, and that it would not, with the benefit of hindsight, address the issue in exactly the same way. But what of the positive duty to protect, and to lead? In each and every stage the leadership could have led, where we are today could also have been where we were in January, or even in November last.

Gross negligence is described in German civil law as the kind of situation which makes one clap one’s hand to one’s head and ask “How could it happen?” A clinical examination of the facts discloses that not only was the CC negligent but that its negligence was gross. The fundamentally flawed nature of the DC’s investigation means that there can be no closure for the individuals involved, an acquittal by a flawed process is no acquittal. All that can be said is that its findings are meaningless, they are unreliat, they neither acquit nor convict but even worse the fallout has left all tarnished. And of course there can be no rerun. With such failings come consequences, our leadership have to take responsibility.

Donoghue v Stevenson [1932] AC 562, also known as the case of the snail that spoiled the ginger beer, introduced the concept of negligence into Scottish and English law, it meant that people who breached their duty to their neighbours could be held to account.

Since then it has been possible for workers suffering from harm ranging from vibration white finger to injuries from falls at work to hold their employers to account for their breach of duty; to move on we need some accounting.

Those responsible, and there have to be some more than others, have to pay the price, they elect to lead, and have failed to lead, they have failed in the duty they owe us all, the principled position would be to refuse to put themselves forward for re-election, regrettably signs of such true leadership remain wholly absent.

Having failed us all so egregiously what faith should a reasonable person have in our current leadership’s capability to steer us safely between Scylla and Charybdis?

importantly the fact that there had been containment, inevitably it became to be seen as a “cover-up”.

The harm was yet further magnified by absence of any discernible plan to address circumstances were that containment breached. The apparent paralysis and absence of any plan B, suggests that it was not as a matter of fact foreseen by the CC that their efforts to prevent wider knowledge of the complaints would not be sustained and were not sustainable. Yet it is acknowledged that “details of the case had reached figures outside of and hostile to the SWP before the DC had finished its hearings”. In those circumstances containment was always going to be impossible, and can only be considered as reckless. A CC selected at random by lottery from all members could not have fared worse.

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The party has valuable resources on revolutionary theory and practice. As a left wing newspaper Online SW takes a lead when issues arise and the Review gives in depth analysis. We believe the articles can help to pressure media to take notice of a situation.

For marginalized people can feel like a breakthrough to international acknowledgement and solidarity which gives them greater confidence, despite the media’s (deliberate?) watering down of SW’s sharp arguments.

As far as we know The Review was one of the earliest and the only UK sources to give any serious coverage of the South Yemen revolution – we were followed by the Guardian and Al Jazeera.

The ideas and experience of the revolutionary party are spreading across borders to people who are hungry for ideas, and SW shows how the revolutions there challenge US imperialism’s favourite narrative of Yemen being backward and a terrorist hotbed.

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME
Pat (Euston)

A version of his article was first written in response to the disastrous practices adopted by the leadership and accepted by much of the cadre at the emergency conference last year.

This time round some of the more blatantly absurd undemocratic practices have been dropped, yet still fundamental problems remain. The strident call to arms and disciplinary measures that could be found in ‘Statement for our revolutionary party’ signed by a section of the cadre in IB 1 may have been the most dogmatic variant of this, but by no means the only one.

Having done a number of aggregates it has been sad to see longstanding comrades who in a rush to ‘defend the Party’ have played fast and loose with our politics on women’s oppression, and indeed see key figures in the leadership hide behind a smoke screen of the dangers of movementism rather than confront the key arguments around the dispute, or even the more unfortunate formulations of their own supporters.

SWP MAKES A DIFFERENCE INTERNATIONALLY
Mirfat and Alistair (Birmingham Handsworth)

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The ideas and experience of the revolutionary party are spreading across borders to people who are hungry for ideas, and SW shows how the revolutions there challenge US imperialism’s favourite narrative of Yemen being backward and a terrorist hotbed.
The failure of the leadership to acknowledge the need for an apology to the two women who suffered as a result of the flawed disciplinary procedures and the failure to honestly account for why things went wrong has had devastating affects on the Party. Instead of facing up to these problems the leadership have preferred hiding behind a collective outrage about ‘rule breaking’ and ‘permanent factions’ which in turn has discredited and severely damaged the whole notion of democratic centralism.

The article was first written when Alex Callinicos decided to use the ‘dispute’ as a political football arguing that those who thought the party had got the handling of the complaints against M wrong, were abandoning Leninism. The article is mine, it is not the faction’s, I’m sure there will be comrades within the faction who agree with all or bits of it, just as there will be those that don’t.

I wrote this in an attempt to correct a mechanical version of democratic centralism which many comrades adhered to with an alarming ferocity, whilst appearing to show very little understanding of the essence of the concept of revolutionary democracy.

For the first time in my life in the Party, comrades had begun hiding behind the constitution and applying a version of democratic centralism that was more in keeping with a parliamentary whips office then a living breathing version of revolutionary democracy. Certainly all of this was a far cry from the Party’s tradition.

As Duncan Hallas put it in Party and Class:

> The discipline that is certainly necessary in any serious organisation can arise in one of two ways. It can arise from a system of artificial unanimity enforced by edicts and prescriptions, a system that is counter-productive in a socialist group. Or it can arise from a common tradition and loyalty built on the basis of common work, mutual education and a realistic and responsible relationship to the spontaneous activities of workers.

In the course of our debates it seemed that for many comrades there were edicts and prescriptions that there was a formula; that; Democratic Centralism =

- A 3 month pre conference discussion period with factions permitted (or more accurately tolerated through gritted teeth)
- + CC elected by slate
- + voting ends the matter no matter how close the vote
- + no permanent factions +
- all matters decided for nine months, apart from ones the CC changes.

This last point was perhaps best encapsulated by a long standing comrades in one of the aggregates, whose response to a non-faction member saying that she felt the faction had ‘disciplined the CC’ responded by saying he was outraged by such a notion and that disciplining the CC was the job of conference, the logic being the leadership can only be challenged in the three month period leading up to it.

As Joseph C put it so well at Christmas conference, our version of Democratic Centralism was being interpreted as three months of democracy followed by nine months of centralism.

In part leading members must take some of the blame for this reductionist view. At our conference two years before Alex C implied it was anti-Leninist not to have a slate system for the CC election. This, as Alex well knows, is nonsense, the Bolsheviks had used a variety of electoral systems at different times.

At that time this was cause for concern but it was when the Disputes Committee row broke that the problem became really clear. Democratic Centralism was used in the crudest way possible. An incredibly tight vote had occurred that clearly divided the party deeply. It was not a vote about a time sensitive issue, or indeed an operational one, it was not who to vote for at an upcoming election, what attitude to take to an industrial dispute already under way, or a war about to break out.

In each of these situations the operational decision would have to be implemented no matter how close the vote… though the debate would surely have to continue if the vote was very close.

However this was a vote about the way in which the party had handled an internal matter relating to rape and sexual misconduct, it was even so close, and the two sides very polarised. There had to be an attempt to resolve this by bridging the gap between them, taking measures to see that such events in the future would not polarise the party in the same way, drawing the Party back together. (for my views on how this could have been done see ‘thoughts on a crisis’ pre-emergency conference IB)

Instead people’s interpretation of democratic centralism was such that the ‘losing’ side had to ‘unthink’ their thoughts, be loyal and defend what was for many indefensible. It was crudely mechanical and as we can see very counter-productive.

At the emergency Conference Alex Callinicos seemed to want to tag me with the term medium, because I had used a particular quote from Cliff throughout the aggregates.

So just to be clear I am not in any way trying to argue that any of the late comrades that I quote in this article would have been on my side or anybody else’s during our current dispute, to do so would be crass and stupid, I am merely trying to go back to first principals. So at the risk of becoming ‘Mystic Pat’ let me just remind comrades what Cliff said on the subject:

> “The successful working of democratic centralism on a national or international scale requires a high level of homogeneity in the party, a high level of consciousness, training and also trust between leaders, as well as between all members and the leadership.

> “If “staff” and “troops” are well integrated, discipline follows 99 per cent from conviction and only 1 per cent from mechanical obedience.” (Cliff, Lenin, Vol. IV (Pluto, 1979), p. 57.)

Never was such an interpretation more appropriate, never was it less adhered to.

What became clear to me was that problems around Democratic Centralism were not just those of a leadership manoeuvring (though they certainly were that), but also of a whole section of the cadre chanting the mantra Democratic Centralism, but failing to apply or understand it in any meaningful sense.

So how has this happened?

It is worth just taking a walk back through our history. For many comrades the essentials which I outlined above as ‘the democratic centralism formula’ have been the only ones they have known as party members, indeed for about 12 months of my membership this is how we have been organised internally.

Yet these particular forms of organising-slate election – 3 month discussion period-no permanent factions – were developed not out of some newly discovered ‘lost works of Lenin’ but out of a particular need to solve a particular problem at a particular time.

In the late sixties The IS was a very loose and almost ultra-democratic organisation. In 1968 immediately following, and in response to, Enoch Powell’s ‘rivers of blood’ speech in the IS put out a call for left unity. The main target for this call was the International Marxist Group (IMG), who were an orthodox Trotskyist (Fourth International) group who had enjoyed some success building out of Student unrest, and whose best known member was Student leader Tarig Ali. The IMG had many faults, but was considerably less sectarian and more serious than the rest of the Orthodox Trotskyist left.

Sadly the IMG ignored the call but one small sectarian group (mainly interested in entry work to recruit for their own organisation) did respond. This group in no way shared our politics but thought we offered fertile ground for their operations. At the time they joined the IS had already got one very dogmatic secret faction and so internal life was becoming fantastically disrupted by effectively two parasitic groupings working within the main group.

On top of all this the organisation then did suffer a serious split (it’s most serious until the current one) when a number of comrades including key figures (a former SW editor, a former national secretary- and a very prominent public speaker) formed a faction The IS Opposition (ISO) (nothing to do with the America ISO) and were ultimately expelled.

In order to deal with all these problems, the group needed to examine its internal life.

At the 1975 Conference It was decided that there would be a new streamlined
full time CC elected directly by conference (rather than as had been the case by the National committee). That it would be elected on a slate system. That factions would be allowed to be formed in a three month period before conference, but must dissolve afterwards, and let their differences rest.

Although this was the formal position, it has to be said that when serious divisions came along Women’s Voice, Flame, the ‘Downturn analysis’ although there were not formal factions, debates were carried out within the organisation for an extended period, with little regard by any side to formal rules about three months.

The rules had been partly designed to deal with mischief makers, and were not used as an excuse to outlaw genuine division.

However even allowing for this and understanding that necessary corrective measures had been taken, the new structures were not without their problems or indeed their critics… John Molyneux and Chris Harman to site but two who could hardly be described as malicious mischief makers.

(In John’s case those concerns pre-dated the 75 conference, and grew substantially down the years, leading to him unsuccessfully running for the CC in 2005 although apparently now separation by the Irish Sea and the green pastures of my native land seem to have soothed my old friend’s troubled mind, and instead seen him become a cheer leader for some of the more fanciful nonsense about movementism and so on coming from the CC.

However writing as long ago as 1975 John states:

‘After the 1973 conference it was decided that we had wasted enough time on internal debate and that now was the time to go out and build. For a while this worked well but gradually problems accumulated, and unfortunately the leadership’s habit of keeping their differences within a restricted circle persisted. The result was that issues… would fester… and then burst over the heads of an unsuspecting membership.

For some time we have ‘had a situation in which the membership learns of differences in strategy and approach among the [leadership] only through vague rumour and in which open debate takes place only after crucial decisions have been taken.

Four years later Chris Harman delivered an even more strident critique. Having found himself at loggerheads with the majority of the CC at the time following the ‘punk paper debate’ Harman wrote an article for the IB entitled ‘the sort of leadership we need’.

In it he raised serious concerns not just about the Leadership, but about the internal life of the party. After penning a strident attack on the failures of the CC of the day he went on to say;

Something more radical is needed than changing the composition of the CC: there has to be a change in the structures within which our leadership operates and, above all, in the way in which issues are argued out within the party.

He went on to explain the problems with the new structures

…We decided, in effect, to try to protect the organisation against internal and external centrifugal pressures by establishing a small, centralised leadership of six (and later 9 or 10) comrades. I was a supporter of this move. However, experience has shown that we were wrong to make the change to the new structure.

The change was based on the false premise that you can avoid the political pressures that develop in a period of difficulty for revolutionaries by restricting the number of comrades involved in the effective decision making of the organisation.

We reached the stage where we feared that any discussion outside a very small group of comrades at the Centre would lead to unnecessary rows, to a factional atmosphere in the organisation, to more splits and more losses.

Fear of ‘rocking the boat’ when times were difficult led us to downgrade the importance of discussion over national perspectives, strategy and tactics. We even convinced ourselves that it was our tight structure which had held us together during the downturn, not our correct politics

I myself forgot what I had written in Party and Class nearly ten years before:

“By being part of a (democratic centralist) organisation, workers and intellectuals alike are trained to assess their own concrete situation in accordance with the scientific socialist activity of thousands of others. “Discipline” means acceptance of the need to relate individual experience to the total theory and practice of the party.

“As such it is not opposed to, but a necessary prerequisite of the ability to make independent evaluations of concrete situations. That is why “discipline” for Lenin does not mean hiding differences which exist within the party, but rather exposing them to the light of day so as to argue them out. Only in this way can the mass of members make scientific evaluations…

“Without an organisational centralisation aimed at giving clarity and decisiveness to political differences, the independence of rank and file members was bound to be undermined. Ties of personal affection or deference to established leaders became more important than scientific, political evaluation.” (Harman’s emphasis, and a chillingly apposite last sentence).

One has to presume that Chris healed his differences with the leadership (in particular Cliff) as over a period of time his concerns receded, yet much of what he wrote has a resonance today, and indeed must surely have re-entered his thoughts during his quite scandalous marginalisation during the latter years of the German/Rees regime.

The problems Chris was highlighting were to be strengthened during the period of the downturn.

It would be a gross caricature to say all the SWP did in the downturn years was to read books and theorise. The Party threw everything in to the various disputes that emerged, notably the miners’ strike and Wapping.

However there is little doubt that, particularly as we began the adjustment to the new situation, the theoretical development of the organisation became a central feature of our work. Big branches covering quite wide geographical areas were encouraged.

The outside world was difficult –with the loss of struggle and as Cliff described it a period of defeats punctuated by disasters.

The retreat from revolutionary politics was real, the growth of left reformism (in particular Bennism) became enormously attractive to erstwhile revolutionaries, pulling much of the far left off course.

To stand up to this and preserve revolutionary Marxism, meetings on the history and traditions of the movement became central to our perspective.

The problem though was how did Democratic Centralism function in such circumstances? As a Party we had lost much of our independent thinking cadre, or rather they had lost their influence in the class.

The factory branches, the strong stewards committees and the rank and file leaders in the workplace were precisely the section of the party most damaged and weakened by the downturn in struggle.

Many lost their jobs, others were ground down by the defeats. It was no longer the feedback and pulls of and on shop stewards, the day to day struggles of workers, the waves of student unrest that were in the main informing the membership, and therefore creating the two way tension with the leadership which lies at the heart of Democratic Centralism.

After all who knew more about the Russian Revolution than ‘Cliff, The German Revolution than Harman, the Comintern than Halas.

Even if the odd individual developed a ‘heresy’ how could it be tested, and why would the membership trust ‘gobby would-be intellectual’ against the people who had lived and breathed this stuff all their adult lives. In other words who could teach the teachers?

This meant that a whole cadre was developed with a high level of political knowledge, but little experience of ‘challenging the leadership’. For them loyalty to the party, and loyalty to the leadership were to become almost synonymous.
In other words a democratic deficit was opening up. At the height of the downturn this didn’t have a huge practical impact, but as we began to try and re-emerge more fully into the struggles and movements outside it began to matter a lot. The problem was that having installed processes to deal with factionalism, and entryism, we left them intact as the party itself was facing the very different problems of the downturn era.

The concerns Molyneaux and Harman had raised were now beginning to have much more serious effect, and yet the structures were never less challenged.

In part it was easy to point to the rest of the left and say we are getting much more right than they are, and this was true, we have survived when much of the left has collapsed and this was true. These truths however did not mean there were not problems.

As the 90’s and 00’s progressed, the absence of challenge to the leadership during the downturn remained even when comrades day by day began to tell us that things weren’t right.

I recently found a letter I wrote to a friend at the time of the Rees/German crisis outlining what I saw as the problem:

‘Democracy-wise things were going badly wrong even before I left the CC. We lived in a cocooned fantasy land much of the time - and although many members thought so, none (or almost none) would tell us to our faces. Only after I came off the CC did people frankly tell me ‘Party Notes was a complete laughing stock’, that nobody believed the membership figures, that splitting branches again and again had caused huge problems and so on. I suddenly felt that being on the CC was a bit like being a priest in a room - nobody swears until you leave!

A leadership can’t lead properly in such circumstances, as it is not receiving proper information - NC’s, organisers meetings, conference etc were little more than echo chambers, where the members told the leadership what they wanted to hear, whilst privately despairing and complaining to one another, with many ultimately voting with their feet.

Initiatives could be launched as the main priority of one NC and two NCs later have vanished without any explanation, or more crucially without anyone daring to ask why.

Pre-conference perspectives for one year were rarely reviewed the next.

Comrades were told the party was mush-rooming in size whilst their branch meetings were getting smaller and smaller, yet hardly anyone spoke up.

Branches were split, and split again, with various formulas like the short lived ‘troika’ put in place to sustain them, and then for a period they were abandoned altogether.

When in the early noughties Molyneux, I and others wrote a letter to the CC/NC asking for membership and paper sale figures we were denounced at an NC by various CC and NC members… one NC member even going so far as to say we were ‘disgusting’.

Although from time to time real tensions and differences arose in the CC they were kept away from the membership. In public the CC were always united, the cadre always followed.

The organisers in turn were conduits for the CC’s wisdom. Far from feeding back the realities of their districts they told the CC what they/we (at the time) wanted to here. Chris Harman once described organisers meetings as being like a gathering of sales reps competing to bring the best news to head office.

In turn the cadre told the CC what they wanted to hear. In private there was growing unease, but in public all was sweetness and light, and if it wasn’t god help you. A style of debate and denunciation emerged that was often pure bullying, and a complete distortion of our tendency’s tradition.

Much of this distorted practice was acknowledged by three main proponents Rees, German, (and slightly later) Bamberry were removed (as Rees was) or removed themselves from the leadership, and in response to a collective exhalation of democratic rage the Democracy Commission was set up.

In preparation for the commission Chris Harman in reply to an IB article to Neil Davidson wrote the following:

Nevertheless, there has been and remains a real problem. It is not that comrades lack democratic rights in the abstract. As Neil recognises, conference is free to replace or change the composition of the CC every year, it chooses a new National Committee each year, and the National Committee can censure the CC if it the majority of its members want to. On top of this there are national delegate meetings at least twice a year ...

The problem is that our structures have not in practice encouraged people to participate actively in decision making. There has been a tendency for comrades to rely on the CC to make decisions. The result is precisely the vicious circle of people leaving decisions to the CC and CC members falling into the easy trap of assuming that only they have the capacity to make the decisions. This is what we have to deal with. We need a national leadership which is wider than just the full time members of the CC…

…We have to try to work out some structures better than the present ones. But that means confronting the practical difficulties as well as any attitudinal approaches that have developed in recent years.

That is why it seems to me that a conference-elected commission to make recommendations is a better way forward than three months of discussion in internal bulletins.

Hopefully such a commission could look at other experiences from the history of the movement and internationally, talk through the issues with long established lay members of the party, and suggest clear proposals (or alternative proposals) to be voted on.

That Commission did seek to genuinely get to grips with what had gone wrong and what could be done to ensure it couldn’t happen again. Yet Harman’s ‘better structure’ never appeared, and those 1970’s structures emerged from the other end almost completely intact, and as a result the problems Harman highlighted remained unresolved.

The commission did do some good work, yet sitting on it, It became clear that at a certain point the brakes were being applied. Rumours began to circulate of CC members telling ‘those in the know’ that it was a pain in the arse and a waste of time. The National Secretary of the time told an organisers meeting to ignore it.

It was a tragedy, because the whole Rees/German thread had not only exposed the bullying, hectoring etc. but something else every bit as profound. That a leadership that only gets told what it wants to hear ends up knowing very little.

I should say that at the time the row broke I was semi retired, semi detached (pretty demoralised) yet I knew once the Respect crisis broke that there was a huge rage about the mess and a really deep feeling that despite loyally standing behind Rees against Galloway, comrades felt Rees himself was greatly to blame, out of control and needed to be brought to account.

When at last a section of the CC decided to take him on I was told by a CC member absolutely central to that fight that he expected Rees/German to carry about 40 per cent of the conference. (Apparently at this point Rees/German had a similar estimation.) I fell about laughing and told him they’d be lucky to get 5 per cent.

How could it possibly be that someone as out of touch as me knew far more accurately the mood of the party then a key (and at the time, popular) figure on the CC? Indeed how could Rees be so blissfully ignorant of the huge antipathy that existed towards him? Clearly the Party’s democratic processes weren’t working.

So despite the Democracy Commission we were left with the old structures, no one questioning, no one challenging, and no one teaching the teachers. Yes there was a rebellion against a minority of the CC, but only because it was led by the majority.

Yes the nastier haranguing and bullying largely disappeared (until the current dispute) but the central problems remained, and when the current crisis hit, those problems became magnified. Faced with potential huge internal fractures following the outcome of the Disputes Committee hearing the CC fell back on the structures and the structures were found wanting.

So that the ‘not in front of the children’ aspect which Molyneaux and Harman had warned against decades earlier and which
the Democracy Commission explicitly recommended getting rid of was brought in to play.

Four CC members became increasingly unhappy about the decision, and the way the CC had responded to it, yet they were forbidden from saying so publicly. Even when an NC took place they were forbidden from raising their differences, and for a while it was even suggested that they would be breaking discipline if they spoke up at Conference, and two were punished for doing so by being removed from the CC slate.

(This problem has actually grown over the last year. The worst kept secret in the Party is that there has been a deep split within the CC between the majority and the ‘IDOOM’ minority of five members who have at every stage tried to block even the limited progress that has been made around the dispute, and who want this author and indeed all faction members expelled.

This fact is known not just by faction members, but also by many who had become identified with the ‘middle ground’ but who at the last moment have thrown their lot in with the CC, it’s supporters and a section of the very people they were identifying to us as a hard sectarian factional block).

When the conference decided (very narrowly) to endorse the Disputes Committee report a CC raised on members doing what they were told, told the membership to put up and shut up, and were clearly completely caught off guard when a large number of comrades decided not to do so.

In part I have no doubt the rebellion was greatly aided by the fact that for the first time in a long time we had recruited a large number of young members, and we were developing an impressive young cadre completely disinclined to blindly following orders. This was of course magnified by the nature of the issue itself.

Yet even then, there was no mechanism with which the leadership or the cadre were familiar with to pull us back from the brink. CC loyalists began shouting about ‘the constitution’ ‘loopholes’ ‘permanent factions’, a response a million miles from what Harman had said about Lenin’s discipline meaning exposing differences to the light of day so as to argue them out.

In the faction fight that followed Democratic Centralism, was distorted and abused in ways that were breath-taking, and yet still people quoted it ad-nauseam.

The six minute introduction and no summing up for the faction were defended as ‘what we have always done’. It wasn’t incidentally, it was a process dreamt up to carve up Rees/German et al, (completely unnecessarily as it happens as they would have been trounced in any event.) and then continued to hugely counter-productive effect against IDOOP.

In addition the way the delegations were carried out meant a room electing 20 delegations might be split 55%-45% but elected hundred per cent representation for the majority, which made for a hugely unrepresentative conference where D from Birmingham could whip the crowd up at the thought of getting rid of all us malcontents, apparently blissfully unaware that he was talking about almost half the active membership (of which more later).

This crude gerrymander though was defended on the incredibly stupid grounds that as the faction had argued about the closelessness of the vote at conference (or in other words how deeply the party was divided) this time there needed to be a clear vote, as if engineering a majority solved the problem of the deep division in the party. (Sadly going by the current aggregates this is a lesson largely unlearned).

At the end of it a layer of the pro CC side took their revenge by excluding and marginalising faction members at a local level.

Yet in reality the divisions remained deep, and the ‘rules’ remained an impediment to any on-going clarification or resolution. Many left, many more who didn’t felt they had to bend the rules out of all recognition in order to justify staying, some on the other side were anxious for the rules to be enforced and disciplinary action taken, (this despite the fact that they themselves were now also bending the rules and creating their unacknowledged secret faction).

Thankfully a majority on the CC was against such action (apart from the incredibly stupid suspension of four comrades which they had to lift within three days) recognising, as the enforcers apparently couldn’t, that to do so would be to leave the party; very small, very small, indeed once the joy of bloodletting died down, very demoralised.

That this would be the case should have been plainly obvious. The CC claimed that at the height of the greatest crisis our party had ever known 1000 members had turned up to aggregates (funnily enough the faction put the figure at about 1300).

There has been much talk of ‘punching above our weight’, which may be true, but if those figures are accurate (and it’s hard to see why they wouldn’t be) then even with the faction estimate ‘our weight’ would seem to be considerably lighter than most of us were led to believe. A departure of another three, four, or five hundred members would be a disaster.

At the heart of this potential disaster in my opinion lie two things; the handling of the dispute, and compounding it, this chillingly mechanical view of democratic centralism. It seems to me much of our cadre need to be won to a view of democratic centralism that sees them bringing their own experiences and views into the party, disagreeing without feelings of guilt or disloyalty, and understanding that a revolutionary party can only really function in an atmosphere of frank and open discussion and debate.

I know many will say that we already have this as we have ‘NC’s, Party Council’s Conference etc. Comrades though need to be brutally honest as to whether those bodies really perform such functions. Certainly as we have seen Harman didn’t think so at the time of the formation of the Democracy Commission.

CC’s are never infallible, they need to be challenged, they need to be honestly informed, that was true of CC’s with Cliff, Harman, Hallas on them and is surely even more true of a CC that has grown up without experiencing huge collisions and struggles, without being responsible for forging the theoretical bedrocks of our tendency, without the huge all round experience of those former comrades.

Therefore much of what I am arguing for is a cultural and political shift back to the true spirit of democratic centralism, however it seems to me that in order for that transformation, some practical changes have to follow.

The first question therefore has to be what are the immediate needs of an organisation of our size today? I think the first thing we have to do is be realistic about our size and the tasks that face us.

As already stated above, our active membership (before recent departures) would appear to be rather less than 1500. In these circumstances models that fitted the Bolsheviks on the eve of taking state power are clearly inappropriate.

So to, I would argue are models based on an expected surge in membership, in particular worker militant recruitment, at a time when the struggle appeared to be outward and upward, especially if those models were designed to combat particular problems as outlined above.

It is becoming depressingy unlikely that the leadership will act quickly enough or decisively enough to finally put the issue of the dispute behind us, but should they I believe we face a two-fold challenge as a party today; one to intervene effectively in the struggles, campaigns and movements that cross our paths as we continue to try and ‘punch above our weight’.

The other though is a longer term strategic look at where we are, where the class is, what the balance of class forces are. Emerging from that are wider issues around the united front, oppression today, the state of the student movement.

For the first we need the unity in action that is essential to any serious revolutionary organisation. For the second, we need a democratic openness that allows wide ranging discussions, exchanges of ideas, debates, not hindered by arbitrary time limits, or rules.

We have to break with the notion that all these questions were answered in the decades before many of today’s comrades joined. We have to break with the notion these comrades merely need to be ‘taught the line’. Again to quote Hallas:

The self-education of militants is impossible in an atmosphere of sterile orthodoxy. Self-reliance and confidence in one’s ideas are developed in the course of that genuine debate that takes place in an atmosphere where differences are freely and openly argued. The “monolithic party” is a Sta-
linist concept. Uniformity and democracy are mutually incompatible.

Of course these two elements are not that lopsided, we also crucially need democratic discussion for effective intervention, and ultimately we need to reach united (or majority voted) conclusions to theoretical questions.

Else we become headless chickens or debating societies. However three months can’t begin to deal with such strategic and theoretical renewal.

One can hear the gaps almost instantly ‘he wants permanent factions!’ I think in all the shouting about permanent factions two quite distinct phenomena became confused. So that the fate of the rest of the revolutionary left (in particular the French experience) kept being thrown up as an example of where the folly of permanent factions led.

I think it is important to be clear though what is meant by permanent factions in this context. Because what people were describing bore absolutely no relation to what was happening in the SWP.

On much of the rest of the Revolutionary left ‘permanent tendencies’ effectively meant parties within parties with their own set of politics, their own programmes, their own leadership, demanding their own portions of representation of the leadership. They have no desire to disband and become as one with the organisation.

What we were experiencing was quite different, a huge division within the organisation around a specific question, which a vote at conference had simply failed to resolve. The charge of ‘permanent faction’ came the moment a significant minority said they couldn’t merely accept that decision.

This was not the unity of a ‘pre-ordained tendency’, rather the coming together of a widely divergent group of comrades in opposition to what they thought was a terrible mistake. The problem was that the epithet ‘permanent faction’ was thrown around carelessly at comrades merely because they dared to say a specific question has not been settled in any kind of satisfactory way.

CC supporters knew the rules though, so if anyone went beyond the 3 month rule they were taking us down a road of permanent factions, in other words on the road to perdition.

Hence the talk of ‘constitutional loopholes’, the rush to get the emergency conference out of the way, the need to ‘enforce the rules’.

Here we saw how the rules not just completely hindered a process of clarification and hopeful reconciliation, but also mis-educated in a way that led to completely phoney and inappropriate parallels.

Ironically if anything this behaviour did give the opposition more to adhere to, a growing belief that there was more wrong with the party than a muddled up disputes procedure, and the political shortcomings that flowed from it.

The lesson of the whole affair was an important one. For ironically the best way to avoid permanent division along pre-set lines has to be to open up the party’s structures. We may not want or need permanent tendencies, but we do want on-going debate, discussion and discourse, and it is clear that at the present time the three month rule is as inappropriate to that process and our current needs as it may have been appropriate to deal with the entrism of the early seventies.

Therefore I think we need to clearly distinguish between outlawing permanent tendencies repeatedly going over the same old ground, and a genuine opening up of a free exchange of ideas, where comrades can come together freely, communicate freely, publish freely and debate freely without being made to feel they are doing something fundamentally undemocratic and un-Leninist.

Nor of course is it un-Leninist to challenge the slate system of electing the CC. I believe that system has been found wanting for some time, and in particular of late. There is, as I’ve already stated nothing inherently ‘Leninist about it’.

I believe the slate system has failed us in a number of ways. First of all since being introduced there have been precisely two challenges to the CC slate. John Molyneux in 2005 and the Christmas Conference’ election caused by a last minute manoeuvre by the CC majority. This year there will be a third.

Has meant that in 38 years we have had two contested elections, both won by the existing CC’s nominated slate. Thus effectively meaning the CC has become a self selecting body. This has in turn caused a number of problems.

The first is that if the only real way to get on to the CC is to enjoy the patronage of the current CC. That militates against independent thought, taking oppositional stances, being prepared to challenge positions of the existing leadership. Whilst there have been exceptions (one member of the current CC could be cited, the best route on to the CC seems to be ‘don’t rock the boat’ as another member of the current CC told one member he was trying to dissuade from joining the opposition.

Nor is it just those who are oppositional. When I was on the CC there was a long-standing organiser who was repeatedly overlooked when it came to the CC slate being nominated. He privately expressed bewilderment to me that others were leapfrogging him.

I suggested he try and get nominated by other comrades. He said to do so would be seen as disloyal and kill off any chance he had of eventually getting on, and he was probably right.

The problem is that is the election itself tells the CC very little. You are invited to vote for the slate or against it. Apart from moving another slate you have no way of registering that though you may think the CC has in general done a good job you are dissatisfaction with this particular area of work, or more particularly with the job the CC member responsible for that area is doing.

So if we look at the Respect crisis, the CC election the year before he was dumped failed to warn Rees that comrades were unhappy with what had happened, or to strengthen the rest of the CC’s hand in dealing with the problem.

My guess is a different election system would have seen a dramatic collapse in Rees’s vote, which would of either removed him or at the least would certainly have made it clear to him and the rest of the CC that the Party didn’t regard him as the right man for that area of work.

I therefore prefer a system of individual votes. The outgoing CC can also put forward a preferred list of candidates but each is voted on individually in a ballot (as with the NC currently).

I believe this would encourage more comrades to stand, and also serve as a very good guide to the CC as to whether a particular member’s work is failing to satisfy the membership.

The argument against this has always been that the ‘balance will be wrong on the CC’ or the election becomes a popularity poll.

Actually this is a non argument, a ‘we don’t trust democracy’ argument which merely shows a distrust of the membership to make serious decisions on anything other than a superficial level.

If the CC felt some of their list were less obvious candidates, or had particular talents the CC needs then they should fight for those candidates accordingly. If the membership thinks otherwise then so be it.

Furthermore I think we have to move away from a notion of a CC necessarily being of like minded comrades. For a leadership to function effectively there have to be tensions, arguments, different approaches, battles of will. As long as the membership are aware of any significant differences, so they can decide whether they are so great as to mean comrades should be removed.

The history of the Bolsheviks is one of constant battles within the leadership, right to the point of insurrection itself, where I think we can safely say the differences between Lenin and Trotsky on one side and Zinoviev and Kamenev on the other were of the most profound importance.

All four remained in the leadership, rather different to our own recent axing of two CC members whose removal was motivated by Alex Callinicos on the grounds of ‘nuanced differences’.

Furthermore in a period where the Party cannot easily put together a full time leadership forged in great struggle, huge ideological ferment, or life-long revolutionary experience it seems to me we need a larger body then currently exists. I also think that it should be made up not just of full timers but also comrades who currently work.

We need to bring more of the feel of the outside world into the leadership, more connection to current debates and arguments on the campuses and elsewhere. We need a
CC that is taking a wider feel of the Party’s pulse.
Will such changes in and of themselves solve all problems? Of course not, but I feel we need structural changes as a necessary counterweight to bad habits and bad education, and clearly show a commitment to the cultural change that the Democracy Commission failed to deliver.

I think the changes fit the needs of the Party today much better than our existing structures. I am also convinced that we must never again allow ‘a version’ of Democratic Centralism to remain unchanged, unchallenged and un-reviewed, as the world around us changes, as the tempo of struggle increases or slows down, as new arguments develop, and old certainties become dated, as the Party grows or shrinks.

In order to avoid that, it seems to me we have to go back to the very essence of Democratic Centralism as argued for in Party and Class. We have to understand that democracy in the building of centralism, but on the contrary the lifeblood of everything that makes the centralism function.

It can’t be dismissed as a hindrance to intervention and struggle. There is surely no more depressing site then seeing longstanding revolutionaries arguing that on-going democratic debate is an obstacle to intervening in the class struggle.

In one aggregate I did, a large number of comrades turned up who hadn’t been seen for some time, one was estimated to have not been at anything for five years. Now there may be deep-seated problems for the CC having to draw on inactive loyalists to outvote activists, but comrades turning up to meetings is something we should all welcome.

However when those comrades, who have had no part in any of the discussions (including the person who hadn’t turned up for 5 years) vote not to hear any more than 6 minutes from one side, and not to let that side sum up very serious alarm bells ring. I have no idea what you describe such a process as but it sure as hell ain’t the democratic centralism which to requote Hallas required ‘Self-reliance and confidence in one’s ideas… developed in the course of genuine debate that takes place in an atmosphere where differences are freely and openly argued.’

A Party that fails to fully discuss, debate and involve the membership is a not a party that is going to intervene effectively or correctly. Members must bring their experiences, insights, and the pressures of daily political life on them, into the party. Discussion must be informed by those experiences, insights and pressures.

In doing so they are bringing the experiences of the workplace, the campus, the campaign, back to the branch, the District, the NC the CC. They are forming the debates that are a pre-requisite to effective action and intervention. Debate is neither a luxury extra, or an annoying diversion… it certainly took up a huge amount of Lenin’s time in the Bolsheviks.

An extension of this democracy v struggle is an implied division of Labour that simply shouldn’t exist in a revolutionary party between those who ‘think’ and those who ‘do’. For us ideological struggle isn’t the property of academics, any more than class struggle is the exclusive property of manual workers.

We do not want a division of labour in our student work that sees the majority charging from activity to activity without a thought for theory, whilst an elite sit in libraries reading the weighty tomes of the movement.

Of course there is some division of labour- comrades have different strengths and weaknesses- but we are meant to be building a party of leaders, and the battle for ideas has to be as central to comrades political life as the day to day struggle.

Leninism faces a huge challenge in the 21st century, and one that it will fail if treated like a dead dogma. If however we take the central guiding spirit of Lenin’s vision of the party, and adapt it to the needs of today, tomorrow, democratic centralism can remain at the forefront of building for revolutionary change.

To achieve that it is necessary to understand that for the centralism of united action to really work, democracy, argument and discourse are essential. Comrades have to have faith that even if they have ended up on the losing side of an argument, the democratic structures they participated in are open honest and thorough, and that arguments can be revisited where necessary.

Such democracy can’t be restricted to three months, stamped on by constitutions, outlawed, by dictate, or ignored when it is hammering at the centralist gates.

If it is then all that’s left are orders and rules, 99 per cent discipline and one per cent conviction, and that’s a recipe for disaster and a negation of everything our tradition stands for.

**ENDING THE SECT MENTALITY**

Olly (Colchester)

For many of us who now find ourselves in opposition to the leadership, this is a new experience but also a painful one. Painful because I can still recall the excitement when I first joined. I felt that I was part of something bigger fighting for liberation and socialism, part of a revolutionary party.

But this past 10 months has seen many of the ‘delusions of grandeur’ I indulged myself in collapse as the organisation I joined collapses with it.

It’s common sense within the organisation to believe that we’re ‘the’ party and every other left group is in la la sect land, that’s why for example our publications rarely engage with the work of other groups but overload our own interventions.

It’s become increasingly clear over the recent period that the SWP is itself increasingly a sect like any other, characterised by its own narrow doctrine as a membership requirement and a leadership that is ultimately self perpetuating rather than a genuine leadership in the movement. The struggle for realignment and a party of the whole Marxist left is the only solution.

**Self-perpetuating**

The CC have offered no real leadership over this current crisis, students in my branch (Essex uni) faced petitions against them and hostility from everyone in their periphery as the rest of the movement on campus recoiled in horror at the shocking allegations about Delta and the CC’s collusion in protecting him.

Instead of listening rationally to concerns within the party and the movement, the CC have instead concocted various schemes and bureaucratic manoeuvres to push out anyone that questions them, invented slanders of ‘feminism’ and ‘autonomy’ were dished out to anyone with even the slightest concerns. At aggregates we had the opposition given six minutes and the CC given 24 with a right of reply.

We have an arbitrary cut off date for conference that seeks to exclude new student recruits; we’ve seen oppositionists purged from district committees at meetings they weren’t at by CC loyalists. At every turn the CC and forces loyal to it have acted like a sect more interested in defending ‘the line’ against other socialists rather than engaging with the left.

The greatest illustration of this during the recent ‘Delta’ fiasco has been some comrades betraying our politics on women’s oppression out of an apolitical loyalty to Delta and the clique around him. New allegations were in IB2 that certain DC members asked wholly inappropriate & reactionary questions in regards to the victims drinking and personal relationships, or allegations of disgraceful & cruel conduct by sections of Birmingham SWP in deliberately holding meetings in the cafe the first complainant worked at. This certainly isn’t our politics on oppression but sections of the party have simply swallowed it and put the sect and the leadership ahead of basic Marxist principles.

How has this happened? The lack of democratic culture and accountability within the organisation has ultimately created a mean cult of leadership. The latest twist and turns are swallowed without much questioning because years of a democratic deficit internally has ironed out (or at least superficially suppressed) dissenters and the possibility of a struggle between tendencies that would allow for a fuller debate.
Sect mentalities

The ‘delusion of grandeur’ that has afflicted our organisation mainly stems from the belief that we’re the party or at least the party in embryo and that all we really need to do is to recruit and win people to the SWP and the IS tradition through involvement in mass struggle.

The reality is that the SWP is not a ‘party’ in the real sense of the word rather a tendency within Marxism and the socialist movement. I’d argue that it’s not possible to build the mass revolutionary party we need purely from our own particular tendency (IS tradition). The nature of the socialist movement is that there are distinct theoretical and ideological differences within the parameters of Marxism so any genuine combat party will have to be able to contain the different currents that exist in the revolutionary movement. What makes that unity possible, principled and potentially so powerful is working out and agreeing a common programme.

On the firm basis of that programme there should be the right to conduct an open political struggle between the various tendencies or factions. Lenin said:

“Our party’s serious illness is the growing pains of a mass party. For there can be no mass party, no party of a class, without full clarity of essential shadings, without open struggle between various tendencies, without informing the masses as to which leaders and which organisations of the party are pursuing this or that line. Without this, a party worthy of the name cannot be built.” LCW vol.13, p.159.

Further to this, the quote also rightly articulates transparency as a requisite to unity. Differences within the leadership must always be known and communicated not just to members but to the class.

Transparency shouldn’t be a particularly controversial point, it was to all intents and purposes implied by the democracy commission in 2009. Unfortunately that remains unimplemented and instead the CC opts for a slightly bizarre form of collective cabinet responsibility – more akin to a bourgeois government than a revolutionary organisation- whereby they must present a united face to the membership at all times even when real divisions exist and one must resign to publicly disagree (as Hannah D & Ray M were forced to). This fundamentally is lying to the party and to the class. Any organisation that is able to hold within it different currents and tendencies must, of course, have those differences expressed within the leadership

What is regroupment?

‘Regroupment’ is something bandied about a lot especially in the context of left unity and articles in ISJ by Paul B & Alex C etc. have rightly stated the problems with of the broad party model and the way in which the question of the state and power are fudged.

We can see this in Greece with the prospect of Syriza entering into a bourgeois government which would only lead to capitulation to neo-liberalism & austerity but also for the revolutionaries within Syriza, demoralisation and cooption. In this piece I am not arguing for a nebulous ‘left regroupment’ or dissolving into broad left Syriza type party. That would be disastrous. No, what I am arguing for is Marxist regroupment around an agreed programme.

Of course, there are real and highly significant differences between different Marxist traditions. But disagreement should be seen as the opportunity for debate and education of all. After all, we all have areas where we can learn from each other. Does the IS tradition hold all the answers all the time? No. Marxists from outside our tradition may well have important contributions in a number of areas, for example, ecology, the human revolution, the history of Bolshevism, the nature of the Soviet Union, etc. So why can’t we be in an organisation with them as comrades where these debates on the Marxist left can be had?

Why is it impossible to create one pole of attraction to those coming into Marxist politics rather than the alphabet soup of sects that exist today? In the 1920s every serious revolutionary and worker militant was in the old CPGB. Where does a newly radicalised worker or student go to today for organisation? One of the sects? The need for a revolutionary party of the whole Marxist left has never been greater.

The situation today

The failure to achieve unity amongst those in the Leninist tradition and the constant cycle of splits that have been thrown up has meant that even through periods of high struggle we’ve come out without significant change and of course virtually no retention.

Added to this the increasing pull of ‘anti-party’ and autonomist sentiments have proved more appealing than the organised left that is probably more fractured and sectarian today than it has ever been with good activists scattered amongst the countless grouplets (of which we are one).

However, all is not necessarily lost. We’re seeing a number of developments on the left that are very promising. The appeal of ‘Left Unity’ has brought many together and what’s more, an interesting platform debate is emerging between those wanting to build a Syriza broad left reformist party (left party platform) and other factions (such as the Class Struggle Platform, the Socialist Platform and the Communist Platform) arguing that the new party must be an explicitly anticapitalist, socialist party that rejects participation in bourgeois government.

This is a key debate yet the SWP is on the sidelines refusing to even engage with Left Unity. Also, there are moves for a merger between the ISN (SWP members that left in March), ACI & Socialist Resistance with the aim of creating a ‘multi-tendency socialist party’, the terms upon which this is being engineered are dodgy and looking increasingly like a unity of the swamp around unclear politics, nevertheless its an important development on the left and the SWP shouldn’t be afraid of engaging with those comrades and arguing principled Marxists politics.

Concluding

We’ve all been through this painful crisis that has actually engulfed the entire left and set us back badly. There are few points in history where the left has been so fragmented and so weak as it is today.

In 1917, unity on solid revolutionary principles gave that party the stature of a genuine revolutionary party. We can all agree on the need for a Leninist party at the centre of struggle to provide organisation and intervention. A party capable of doing that has to be more than a sect for those of a particular tendency; it has to be a party of the whole revolutionary left based on a clear programme.

The requisites for building such a party entail rejecting many of the internal methods in the SWP and creating an environment where democratic centralism can be a reality rather than the increasingly bureaucratic centralism that characterises the SWP in the recent period. That means an honest leadership that doesn’t hide its differences with the party and class.

It means recognising ‘unity in action’ in the class struggle is different to artificially forcing a unity of perspective. It means lifting the absurd ban on even temporary factions outside the arbitrary ‘preconference period’ which serves only to gloss over and fudge differences rather than dealing with them. Most importantly it means accountability.

There are too many examples of the CC and its apparatus acting with impunity, for example the membership should have the right to know who the minority on the CC is that are said to be protecting Delta and cynically delaying the second DC hearing.

We need to hold these people to account for their disgraceful role if they recklessly pushed the party to breaking point through apolitical loyalty.

No organisation can function effectively in the class struggle if those elected to lead are subject to the most flimsy democratic procedures imaginable.

Democratisation is one of the key roads to the mass revolutionary party we need to fight the ruling class. Real democratic centralism and Marxist unity should be our aim if we’re to break out of the sect mentality we’re in.
WHAT A DIFFERENCE IT MAKES BEING IN A BRANCH AGAIN

Nina (Crewe/Stoke)

I am proud to have been involved in the SWP for most of my life. For the last 12 years I have lived in a small town where there has been no SWP branch and one other SWP member.

Over the years I felt politically isolated and out of touch, lost confidence and found it difficult to talk about revolutionary socialist ideas. I kept in touch through Marxism and other national and regional events but that wasn’t enough.

Over the last few months we have gained a new member in Crewe and have formed a branch with Stoke-on-Trent comrades. We aren’t having public meetings yet but we are working towards it through having regular educational branch meetings.

We are doing regular street paper sales and using Socialist Worker to engage and connect with people. Some people have started looking for us in town on Saturdays.

All these things are making a positive difference to how I feel in everything I do. I feel better placed to tackle things and more able to put my ideas across, and now feel I have more opportunities to discuss and put into practice these ideas with local comrades and the rest of the world. Thanks comrades.

HOW DO WE REGENERATE THE RANK AND FILE?

Ray (Hornsey & Wood Green)

We need an industrial strategy that understands the unevenness in the class and the fact that there is no obvious ‘vanguard’. This is not about seeking to reflect the unevenness but about facing up to reality and attempting to work out how we overcome the real problems we face. This strategy must focus on trying to relate to and organise resistance wherever possible.

It must also acknowledge the real weaknesses that do exist on our side and seek to address them. This piece will attempt to point a way forward by focussing on the following areas:

1. How ‘collectivity’ and class consciousness have been undermined by the combined impact of defeat, neoliberal offensive, new management techniques and ‘partnership’.

2. The renewed employers’ offensive opens up opportunities for resistance and to regenerate rank and file organisation.

3. Political trade unionism can be best introduced into our practice by relating the issues we face at work to the bigger political questions.

What’s significantly changed in the last three decades?

There is now a welcome debate in party publications about what has changed in the last three decades.

Neil Davidson describes some of the key changes. Following the employers offensive in the 80s we saw a period of consolidation where the commodification of more aspects of our lives increasingly undermined “collectivity”. Social democratic parties like the Labour Party adapted by embracing neoliberal ideas in what became known as the Third Way. Neil argues that this shift in the Labour Party and lower union membership led to a situation where Labour Party and trade union activists had less influence in working class communities and workplaces. This, and Third Way politics, meant Labour Party and union activists were less able to maintain reformist class consciousness. This change means revolutionaries trying to win people to our own politics can’t take acceptance of Old Labour values for granted.

The adoption of the neoliberal agenda by social democratic parties, which Neil terms ‘social neoliberalism’, has had a significant impact on the ideological terrain in British society. Where people believe ‘There Is No Alternative’ to neoliberalism (a view which became ‘common sense’ in much of the labour movement) they will feel less able to resist the cuts.

The neoliberal ideology was transmitted throughout the movement from the Labour Party via the Labour–union link. For example, a Labour anti-cuts slogan saying the Con-Dem cuts were “too fast and too deep” was used by Unite on the March 26th 2011 TUC demonstration.

However, within Unite there was significant resistance to this slogan and it was swiftly removed from Unite vests at future events. This example and the campaigns to defend the NHS are proof that these changes in the Labour Party undermine but can’t eliminate reformist consciousness which rests on a rejection of the symptoms of capitalism but an acceptance of the system itself. Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that the embracing of neoliberal ideas by Labour and the unions is significant in undermining left wing ideas within the movement.

The fact that Len McCluskey and Unite the union have launched the CLASS initiative is a recognition of this problem. McCluskey has repeatedly said that the aim of CLASS is to ‘raise consciousness’. A problem for revolutionaries is of course that McCluskey wants to raise a particular type of consciousness. He wants to rebuild the Labour left around Keynesian ideas. Such ideas are also shared by many of those to the left of Labour who are working with him in the People’s Assembly, which McCluskey also aims to use as part of this project. It’s important to recognise and relate to it, arguing for our own politics.

The ‘new workplace’ and ‘partnership’

Employers built on the all-out confrontations of the 80s by taking advantage of a weakened labour movement and gradually implementing further changes whose aim was to increase profitability and undermine union organisation.

With the structural changes to Capital, we have seen a recomposition of the working class. Alongside the contraction of manufacturing, privatisation of the public sector, the growth of non-manual work, the shift towards services and the expansion of self-employment we saw the development of what has been termed the ‘new workplace’.

The term ‘new workplace’ was used in the 90’s to describe concepts such as Human Resource Management (HRM), Total Quality Management (TQM), Employee Involvement (EI), Performance Related Pay (PRP) and Empowerment. Workers were redefined as employees, individuals and teams and definitely not as organised collectives with interests separate from the management.

Just-In-time (JIT), Continuous Improvement, individual and team objectives and targets, outsourcing, offshoring, multi-skilling, lean production etc. all became common in the 90’s. Workers became subject to a routine of management propaganda – ‘team briefs’, ‘mission statements’ etc. alongside these changes.

Within the trade union movement, business unionism sought to embrace ‘partnership’, the employers’ latest approach to subduing the unions. Many trade union leaders thought that they could engage in partnership as equal players. Martin Upchurch in his piece “What is happening in the contemporary workplace” describes how New Labour helped to prepare the way ideologically for this retreat:

“Behind the rhetoric of ‘stakeholderism’ and ‘mutual gains’, the experiment was designed to draw employees into collaborative productivity coalitions based on lean production methods, and where

the trade unions did become involved the net outcome was a form of business unionism. Ideologically Blair himself was influenced by Anthony Giddens and his ‘Third Way’ approach to societal consensus, expressed through concepts of a de-classed society and voluntary curbs on capital’s worst excesses. Trade unions and organised collective action had no particular place in this supposed nirvana, and Blair utilised his authority to encourage workplace collaboration and employee consultation (as an alternative to negotiation) as a result.” 40

Many reps accept the idea that we need a competitive and profitable business to survive. They view working with employers to achieve these goals under the guise of ‘partnership’ as their key focus.

This weakens the independence of activists and reps not just from the trade union bureaucracy but also from the employers themselves. In many cases, employers have used partnership arrangements to get stews to recommend labour intensifying measures.

Management encouraged workers to view themselves as ‘individual employees’ and used appraisals and Performance Related Pay (PRP) to convince workers they had an individual way to a better life. The idea that if you ‘played by the rules’, worked hard and demonstrated the correct attitude that you could have a career and progress through the business became common in the ‘new workplace’.

The ‘carrot’ of advancement was more than matched by the ‘stick’ of the fear of poor appraisals, zero pay rises or capability procedures which were all used to encourage competition and unpaid overtime. For many in lower skilled jobs the carrot wasn’t very visible at all. These techniques are now widespread across all sectors of the economy.

During this period, socialists tried to build in the social movements of the ‘political upturn’ but had little success in connecting them to effective industrial action in the workplace. Workers who supported the anti-war movement or environmental politics often opted out of confrontation at work through a sense of powerlessness.

This says less about workers being content with the system but more about a lack of confidence, the low level of class consciousness and the partnership era not offering a class struggle agenda. While few activists positively endorsed the ruling class agenda, they typically adopted a pragmatic approach and avoided ideological questions, substituting fatalism for active resistance. Marx describes this resignation thus – “the dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist”.

Throughout this period, strikes were at unprecedentedly low levels. While aspects of ‘new management techniques’ were contested, there was no clear challenge to the overall agenda of the ‘new workplace’. The combination of TQM, HRM, labour intensification techniques, the adoption of the ideology of team-working and the willingness to accept corporate goals over workers’ interests by union reps gave credence to the management agenda and did immense damage to workers consciousness and organisation.

The low levels of struggle were obviously key but these changes also helped undermine the independence and collective nature of workplace organisation and present barriers we must overcome to rebuild workplace organisation today.

Ruling class strategy - Make workers’ pay for the crisis

The current pay squeeze is the longest since Victorian times. It is widely recognised that an increasing number of workers can’t survive until the end of the month without benefits or loans to supplement their meagre income. The growing inequality is problematic even for many opponents of the labour movement. The rumblings from Labour leaders about encouraging employers to pay a ‘living wage’ are an acknowledgement of how bad things are for many working class families.

Michael Roberts, in ISJ 140 discusses how a part of the ruling class agenda is to “…shrink the welfare system and weaken the power of organised labour, thus raising the rate of exploitation to restore profitability.” 41

Shrinking the welfare state is not just about cutting back on public spending. It’s also a mechanism to drive more people into the job market and make them compete harder for the inadequate jobs available, putting further downward pressure on wages and allowing profits to rise.

The ‘new workplace’ and the end of ‘partnership’

Martin Upchurch makes some important observations on how employers are seeking to raise profits by increasing the pressure on workers.

The current situation is not just one of cuts and growing austerity but one where employers are seeking to increase the rate of exploitation by intensive and extensive means. The former approach includes attempts to reorganise work routines and practices to eliminate ‘downtime’ and increase productivity.

The latter may include expectations of working free overtime, covering unfilled vacancies or the work of absent colleagues, or shifting to such practices as zero hours contracts.

However, this process left the employers with a conundrum. How would they continue to maintain the allegiance and commitment of their employees without negotiated forms of control? Workplace collaboration and the ideology of partnership is being undermined by the recession that followed the 2007/2008 crash and the new drive to squeeze out more surplus value from workers.

Rather than seek workers’ buy-in to raising productivity, employers have increasingly turned to more brutal methods to obtain compliance and control. A culture of dismissals and blame for ‘poor performance’, sickness management and ‘capability’ is driving increased fear in the workplace. Recorded workplace bullying has doubled in the last 12 years, according to UNISON. The increase in feelings of anxiety and depression flow directly from management by stress.

The huge fall in living standards in Britain alongside growing pressure on employers to adopt measures to raise the rate of exploitation at work represent a significant departure from the strategy the employers successfully utilised to subdue labour before the crisis. The combination of extremely low pay, obscene levels of inequality and growing forms of intensive and extensive exploitation will make the situation intolerable for a growing number of workers.

How do we regenerate the rank and file?

It’s against this backdrop that any discussion on industrial strategy must take place. In IB2 the Central Committee (CC) challenge criticisms made by Jamie and me in our piece in IB1 “The working class today: the need for analysis and an effective strategy”. The crux of the argument for the CC is:

“For some comrades, such as Ray and Jamie, the SWP’s industrial strategy is far too focussed on the trade union leaders and the official structures of the unions. They argue that effectively our organisation relates to union general secretaries, conferences and elections while it lacks a concentration on the base.” 42

This is an honest attempt at describing the disagreement and a genuine concern we have. However, it doesn’t get to the heart of the matter. If you are only concerned with ‘getting the strikes back on’ then the argument can be framed in this way. What we also argued was “It’s important to understand how workers’ existing consciousness made our struggle tougher than we anticipated when the bureaucracy closed down...”

40 Upchurch, Martin http://martinupchurch.wordpress.com/2013/10/20/what-is-happening-in-the-contemporary-workplace/

41 Roberts, Michael, “From global slump to long depression” http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php?id=914&issues=140

42 Politics and the Workplace, Central Committee, IB2
the pension’s dispute.”

The problems we face are more profound than not having enough SWP members on executives. We need to reconstruct the notion of the ‘collective’, class consciousness and rank and file organisation to repair the damage done by decades of social neoliberalism, business unionism and partnership. This means that the problem must be framed differently.

The real question is - how do we regenerate the rank and file? This doesn’t mean not having a relationship with the bureaucracy, but our starting point must be the rank and file – whatever strategy or tactics we adopt.

The importance of winning positions in the trade union bureaucracy to try and change the strategy of the union, launch organising drives and call strikes is not in dispute. We only want comrades to win positions in the union machine if they have a base strong enough to hold them to account.

This means that too many comrades or stand candidates without a strong enough base or the politics to withstand the huge pressures present in the current situation.

Strike action is the best way to rebuild organisation. But our ability to do this around one day or bureaucratic mass strikes is limited, particularly if socialists fail to focus clearly on the rank and file. We didn’t do this effectively around N30.

The experience in UCU is a case in point. The comrades here did a fantastic job in beginning the whole process that led to J30 and N30. However, we were not strong enough at the base of the union to stop the sell outs or organise action independently. Moreover, after N30 our influence at the top of the union is weaker now than it was before J30. This is not a criticism of the efforts of the comrades involved. It’s about the strategy we employed. We hadn’t focussed enough on developing rank and file networks in the union. This is what made us vulnerable to the retreats and setbacks we have suffered after N30.

If our strategy doesn’t start by attempting to overcome the problems of 3 decades of defeat and retreat at the base of our movement then what we build at the top will be built on sand. We need to begin at the base – always.

The party correctly criticises the CP for mistakes made during the General Strike. No-one is suggesting that comrades made the catastrophic mistakes of the CP in 1926. The CP didn’t build out of this defeat because there was a problem with their strategy and orientation. Following the defeat of the Great Miners’ Strike, the SWP were able to build a significant cadre because we were able to explain the reasons behind the betrayal and point to alternative strategies. Did this happen after N30? We didn’t build in the public sector sections of Unite. Did we build our base in the other unions at the centre of the strikes? If not it implies a problem with the method.

The deeper question of class consciousness

In IB1 Jamie and I made the point that we felt perspectives were impressionistic. We have lost sight of the importance of starting from the rank and file and engaging with the thorny question of class consciousness.

We need to develop a consistent approach to class consciousness - how its shaped and more importantly – how revolutionaries shape it.

Mike Kidron, made this important point in International Socialism in 1960:

“What is needed is an analysis of contemporary capitalism in terms of its impact on working class consciousness, prescriptions tailored to the weakness and strength of class consciousness today; in fact the recognition that class consciousness is the material with which we deal as socialists with a view to transforming it into a material force in its own right. Without this at its centre, socialist analysis loses its coherence and socialist programmes their reality.”

Reducing class consciousness to just the dimensions of anger and confidence is apolitical. Any perspectives that don’t start with workers consciousness will be impressionistic, unsatisfactory or incoherent.

Workers engaged in major struggles often emerge with their world outlook fundamentally changed. The problem for socialists in the last 25 years has been how we engage with and seek to develop class consciousness in a period of very low levels of struggle.

In recent years we have also had to consider potential volatility. Neil Davidson put it like this: “Moreover, the volatility of the present situation means that radical shifts in class consciousness are likely to occur in unpredictable ways”

To try and deal with the huge problems emerging in the workplace will require a routine of intervention in the rank and file. Only this will allow socialists to assess consciousness and then seek to transform it. Any focus on the workplace will likely need to focus on changes in the labour process. This was the key to building rank and file organisation in the 30’s.

Martin Upchurch says

“The task facing organised workers is thus to generalise the experience of individual fear and to collectively mobilise around grievances over discrimination, work targets and stress. Such was the experience, for example, of the engineering union in the 1930s and 1940s as the trade unions began to recover from the defeat of the 1926 General Strike. Membership of the engineering union increased from 190,000 in 1933 to over 900,000 by the end of the war in 1945.

“The union, driven by Communist Party activists, rank-and file networks, apprentice strikes, and the entry of women into the factories turned to a programme of collective mobilisation against grievances and for the ‘rate for the job’.”

It’s the real changes in the world of work that are likely to have most impact on workers consciousness. Struggles that emerge out of the material experience of exploitation will have a more direct impact on consciousness. Combining these struggles with the anger at growing inequality and low pay could lead to explosive developments.

Political trade unionism

The IS were often (wrongly) criticised of syndicalism because of their focus on the workplace. I am not proposing a recipe for bread and butter trade unionism. We do need politics. Starting from where rank and file workers find themselves is necessary if we want to seek to establish the connection between workplace resistance at whatever level it exists with wider social and political questions. It’s the art of identifying ‘the next step’.

This is not about abstractly raising ‘political’ issues in the workplace like raising support for a variety of campaigns in the union branch, important as that is. It’s about the linking of the apparent simple workplace demands to wider social issues and linking the political and socialist arguments back to the day-to-day interests and concerns of workplace activists and union members.

For example, linking the questions of low pay with growing demands from the employer with fat cat salaries in the board room and wider societal inequality is one way. Or linking the fight against sexism at work with the growing campaigns against sexism and campaigns for women’s liberation is another. Most workplace activity fails to link workers’ experiences to a critique of class relations as a whole – this is the job of socialists.

Learning from the past

It’s time we attempted to learn from some of our most successful engagements with the rank and file. In his review of Volume 2 of Cliff’s writings, Ian Birchall writes:

“These books were not just written for the organisation but, in a very real sense, by the organisation. Though the IS was still small (around 1,000 at the time of The Employer’s Offensive) Cliff had gathered around him a group of experienced trade unionists – Geoff Carlsson, Jim Higgins, Roger Cox, Ross Pritchard and others – as well as talented academics like Richard Hyman and Colin Barker.

“Hence he could draw on a collective experience… Nobody should turn to Cliff’s writings in the hope of ready-made solutions or simple slogans. As he put it, ‘Parrots have never made a revolu-

43 Kidron, Mike, Two Left Feet http://www.marxists.org/archive/kidron/works/1960/xx/newleft.htm
The situation today is not comparable with the time Cliff was writing. We had an already existing rank and file in the 60s and 70s. However, this rank and file was far from perfect. It suffered from a host of problems - unevenness, syndicalism, craftism and racism to name but a few.

Today, we are entering a period of increasing volatility. More workers today have been involved in campaigns or demonstrations against war, fascism, police violence etc.

Employers’ drive to increase exploitation is tearing up old patterns of workplace relations. The breaking down of partnership means the potential exists to develop new workplace leaders who oppose the reality of the ‘new workplace’, labour intensification and wage squeeze. We need to start from the experience of rank and file workers and link this into the wider political questions.

As a part of this effort we could commission some of our comrades to produce a workplace activists’ pamphlet on the ‘New Workplace’, labour intensification, low pay and resistance aimed at union activists.

Conclusion

If we recognise the damage done in 25 years of employers’ offensive and relative passivity of workers, then it follows that we need to develop strategies to deal with these problems that focus on the workplace.

Revolutionaries need to engage with existing strategies in the unions to rebuild workplace organisation and look at how we rebuild class consciousness in these campaigns.

The employers’ offensive is brutal but it is this quality that presents us with opportunities that are now more generalised. The volatility of the current situation will also mean that we may be surprised at where opportunities for organising and struggle emerge.

Our approach to political trade unionism needs to be less prescriptive and ‘bottom-up’ as a pose to ‘top-down’. We need to link the real needs of ordinary workers with the bigger political questions. These ideas are a contribution to a debate on how we develop an effective industrial strategy that combines politics and economics with the rank and file as its primary focus.

The following three points set the overarching context in which all debates about the party’s current crisis need to be set:

a) We are trying to do something unique in history – namely build a Leninist revolutionary organisation over a long period of time (decades) in one of the world’s oldest capitalist democracies. The Bolsheviks were created in 1903 and 14 years later they were leading a workers revolution. This is not our timeline.

Therefore it is inevitable that we will come up against situations that have not existed before and that sometimes we’ll get wrong (or partially wrong) before we get them right. Whenever this happens we are bound to have conflict within the party without that conflict meaning either side is giving up on Leninism and socialism, or that the CC are rubbish.

b) In trying to build a revolutionary party over a very long period of time we have adapted informally and unconsciously to the understanding that we are in a marathon and not a sprint. When I joined I.S. in 1974 the mantra was that you walked the walk in order to talk the talk. We have all relaxed this mantra, probably correctly so – if comrades are in this for the long haul then all of us will have personal and work crises and changes which reduce our activity without in our heads altering our belief in Marxism and socialism.

But this has meant that comrades can have both massively different levels of activity (and sometimes this means almost none at all for some comrades) and different material experiences of the struggle, both of which add to the centrifugal forces exerted on the party. We have not yet worked out how to manage this.

c) The low level of workers struggle. We are not in a downturn. Having been outsourced to an offshoring company and then achieved 9 years of above inflation pay rises and 92% trade union density, my own lived experience tells me this is not a downturn. But there continues to be a low level of class struggle.

So for our party to lead huge mass movements on the street whilst at the same time not being able to point often to the actuality of class struggle in the workplace as the agency of change was bound and is bound to cause us tensions.

Whether we’ve done the right thing to manage those tensions is an unresolved issue for me. (I think the explanation of the current state of the class struggle from Ian from Bury and Prestwich - Ian from now on- is excellent. Ian and I are on different sides of the current factional split but I urge comrades not to let factional fog put them off reading it. It is an intelligent contribution to the balance of class forces debate and has more implications than Ian has yet stated and we have yet to debate).

The Disputes Committee

The changes to the disputes committee procedure are welcome. I re-read the article in the IB for the special conference submitted by (amongst others) Simon F from Birmingham and have concluded that a lot of what that article suggested has now been accepted by the review of our procedures. Which is another way of saying that Simon was mostly right on this and I was mostly wrong.

I think the CC’s motion on this issue is a big step in the right direction but it has to include an apology to the two women concerned.

Comrades I have publicly apologised to my members in mass meetings for a lot less than this. It comes with the territory. The class learn to trust leadership not because we don’t make mistakes (step forward perfect comrade or group of comrades whoever you are!!) but because we recognise them, admit them and learn from them.

This is a crucial part of Leninism.

I’ve heard the argument that the opposition simply keeping creating one new demand after another – first it was a special conference, then a dispute committee review, then comrade Delta had to go, then it’s an apology. So won’t they just add another demand if we agree to the apology?

The point is that an apology is justified and correct irrelevant of if and how others wish to exploit it and therefore it should be done. If people decide to use it as a political football then that is their problem not ours.

But I trust the vast majority of comrades in the opposition do not wish to do this. If a minority behave differently then a parting of the ways with that minority may unfortunately be inevitable and necessary. Let’s hope wiser counsels prevail.

Internet individualism

My opposition to the use of the internet to unilaterally expose internal party debates to the public was documented in the special conference bulletin in the article entitled “Democracy, discipline and openness in the revolutionary party in the age of the internet”.

The only argument presented to me in opposition to that article was by a lapsed party member who argued “that what is ok for a workplace trade union is not necessarily ok for a revolutionary party”. I remain unconvinced that a Marxist revolutionary

44 Birchall, Ian, Parrots have never made a revolution http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=7936

THE POLITICS OF THE CRISIS IN THE SWP, THE INTERNET AND MOVEMENTISM

Richard (Coventry)

Richard (Coventry)
party should have less collective discipline than a group of private sector white collar workers. Lenin used trade union discipline as his example when arguing for party discipline in 1917, so I’m in decent company there.

The freedom of individual comrades to write what they want where they want about anyone and anything in the party runs completely contrary to comrades’ freedom to be able to attend party meetings confident that they will not be shopped to their employer. These two things cannot co-exist together. This is the proverbial line in the sand for me. The party has to decide which way it is going to.

Every single employer I have been interviewed for has asked me directly or indirectly about my attitude to trade unionism. If there is total anarchy on the internet, then they will have no need to ask, they will just need to internet search.

Of course the movement will always be infiltrated by the capitalist class or their state. But for these people to be effective they have to behave like good activists in the movement or the party and have to be careful what they publish lest it expose them. To be any good they have to behave like being a good Bolshevik. But if being a good Bolshevik means leaking everything to anybody, then we have done half their job for them.

It particularly concerns me that comrades are not taking on these arguments with our younger comrades or ex-members and instead are just irresponsibly bowing down to the individualism of the internet. If these young people follow the internet individualist route none of them will ever get a job in private sector multi-national capitalist companies whilst remaining left-wing. But don’t we want them to get jobs in the profitable heart of the beast?

Society itself is telling us to be careful. E.g. In many schools in England newly qualified teachers will be presented by their leadership teams with what those head teachers have found out about them on the internet. This not to discipline them, but to make them aware that the children they will be teaching and their parents of these children will also be able to find this out, and to make the newly qualified teachers careful about what and where they post.

I cannot be the only party member union rep who has to defend members being disciplined because they’ve written stupid things on Facebook.

The internet individualists’ in the opposition and amongst our ex-members are modelling behaviours to younger comrades which will come back to haunt them and us and which do a disservice to these young people and the movement. Unless we pull these young people back into the party they will end up learning this the hard way and will either end up leaving the left or in a life-style ghetto where you can be as left-wing as you want and influence exactly no-one. We need to sort this out with a comradely non-fictional debate which does not counter-pose the Revolutionary Paper and the internet as if these two things are mutually exclusive. We have a responsibility to do this for ourselves and the movement.

Debating via the internet

I see debating via the email and the internet (as opposed to people posting articles on the internet) as an essentially individualistic approach to debate equivalent to postal ballots for strikes.

The Tories implemented postal ballots for strikes for a reason. They believed correctly that individuals sat at home would be less likely to vote to fight the employing class than the same individual attending a collective meeting at work. In the mass meeting the vote is on what “we” do and a full debate can be had. At home it is on what “I” do. Together workers feel more confident than sat on their own at home.

Every workplace activist will know that the postal ballot always produces a weaker result than the show of hands in the mass meeting. For this reason the left has always correctly opposed postal balloting. Debating via the internet is the equivalent of the postal ballot. It is not collective. It is individualistic. We need to persuade comrades that it is wrong.

Alex and Charlie (A&C) are correct to locate the context of the crisis in the party in the impact of movementism on the Party.

I understand movementism to mean the de-emphasising of the building of the party, its organisation and its periphery in favour of the building of which ever united front we happen to be involved in at the time (including trade unionism), and all this inevitably leads to a decline in our politics. Another way of expressing this is that comrades accommodate to the milieu they’re active in. A&C also use the term to mean the stressing of the movements over the workplace.

We participate in united fronts for two reasons – 1) to make the united front more successful and 2) to recruit more people to revolutionary socialism, either by becoming a party member or by being organised on our periphery. Both matter to us. E.g. 1) it is great that UAF and the ANL before it have succeeded in keeping the Nazis on the margins of UK politics, unlike the French NF. E.g. 2) the party is correct to argue that the vote against Syria in the UK parliament was a delayed result of the Stop the War Coalition’s (STW) activity since its founding in 2001. And that impact went beyond the UK – proving the argument that stopping the drive to war in the UK would impact the US of A.

Our initiative and leadership of STW was excellent. Our intervention in it was rubbish. How many extra revolutionary socialists did we create from STW? 200 at most. How many extra permanent readers of Socialist Worker did we create? Any at all? This from a movement which had two million people on the streets of Britain. If we need another ninety thousand revolutionaries to have a party big enough to lead the revolution then on the basis of our activity in STW we’ll need another 450 STW movements. Well good luck with that comrades. Movementism was the collective mother of the whole party.

What could we have done differently in STW? I want to make this small suggestion because we all seem to agree that we didn’t build the party correctly in STW but I’ve never read any detailed organisational suggestions as to what we should have done differently. And for Leninists organisation is political. So here’s one. We had comrades leading STW going round the country at various towns and cities speaking at huge STW rallies. In doing so they were setting an example for the rest of us to follow.

As a party we should have insisted that those comrades speak the following night in the same locations at a SWP socialism and war meeting. This could have been leafleted into the STW rally and thus their membership of our organisation would have been announced in a public but in a non-sectarian way and it would have made comrades build our organisation.

To my knowledge this was never done, and as our leading comrades set an example of not trumpeting their membership of the party so the rest of us followed suit, and the majority of us continue to do so.

Debate about movementism

But we have not yet had the ideological debate within the party about movementism. We are starting it now and as Barry and Mick from Yorkshire wrote in IB2 “eight years too late”. But now it’s started let’s get stuck in. The argument over movementism is not a stick with which to beat the opposition. It is a stick with which to beat the lot of us over the head with. The CC and the cadre of the party (including those in the opposition) completely under estimate the prevalence of movementism in our party.

To me the extent of the decline of our...
brand of Leninism in our party is best displayed by the lack of emphasis by comrades on the workplace and on the revolutionary party. And I’m going to present some observations of the party to demonstrate this. But first why the workplace? A&C correctly point out: “Our position is not that only struggles by employed workers count. Unlike most of the rest of the left, for example, we rightly stood with the rioters against the state in 2011... But we are not going to abandon our insistence on the special role of the working class and on the struggle at the point of production as the most powerful weapon available to workers.”

This is important on both counts. If the class is only confident to fight back in the streets then so be it—we’ll be there. The anti-poll tax movement was not workplace based, that is what defeated Thatcher. The anti-bedroom tax movement is similar and is scoring victories in certain localities.

But if we are ever to have a revolution in Britain then the power of capitalism in the workplace will have to be broken. The workplace matters to us. “The SWP believes the working class is at its strongest when it uses its power to turn off the source of profit through strikes and occupations.” Rosa Luxemburg argued precisely this at the founding congress of the KPD in 1918. In summary she argued to an audience which had just overthrow the Kaiser in street battles that “Comrades!... Let us be clear: it is the very essence of this revolution that strikes will become more and more extensive, that they must become more and more the central focus, the key aspect of the revolution. [Applause] It then becomes an economic revolution, and there with a socialist revolution. The struggle for socialism has to be fought out by the masses, by the masses alone, breast to breast against capitalism, in every factory, by every proletarian against his employer. Only then will it be a socialist revolution.”

If it’s good enough for Rosa speaking to the comrades of the KPD (some of them armed) then it’ll do for me.

And the importance of the paper? The revolutionary paper is the tool to organise our periphery and to organise comrades’ relationship with the outside world. Only when we sell the paper are we guaranteed to identify ourselves to the outside world with the totality of our politics. And the workplace and the paper go together.

The organising agenda in the workplace is a sort of syndicalist sub-set of our politics, with the union hard copy newsletter playing the equivalent role of the paper. I have created two different reps committees by the simple tactic of asking those who most expressed a liking for the union newsletters I was dishing out to help distribute them. And at work now I bring the paper buyers together to discuss preparation for union branch meetings. The paper is the single most important weapon in our arsenal and is crucially important in binding the party together to resist the centrifugal forces inherent in capitalism.

Observations of movementism in the party

A) I was part of Coventry’s delegation to the 2013 non-special conference. At that conference approx. 70 comrades put themselves forward to stand for our National Committee – our leading lay leadership body. Each person had to write a short “manifesto”. Of the 70 candidates only 4 mentioned Socialist Worker. I.e. only 5% of the candidates thought that their relationship to the paper had any relevance as to whether they should be part of our leading lay body.

Unless we think that 95% of the NC candidates were supporters of the opposition, it follows that my critical observation is not just aimed at the opposition.

B) For the special conference Internal Bulletin Richard S and China M (along with other comrades) wrote an article titled “In defence of Blogging.” I wrote an article completely contrary to this called “Democracy, discipline and openness in the revolutionary party in the age of the internet”.

I read theirs because I expected it to disagree with me and therefore I would learn something. Their article did make useful ideas about the different nature of engagement via the internet e.g. “consumers on social media are also themselves producers.” I expected the article would talk about how Facebook or blogging could be used to help people organise at work, raise issues etc.

But it had absolutely nothing to say about the workplace. Think about this comrades. We have a group of people writing in our IB trying to persuade us that blogging is useful, and in making that attempt they have absolutely nothing to say about the relationship between the internet and the workplace. Not a word. Not a single thing. In fact the article reads as if no-one actually goes to a workplace – we’re all just individuals sat at home connected by the internet.

This is not a criticism of these comrades. This is a criticism of us.

I understand that Richard and China were in our organisation for approx. ten years each. How can two intelligent articulate people be in our party for so long and fail to absorb one of the central tenants of our theory, namely that workers power most lies in the workplace? Or at the very least not understand how to relate that theory to their ideas? And remember Richard S was on the editorial board of our theoretical journal. 49 Does this group ever discuss the workplace? And we should be clear that the 200 comrades who resigned from either SWSS, the party or both the day after our special conference clearly did not have our politics. Again, this is our failing as well as theirs. 50

C) Richard and China are not alone in this. I’ve analysed articles in three of our recent Internal Bulletins. I simply looked for how often mention was made of either Socialist Worker or the Revolutionary paper. I then also looked for how often mention was made of the workplace or words that could mean a workplace (e.g. office, school, hospital, factory, etc.) This is a very simplistic manual analysis of these IBs but I think it demonstrates how far movementism has forced our version of Leninism on the retreat in all parts of the party – whether they support the CC or not. The analysis is presented below:

It is not the case that every single article has to write about the paper or write about the workplace. But it is surely indicatively worrying that hardly any do this?

By the way the number of pages in all these IBs (including 2011 before the crisis broke, and remember there were two IBs previous in 2011 to this one) shows the absolute lie that the party does not encourage debate or is not democratic. We’ve just been repeating the wrong things.

I have no solutions to our problems, except that in order to get solutions we need to correctly diagnose the problem, and then collectively we can address it. And that diagnosis is that the ideological impact of John and Lindsey on our party has not been resolved and has not been worked out. The debacle over the Disputes Committee is a symptom not a cause. Changing our structures will do nothing to solve this.

Cliff argued that if you gave a group of friends travelling on the London underground a map of the Paris metro presented as a map of the London underground then those friends would inevitably row as the map made no sense to them. This is what is happening to us.

Suggestions for discussion

I have some suggestions which I admit I’m not 100% confident in, but I’ve not heard any better so far in these debates.

Comrades are involved in all sorts of campaigns or perhaps not involved at all - currently going through a non-active phase. These will have a centrifugal pull

48 http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/31.htm

49 Richard S’s behaviour shows that the fact that someone is on the ISJ editorial board proves nothing in itself (either good or bad) about either their understanding of our politics or their activity as party members.

50 Their decision to go immediately after the conference shows what a lie their participation in our democratic process was.
on comrades. Also Ian’s article referred to earlier will mean that comrades in different workplaces will have different experiences. Some will have victories (even if defensive) whilst others are losing. Whilst those involved in “the street” may have greater successes.

I suggest that it is the party branch and selling the paper that act as the centripetal force holding the party together and that we need to re-emphasise the selling of the paper big time. In fact it is time to bend the stick big time in the direction of paper selling.

Everyone can sell to someone. If you’re nervous about selling in your own locality, then sell in a different one, or make yourself available to sell to contacts. But do we do this now? Do all our NC members sell the paper? Do all the members of the ISJ editorial board sell the paper? Does everyone writing in these IBs sell the paper? The cadre of the party need to lead by example.

Where our leading cadre are not involved in public or workplace sales, then they need to lead by example and put this right and get on their next Saturday sale ASAP. Social being determines consciousness. If your social being is that you never sell the paper or never sell it to anyone new, then you will inevitably end up being on the miserable side of things and being detached from the rest of the party.

The opposition

I’m concerned about the opposition’s attack on the discipline of our party. When Ian writes that we should not be held back by constitutionalism, it all sounds very revolutionary.

But he is not talking about the constitution of a capitalist state; he’s talking about the constitution of a revolutionary party. In other words, the rules we have voluntarily and democratically agreed to be bound by.

So what he, and those comrades who joined with him outside of our pre-conference period, are saying is effectively that they don’t care about the rules that we’ve jointly created.

All the debates they’ve wanted could just as easily have been held in the pre-conference period. In order to gain 4 months they’ve set an awful precedent for anyone in the future who disagrees with X,Y or Z to use the internet to wreak havoc on our organisation.

It is now incumbent on them to help counter the effect of this precedent by clearly, openly and without hesitation or exception supporting the party’s democratic and disciplinary process.

By the same token it is important for the majority of the party to go out of our way to help re-integrate the opposition into the functioning life of the party.

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**DRAWING A LINE: WHY THERE NEEDS TO BE AN APOLOGY**

Sara (Horneys & Wood Green)

This contribution aims to put forward some of the main arguments as to why we need an apology to the two women who brought forward separate complaints over the last year with regard to the conduct of a now former senior party member. I will also look at some of the main reasons given against an apology and attempt to unpick them.

Firstly, I want to look briefly at what the Central Committee’s (CC) position has been over the disputes procedure for much of the past year. At a National Committee (NC) meeting last November, Charlie K delivered a statement on behalf of the CC on the initial dispute. This was the first time the dispute had officially been brought to the attention of members. Questions were taken from NC members following the statement. In the course of that discussion, Amy L, one of the CC members that had sat on the dispute panel, stated that the party had ‘to defend the procedure’.

This continued to be the official position of the CC majority through the January conference. Different (although not uncontested) arguments were put forward as to why the procedure had to be defended. One argument was that the Disputes Committee (DC) had been elected by conference and therefore the party had to stand by it. Another was that to question the procedure was to doubt the integrity of those that sat on the DC during the hearing. Finally, we were told, due to the fact that because the DC slate was re-elected unopposed, there could be no real justification for calling the procedure into question.

Nearly one year later, we have had a Special Conference in March that agreed to review the disputes procedures for cases such as these, and the report from the hearing into the second complaint that has resulted in M having a ‘case to answer’.

However, at an NC meeting in September 2013, the argument was still one of the procedures being fundamentally sound. Esme C, the other CC member who had sat on the DC panel into the original hearing, said there was ‘confusion’, ‘criticism’ and ‘misinformation’ regarding the procedure.

The reason given for reviewing the procedure was, in a nutshell, that there was always room for improvement. Esme then stated that she recognised there was, however, a ‘perception’ of it being flawed, but that all it was all it was – a perception.

This was further emphasised by the fact that a motion put to that NC meeting in September by Jim W from Euston branch and seconded by myself, which called for an apology to the two complainants, was defeated. Speaking against the motion, Alex C said that to apologise would lead people to think that the procedure had been flawed.

So, up until just a couple of months ago, the CC’s official position has been that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the procedure. It came as a welcome surprise, therefore, in its motion to conference circulated on 30th October that the CC officially recognised (point 4) “The two complainants suffered real distress because of flaws in our disciplinary procedures ….”.

Even though there has been no open recognition of this change of position nor any explanation as to what has brought it about, it does represent a shift in the right direction, albeit a tardy one.

Whilst the CC motion is a welcome move, there are some real issues with it. Most importantly, it falls short of an apology. Secondly, it contains other elements that attempt to divert attention and shift blame. Unfortunately, this dilutes the credibility in the CC’s concern for the two complainants. It also leaves the impression that its main purpose is to ‘be all things to all people’, representing a ‘fudge’ position which the whole of the CC could bring themselves to support, and around which, no doubt, they hope the party can re unite.

One serious misjudgment in the CC motion is to believe that you can draw a parallel between the distress caused to the two women who brought complaints of sexual harassment to the attention of the DC/CC, and the distress “Many people have suffered … as a result of taking part in or giving evidence to the DC, or due to slurs on the internet.” This is being used as a reason to not offer an open apology to the two complainants.

An example of it was presented at a branch meeting in Wood Green and Hornsey on the 30th October, by fellow branch member who argued that there were other people who deserved an apology, naming two CC members who had been ‘door-stepped’ by the bourgeois press.

No one would argue against the fact that other individuals have undoubtedly suffered stress during the party’s crisis. However, there is a stark contrast between that and the stress and personal attacks suffered by the two women as a result of the process now recognized to be flawed. To try and equate the two is to fog the issue of cause and effect, which handily also obscures the idea of accountability.

Another problem with the CC motion is that it states the distress caused to the two complainants is the ‘collective responsibility of the SWP’. This again is a way of trying to avoid an open accounting, and consequently, the need for an apology. But more importantly, it’s factually incorrect.

There has been unease with and opposition to the handling of the first dispute as soon as it and the original DC report findings were released to the CC. On the CC itself, four members - Mark B, Joseph C,
Hannah D and Ray M – repeatedly opposed the original DC report and refused to change their position despite pressure coming down upon them to project a ‘united CC’ to the membership. This eventually led to two of those CC members, Hannah and Ray, being removed at two days notice before last year’s conference from the proposed CC slate.

During the January conference, it was clear that the CC did not win in any real sense the support of conference for the DC report. Six comrades, including myself, spoke against the acceptance of the DC report, highlighting the problems with the process itself but also how this would not stand up in the eyes of the wider movement.

When it came to the actual vote, those who voted against, those who formally abstained, and those who could not bring themselves to vote at all, altogether represented a greater number than those who voted in favor. That was a clear message to the CC that a majority of members did not agree with the CC/DC position. There was no collective agreement to endorse the DC report. Ever.

There has, however, been a concerted effort to enforce the ‘majority’ position on the dispute by a series of arguments, including arguments about democratic centralism. We have often been reminded over the last year that democratic centralism allows for maximum discussion, then a vote and unity in action to test our position in the class.

But the backlash in the media and the distancing of some of our political allies has not been due to the fact that some comrades did not go out and argue to defend our disputes procedures. It was, as comrades arguing against the DC findings first pointed out, a logical and completely predictable reaction to a process that was clearly inappropriate for a revolutionary socialist organization that seeks to be the tribunal of the oppressed.

More important, however, is that once it became clearer that the process was flawed, the leadership has been reluctant to acknowledge it. This has had a further negative impact, not least that arguments were allowed to circulate about the ‘motives’ of the two complainants, but also that blame was foisted on those who had raised their concerns about the DC report, accusing them of being left-reformist, feminist or movementist.

Another issue that has arisen around the disputes, and also plays a role in whether to apologise, centres on our tradition on women’s liberation. The CC denies that flaws in the original process highlight any possible problems with putting our theoretical tradition on women’s liberation into practice. This is important. From the outset, those who first raised objections with the original procedure have done so on the basis that it calls into question our understanding of the nature of women’s oppression today and our commitment to fighting it not only in society but also within our own organization.

Let’s just look at the question in more detail. As I stated at the January conference last year when I spoke against the acceptance of the DC report, we do not rely on the bourgeois legal system to deliver women’s liberation or justice for women (in such cases as these).

This has been oft misquoted in the bourgeois press and used to portray the party as operating its own ‘court’ system. This was never the intention of my original point, however. The point I was making was that you need only look at how few women actually report rape at all, and the pitifully low rate of conviction, to see proof enough that our legal system cannot deliver justice in these matters.

The problem we had, however, was that our DC relied far too heavily on a legal approach in its own procedure. It started with using the legal definition of rape, and then setting a standard which then we would have to prove had taken place at all. Due to the nature of rape and sexual violence in general, it is notoriously difficult to ‘prove’ such things. When our DC could only ever take statements from the complainant, the accused and witnesses, the process was bound to be unsatisfactory. Taking evidence about such issues is extremely distressing and potentially traumatizing. Without the training and expertise to deal with these issues, it was highly probable the procedure would only exacerbate an already stressful scenario.

In addition, the outcome of the procedure - that the DC concluded rape had not taken place but that sexual assault, sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior were ‘unproven’ – was not only highly likely considering the process, but completely unsatisfactory. The simple message it conveyed was that our DC was incapable of dealing with such cases and the procedure inadequate.

Surely the place to have started would have been with our understanding of how women’s oppression shapes the experience of sexual violence and harassment against women – how evidence points to the fact that most women who do report such issues are not lying, that women recovering from the trauma often come to accept the fact that they have been raped or assaulted long after the event, how women are invariably believed to be at least partially to blame for any violence or harassment they suffer.

We should also have acknowledged the possibility that some of these ideas could also permeate through into our own organization. From there we should have perhaps sought a remit for the DC that was more appropriate – not a rape investigation, but to decipher whether a leading comrade’s behavior could have been found to be below our expected standards.

What also needs to be recognized, however, is that the crisis has revealed and perhaps even encouraged views on the case that seriously call into question some comrades’ understanding of the nature of women’s oppression in such areas as sexual assault. One example can be found in IB2, for example, where Bridget from Kings Heath states:

“The faction say ‘some comrades have echoed right-wing sexist arguments that if a woman doesn’t report a rape immediately this indicates that they are lying’ and this certainly is not acceptable.”

But some 200 faction members put their name to a document on a public website which names M as a ‘sexual predator’, equally unacceptable.”

Her comment about the M being names as a ‘sexual predator’ is incorrect, as the statement I believe she is referring to actually says ‘the claims of sexual predation against M’.

However, the more serious point is that she states both are equally unacceptable. Is this really the position of a revolutionary organization that claims CC motion says, “a total commitment to fighting against women’s oppression and for women’s liberation”? Does the CC agree with this position? If not, will it oppose it? This is not the only time we have heard such arguments. To not categorically take a position on such statements sends a message that they are either not matters of principle or that they are not matters of that great importance.

The real mistake, however, was not so much that we made a serious error of judgment. The real error was that despite ample evidence from many different quarters both inside and outside the party telling us we had made a mistake, the leadership refused to change course. As soon as it became evident that the process was unsatisfactory, the CC should have taken note, should have admitted it, apologized to the complainants for it and sought to correct it. Moreover, it should have done this openly. For too long, we had a concerted campaign which began with the ‘need’ to ‘defend the procedures’ above all other considerations.

A motion will be heard at conference that makes an explicit case for an apology to the two complainants. The CC has argued against it, stating that it contains inaccurate information. If this is the case, it would be useful for the CC to correct this. However, it has not been able to offer a convincing case as to why there should not be an apology per se. If there is a reason against issuing an apology, a clear and convincing one needs to be stated.

For myself, and I believe for others in and outside the faction, if the procedures in this case were flawed, if we can express regret as the CC motion does, then it really is very simple and comes down to this - why on earth wouldn’t you apologise?

Finally, there is an argument that to call for an apology is really a desire to re-open the original case. Out of all the arguments, this strikes me as the most bizarre. Firstly, the complainant in the first dispute has
made it perfectly clear she has no desire to revisit the case. She has left our organization. Comrade Delta resigned from the party a week before the second complaint was due to be heard.

The truth of the matter is that we have never ever really been able to find a resolution to the case during the whole of the last year. The inability and concerted attempts to avoid facing up to a flawed procedure has meant the case has hung over the party and riven us with division and paralysis. The reality is that we need an apology in order to begin to resolve this issue and if we are to have any hope of re-uniting the party on a principled basis.

**INTERSECTIONALITY: FRIEND OR FOE?**

Shanice (Kings College London)

**Intersectionality, Black Feminists and the WLM**

Contrary to Sally C’s historical account of intersectionality in her welcome IB contribution (IB1, page 73), it is not a method that first originated as a reaction to the racism and universalism of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM). The method stems back much further than this. In her speech at the Ohio Women’s convention, 1851, Sojourner Truth said:

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?”

The point she is making is an incredibly important one: we isolate ourselves from sections of the oppressed and exploited if we fail to understand the nuanced realities of exploitation and oppression.

Black women during the WLM era did not just ask “…what about our experience?” They were questioning the universalism of the WLM: white, middle class women defined what being a ‘woman’ was and so the oppression of white, middle class women defined ‘women’s oppression’.

The result was there was an abject failure to recognise how oppression for different women meant different things and this then resulted in an abject failure for the WLM to raise important demands that affected a broader layer of women; it was these excluded women who were, by and large, part of the working class.

This isn’t just a vague recognition that experiences differ. It’s very serious political point: the fact that the WLM universalised women’s oppression is what, in part, caused fragmentation of the WLM across racial lines.

The WLM failed to raise demands that concerned the lives of black women and working class women; which meant the WLM was not the natural place you would go as a black or working class woman wanting to fight for liberation.

It meant the places in which the leading bodies of the WLM organised and agitated wasn’t the ghettos of New York, but the suburbs of Michigan. It created a distinct feeling of isolation recorded by many black and working class women of the time and this precipitated sectarianism and fragmentation when the one thing you would have wanted at the time was solidarity and unity.

Sally is right to point out other factors that contributed to the fragmentation of political groups during that period: the defections of the working class, the disillusionment with the idea of the working class as the agent of change, the resultant post-modernist rejection of grand narratives (particularly Marxism, following the ‘fall of communism’) but this isn’t the full story. I think we get a better picture of what historically happened to the WLM by understanding their rigid and exclusionary approach to women’s oppression: an approach that saw women’s oppression from one perspective rather than understanding it was something that manifests itself differently when it interacts with other social relations.

This is what intersectionality is; it’s the understanding that the way social relations and oppression work is not in isolation from each other. There aren’t these separate systems of oppression; ‘women’s oppression’, ‘LGBT oppression’, ‘racial oppression’: fixed and separated. In fact for many of the working class – particularly the global working class – you cannot separate the oppression that someone experiences as a woman from the fact that they are, say, black or LGBT. It was this very false separation of oppression that meant the WLM failed to see how women’s oppression was racialized and this lent the movement to fragmentation.

**Identity politics**

Sally argues that intersectionality represents a general shift in that period towards identity politics. By making this argument it becomes very easy to regurgitate the repetitive argument that tends to go “X is identity politics therefore we should reject it”.

Over the past year terms like ‘identity politics’ (along with movements) have lost all meaning and have become one of many pejorative epithets used to delegitimise particular arguments.

It’s worth briefly spelling out what identity politics is. As I understand it, identity politics was a result of disillusionment with the working class as the agent of radical change. Identity politics gave rise to sectarian groupings that defined membership to a particular struggle based on your identity.

This easily led to separatism and lifestyle politics: it was a politics of isolation rather than unity. Identity politics is not to be confused with a concern for different oppressions. If this understanding is correct then this is exactly what intersectionality was – and is - not!

Black feminists of the period, on the whole, did not immediately demand that separate organisations be formed. They attempted to wage their arguments and concerns within the WLM. They argued that the plight of black and working class women is the plight of all women who want to fight oppression and exploitation.

Of course, intersectionality was later to be co-opted by identity politics and post-modernism - where difference itself was lionized – but this is a product of the way ideas developed during that period. It says nothing about whether or not an intersectional approach in general – an approach that recognises the heterogeneity of oppression – is useful or not.

**Is there anything to gain from intersectionality?**

This then raises the question, is it useful? I’d argue it is. Sally C gives a fantastic example of the recent intervention comradely in the party made around the hijab being banned at a Birmingham college. It’s a great example of the necessity of understanding the nuances of oppression.

In the UK it’s quite often that serious anti-sexists find themselves arguing that women should be able to wear as few clothes as they want without persecution; this is uncontroversial.

At the same time racist bigots in the UK want to turn around to Muslim women and argue that they should be demonised for wearing too many clothes! This is both an instance of racist bigotry, but it is also fuelled by the same sexist drive to control women’s bodies that fuels criticisms of women who wear ‘too few clothes’.

It’s not an instance of racism separate from sexism: it’s an instance of them both interacting in an inseparable way. Recognising this is crucial. Some feminists fall into the trap of arguing that Muslim women should not wear the hijab because the hijab is oppressive.

Very crudely but not wholly untrue, some argue women are liberated relative to how little clothing they wear (see Femen). The failure here is in part one of racism: this argument concedes to the racist assumption that there is something particularly sexist about Muslims. But it is also a failure to recognise how women’s oppression operates differently in some respects for Muslim women. Muslim women are demonised and oppressed by
those who argue they wear ‘too much clothing’, whereas a lot of the time in the UK women’s oppression manifests itself as a complaint that women are wearing ‘too few clothes’ (‘slut’, ‘slag’, ‘whore’ being shouted at women in short skirts epitomises this).

Recognising this nuance not only puts you on the right side of the arguments but allows you to build solidarity with a broad layer of the working class by understanding how the muck of capitalism affects us, thus allowing room to relate to broader layers of people.

And this is why I defend intersectionality. It’s an approach that, at its core, makes the claim that all oppression is inseparably connected and on that basis all oppressed people should unite, should fight together.

This isn’t a claim foreign to the IST tradition, so what does it bring that’s new? I’d argue intersectionality broadens our understanding of how oppression actually affects various layers of the working class, it means we can attune ourselves to the nuanced ways oppression operates and thus open the doors to relating to a wider layer of people, it means we don’t fall into the trap of universalism that the WLM did. I cannot for the life of me see how this is a bad thing! Intersectionality, in many ways, lays the basis for a broader understanding of oppression which lends itself to the kind of solidarity amongst the oppressed which is the prerequisite for unity.

**Taking a “critical” approach**

Both the CC and Sally raise a very valid point that I have to admit was the missing part of my article on the revolutionary socialism blog. The CC write:

> “We should not, of course, practice abstract denunciation of newer members for trying to develop their ideas, but we do have to engage with concepts such as intersectionality in a critical way.” [my emphasis].

I’ve never been uncritical of intersectionality. If there’s one thing I’ve learned from my experience of the last year in the SWP – if, of course, I’m not vilified for drawing from my experiences – is that being critical is a good thing.

This doesn’t mean being critical of everything ever; this particular trait has characterised and almost defined argument, on all sides, within the SWP over the last year. But this is exactly the approach Sally and the CC seem to take to intersectionality: criticise all of it, there’s nothing to learn here. Sally even argues that “it is a retrograde step that concedes to the idea that Marxism can’t explain oppression.”

For the record, I believe Marxism is absolutely adept at explaining oppression; yet how does this in any way conflict with the idea that the very systems of oppression Marxist brilliantly explains interact in a way that, if recognised and incorporated into our theory, leads to a more illuminating understanding of how oppression affects the working class?

The author of the CC document I quote from above accuses me of “[taking] a licence to develop a theory of oppression that remains at the level of appearance, considering the particular experiences of oppression rather than the underlying causes. Shouldn’t this method be challenged?” I mean this without wanting to sound snarky, but this suggests the author didn’t closely read what I actually wrote. I do say: “As Marxists it is absolutely imperative that we learn from the experience of workers – and then explain that experience through historical materialism from which we can generalise the lessons to be learned and put them into practice.” [emphasis added]. That’s quite a botched formulation but the point is clear: I absolutely believe that explaining oppression using the Marxist method is imperative.

But, and I make this point several times in that blog post, intersectionality is not about explaining oppression. It’s about adopting a method that makes us attune to the various experiences under capitalism of the working class. The CC seems to be arguing we must explain oppression as well as describe it. Of course, but that description is important too - it makes us privy to how capitalism actually affects different layers of people and opens a door to relating to them, which itself opens doors to both solidarity and unity.

**Intersectionality and the centrality of the working class**

Nevertheless, some criticisms. Intersectionality doesn’t say anything particular about what class is. While it recognises the importance of class, it does so in a very unclear way and in a way that doesn’t recognise class as the defining social relation of capitalism, and therefore the one that affords the working class the potential power to overthrow the system.

While this is absolutely true it’s a moot point. The simple way to remedy this is to make the correct observation that class is the fundamental social relation and it is on this basis that the working class will over throw capitalism. The centrality of the working class is not fundamentally incompatible with an intersectional approach.

I think Sally points correctly at the reason why feminists who use an intersectional approach tend to see class as “classism” rather than adopt a Marxist understanding of class: many activists growing up and radicalising today are doing so during a period of relatively low class struggle.

They’re growing up in the slipstream of identity politics and post-modernism. They’re growing up in an era of neo-liberalism that has intensified individualist ideology inherent within capitalism. This means the lives of young activists today are not defined by a potent understanding of themselves as part of an exploited collective – the working class. For us as Marxists that is an argument we have to take to them: and that’s what I’ve been doing at King’s in the feminist society I find myself a central figure within.

**Emphasising categories**

Another criticism is that intersectionality rather than challenging categories (‘women’, ‘black women’, ‘lesbian trans woman’ etc) makes political use of them and so emphasises them when we should be criticising them.

Sally makes this point: “Black feminists’ mistake was to simply create more categories when we should resist them all!” Except, this comes across as incredibly pre-figurative to me. Black feminists didn’t create these categories: capitalism did! I hold the idea that categories like ‘black’, ‘female’, ‘man’ etc have their origins not in biology but arose from specific historical conditions.

I believe they are naturalized and normalised with reference to biology (so black people are picked out by their chemical pigment, women picked out by their genitalia etc) but that this very categorisation was an ideological result of particular material conditions.

On this basis I am absolutely for challenging these categories and fighting for a world where we can flourish as people in our own right and not be restricted by false categorisation and enforced differences. However, the fact is we still live under capitalism. And under capitalism black women simply are oppressed and exploited in a specific way, as are trans people, women, black men (and whatever other categories you can think of).

Therefore I can’t see how it was a mistake for black women to point at their oppression as black women. Should they not have?! I’m certain Sally would not argue this, but this kind of argument lends itself to the idea that we simply should not talk about women’s oppression, or racism or LGBT oppression and should talk only about class because focusing on oppression in this way legitimises categories that we want to undermine.

Yes we do want to undermine them (I for one want to see a world without them), but so long as they are the basis upon which capitalism oppresses people we simply have to use them.

I don’t expect many people to agree with what I’ve argued. Contrary to popular belief, most of the faction disagrees with me.

I do hope, however, we are open and dynamic enough to recognise the positive aspects of intersectionality – the aspects that have the potential to enrich our understanding of and theory on oppression – rather than see all that’s new or foreign as an attack on our tradition. I’d say intersectionality is a friend: but I don’t expect even my best of friends to be perfect.
ON CONFIDENTIALITY

Pat (Euston) and Pura (Liverpool)

This piece is written by two comrades who have had intimate dealings with the Disputes Committee, and have particular dealings in the ‘use of confidentiality’ by the CC and the Disputes Committee.

One of us was the chair of the Disputes Committee until he resigned from that body in January, the other worked closely with the second woman as she strove to have her case against M heard.

When considering the issue of confidentiality in dispute cases, we believe that a key point is what we mean by confidentiality. In the recent disputes, the term was bandied about as if we all share a common understanding and definition. We don’t.

And in any case, there can be never such thing as a “blanket duty to maintain confidentiality” (quote from review of Disputes Committee). This is nothing more than a gagging clause. It is unacceptable. The Disputes Committee review regrettably fails to address this issue and perpetuates the idea that we have a common and agreed understanding of what confidentiality means, and what it’s for. This is inadequate.

In our dealings with recent dispute cases, it seemed that the understanding of confidentiality veered between the two most common contexts we come across. One of these is health and other public services, where confidentiality is invoked to protect vulnerable others (patient/client, child, etc.). The other is in workplace disputes, where the boss/management uses confidentiality as a means of isolating and gagging workers, impeding proper transparency and preventing the worker from collectivising and politicising an individual case.

Confidentiality in resolving disputes in a revolutionary organisation is not similar to these two settings, and the issue requires a much clearer, more political exposition and understanding. We have to ask both what we mean by confidentiality and the purpose we want it to serve. We need to agree how this will be achieved and we have to move this with members politically, not by disciplinary threats.

Failure to get this right can lead to gross distortions of the practical implementation of our politics. We have both had direct experience of this in our dealings with the recent disputes. One author experienced being shouted down in a branch meeting, physically prevented from speaking, under the accusation of “you’re breaking confidentiality”.

In fact, she was highlighting the inadequate treatment of the woman who had made a complaint of sexual harassment. In this case, a false accusation of breaking confidentiality was used to cover this up and prevent other comrades finding out.

The other author, towards the end of his time on the Disputes Committee was asked by the CC to set up a ‘leak enquiry’ into the W case. It always seemed a rather grandiose request and well beyond the means of the Disputes Committee. However two or three members of the Disputes Committee took it up with great gusto. They seemed to be keen to find a smoking gun, particularly one that might point to a CC member they didn’t like, or possibly even to their own Chair.

This then became a one-sided enquiry, with Disputes Committee members wanting to interview individuals who had said something vague to other individuals etc. It was silly in the extreme, and when the storm broke gave the impression that the Disputes Committee were more worried about ‘who said what to who’ than the hugely more important question ‘who did what to who’.

To compound the problem and apparently confirm this priority, when the CC finally agreed to the commission it announced that its remit would be ‘to look into ‘leaks and issues of confidentiality’’. This further gave the impression of cover up. Thankfully the CC under pressure from the opposition, saw sense and extended the remit.

How can such a priority possibly fit with our politics? The practical implication is frightening.

If a comrade believes they were a victim of a sexual assault, and has talked to friends, relatives, or other comrades before deciding whether to proceed, and those friends, family or other comrades tell others, it would be a disaster for the complainant to find the Disputes Committee seems more concerned about who knows, and seems more concerned in tracking down everyone who knows to ‘warn them’ about confidentiality then in dealing with the substance of the case. Otherwise we can end up with the Disputes Committee looking like some amateur Cheka going around issuing warnings about breaches in confidentiality.

This is not just a problem in the abstract. The experience of the second woman in this instance is worth looking at.

At the time she first came forward as a witness to the W case, at least two members of the Disputes committee panel were highly exercised by how she knew W’s complaint had been rejected. Again a highly inappropriate starting point; in cases like this some knowledge that there is a case may lead to other comrades coming forward.

Indeed if we become obsessed by confidentiality we are in danger of offering the accused greater protection than even the bourgeois courts do in cases of this nature.

Furthermore this lack of clarity over what was meant by confidentiality allowed for some serious abuses to take place.

When the second woman was writing to the Disputes Committee about her case, five consecutive emails she received from them ended with the warning “This correspondence is confidential between the Disputes Committee and yourselves. Any breaches of this confidentiality will be taken extremely seriously and will be acted upon by the Disputes Committee”.

This crass insensitivity was shocking and grossly inappropriate. Any trade union rep would vehemently protest such very poor treatment in a work context. We think our conduct should be better than at work – in this case it was much worse. In reality this interpretation of confidentiality was used as a means of maintaining secrecy and control over the complainant.

So we have to look at more than just how we apply confidentiality – we must also accept that we need a common and collectively-determined understanding of what we mean. This must be coherent with our politics.

We need a working definition which is fit for a revolutionary organisation, and we need to raise this politically, not through disciplinary threats.

We should take pride in developing proper revolutionary practice in the difficult area of disputes. We should apply our principles here, not hide under the cover of secrecy. We need agreed, clear procedures.

They don’t have to be heavily bureaucratic, but they must be open to scrutiny and transparency. This will significantly build members’ confidence in our disputes processes. And we need responsibility: the Disputes Committee is elected to carry out a function, and it must commit itself to doing this.

Therefore we think the Disputes Committee needs to see issues of confidentiality in a political light, understand their practical implementations and implications and must guard against a process that appears to be more pre-occupied with the reputation of the accused, then the complaint of the accuser. If not it is the Party’s reputation which ultimately suffers.

For these reasons we support the amendment being put forward by the Rebuilding The Party faction.

RENEWING OUR PARTY’S LEADERSHIP

Pat (Euston) and Ian (Bury & Prestwich)

The job of leadership is to lead. This means foreseeing how events may unfold, being able to promptly respond to unforeseen circumstances, and convincing others to take a course of action which is effective in advancing our goals in those particular circumstances.

Our leadership has failed to lead effectively over the last year. The CC was
slow to grasp what its motion belatedly acknowledges – that our disputes processes “were shown not to be adequate to deal with the cases of sexual misconduct and their aftermath”. They fought tooth and nail against attempts to rectify inadequacies, creating a bitterly divided and factional atmosphere. Progress was made belatedly and piecemeal, behind a curtain of bluster and political misdirection. In the process we lost hundreds of members, including most of our young members, and damaged our reputation in the wider movement and internationally.

Anybody who takes on the heavy burden of leadership will make mistakes. What many in the party and beyond find difficult to understand is why our CC is so reluctant to face up to those mistakes so that our party can rebuild.

The CC tells us all its members agree that mistakes have been made over the handling of the disputes and the aftermath. But it refuses to tell us what those mistakes were, and it refuses to apologise for those mistakes.

One reason for this was given by Charlie at the party’s Manchester aggregate. He argued that an apology would be linked to a change of leadership, and that he was against a change in leadership. This is not a good reason for refusing to do the right thing.

Another reason is that CC members don’t agree about what the mistakes were. Some think they responded to comrades’ concerns over the disputes too slowly. Others think the mistake was to respond to these concerns at all. Hence the vague talk of mistakes and the refusal to discuss differences openly (a refusal that defies the party policy decided upon by the 2009 special conference on democracy). This way a façade of CC unity can temporarily be maintained until the facton has been dealt with.

The facton identified a number of measures necessary to begin rebuilding our party. We should publicly acknowledge the specific nature of the mistakes that occurred. We should apologise to the two complainants for the negative consequences they have suffered as a result of their treatment. We need to revise our disputes procedures to make them “fit for purpose”. And we need leading bodies that reflect the fact that political lessons of the past year have been learnt.

It now seems likely that at least some of these steps will partially happen. But even though the CC is making some welcome moves, their proposed slate represents a continuation of the current unprincipled lash-up between those CC members who can see what needs to happen (even if they are unwilling to say so openly) and a sectarian minority intent on turning the clock back.

This lash-up is not a stable solution, as was exposed at September’s NC meeting, where the opposition and supporters of the CC majority succeeded in defeating the sectarian minority in a series of key votes. But those sectarianists are now banking on gaining the upper hand next year – and that depends on their success in driving sufficient numbers of the opposition out of the party this year, by disciplinary measures or otherwise.

The Rebuilding the Party faction is preparing an alternative CC slate for debate at conference. We want party unity on a principled basis. We hope that comrades in the faction and far beyond can do this and work together. We thank all those who have already sent in suggestions for the slate.

The CC frequently complains that the faction is formed on a narrow front – that of correcting the problems with the disputes process and improving our political culture. This is true: it is also how factions ought to operate, according to the Duncan Hallas document the CC quoted in IB2.

But the CC also says we have nothing to say about the fact that in confront- ing the party. This is nonsense: just look at the many IB articles by faction members on a whole host of important issues from women’s oppression to the state of the working class under neoliberalism. In fact comrades throughout the party have opinions on every issue – and any candidate for the CC should be judged on what they say and what they do. Unlike the present CC, candidates on our slate won’t be hiding their views behind the veil of collective responsibility.

Others object that the facton has a “different model” of leadership. This is also true. We think the leadership should abide by the decisions of the 2009 democracy commission conference and be open with members about significant political differences. We also think the leadership should be prepared to admit to mistakes and make steps to correct them.

A host of other debates have opened up in the party in recent months. Many of them – such as the one raised by Alex and Charlie over what happened with the Respect split – are long overdue. These debates are only just starting. They won’t take place on current factional lines, and won’t be resolved by this conference. In fact the current factional divisions are making these debates more difficult – which is why we need to properly resolve the question of the dispute now, rather than fudging it and hoping we can “move forward”.

We hope the CC will ensure all our candidates for the CC can attend conference as either delegates or observers, so that conference can consider what they have to say on the full range of issues. There is still time to reunite and rebuild the party – but that involves an honest reckoning with what has happened and significant shifts at the top of our organisation.

Wales – Class Struggle, Reformism and Devolution

Peter and Tomáš (Cardiff)

In the following article we seek to address how to effectively rebuild and intervene as a Leninist party in the nuanced political terrain that confronts us.

Both authors are members of Cardiff SWP, but have a good level of experience when it comes to the reality of Welsh politics in general.

We further wish to make clear, that over the last year we have fully supported the Central Committee and firmly opposed the Faction. Our article should in no way be perceived as pandering to the positions of the ‘opposition’ – for federalism, etc. – instead, we seek to take on much of their arguments and seek to develop a position that is within the SWP’s tradition and understands the reality of the political terrain we face in the current period.

We understand that our article will spark a debate, particularly in the South Wales District, which is timely and welcome. But by doing so, we also wish to provide an example of how debate should be conducted with the SWP – in a comradely and political way, through Party structures and publications.

The Party’s national perspectives are always shaped by what is actually taking place in the outside world. Wales is in no way immune from the global crisis; however, the way in which austerity and resistance play out is shaped by the nature of reformism under devolution. Our article is not an argument for ‘Welsh exceptionalism’ – that we are faced by a set of radically different objective circumstances, meaning that our general perspectives do not fit. They do; however the question remains, how can we intervene most effectively in the nuanced political reality in order to strengthen the impact of the Party’s national strategy.

Unite Against Fascism

To begin with a positive example of how we’re effectively implementing our national perspectives, we’ll mention our UAF work and the successes it has seen.

The Party’s antifascist work has been brought into a particularly sharp focus during the last year, primarily in opposing the National Front (NF) in Swansea. We mobilised a demonstration of up to 400 to oppose the NF’s ‘White Pride March’ in April and stopped them gaining a seat in a subsequent council bye-election; this, alongside continuing regular campaigning, is preventing a rump of 20 or so Nazis from growing.
Following Woolwich, we saw the desecration of Muslim graves in Newport and attacks on a Mosque in Neath. The Party was able to move quickly in response, organising a number of successful public meetings across South Wales; not only were they numerically successful, but also bore the fruit of our work in rooting UAF within the Muslim community and the trade unions.

This success can be seen as a product of our ability to make sharp turns that emphasise the importance of local events within a national context.

Workers’ struggle

However, when it comes to the Party’s response to workers’ resistance to austerity the picture is less straightforward. To put it into sharp focus, it’s useful to look at the absence of regional strike action by the NUT and NASUWT in Wales.

While deprived from rolling regional action when it seemed the Welsh Government was willing to engage in negotiations over its own education ‘reforms’.

This was not entirely unexpected. During the Cardiff Rally for Education last May, Chris Keates, General-Secretary of the NASUWT, said that it was still possible to avoid regional strike action in Wales, if the Welsh Government was willing to settle.

Even though education is a devolved policy area (meaning we do not have academies or free schools, etc.), teachers in Wales still suffer the majority attack as teachers in England; moreover, the Welsh Government is implementing its own ‘reforms’ such as the new banding system.

The District slowly came to the realisation that the strike was off, simply by being quietly dropped from the latest press release – even a Comrade, who is an NUT Rep, was never explicitly told that the strike was off by the Wales Office! Now, talk of a national teachers’ strike after Christmas is at best unclear as to whether it will include Wales.

This particular example brings together all aspects of the nuanced political reality in Wales. So it is important to draw out what it can tell us about the relationship between Welsh Labour and the trade union bureaucracy and the role of the Welsh Assembly and their impact on workers’ struggle.

The example of the NUT and NASUWT strike that never was is not isolated; the case of the Remploy campaign and Unite Wales’ ‘strategy’ around regional pay brings further light to this.

In Wales, the Remploy factories were in serious talks over what effectively amounted to nationalisation.

During the 10th May 2012 strike, Andy Richards, Secretary of Unite Wales, told workers on the picket lines that if regional pay were brought in, the Welsh Government would plug the gap; this again points to the relationship between the Welsh Labour Government and the trade union bureaucracy and what the latter’s strategy in fighting austerity is.

It is also important to note that at the height of the 2010 fees revolt, the Welsh Assembly reacted by pledging to subsidise the increase in fees for Welsh students and maintain EMA for some students. The Coalition’s subsequent Higher Education White Paper also did not apply to Wales.

Here we need to analyse the relationship between Welsh Labour and the trade union bureaucracy and the role of the Welsh Assembly.

Welsh Labour and the trade union bureaucracy

In the last year, we’ve seen the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy come into conflict – from the Falkirk debacle, which saw Ed Miliband attack the current nature of the trade union link to GMB slashing its funding in response.

It is important to see this in the context of New Labour and Ed Miliband’s leadership, rejecting the notion that Labour has simply become a “social-neoliberal” party populated by the “public sector middle class”;

however, in Wales, the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy come into little conflict, its relationship best characterised by the old adage of ‘beer and sandwiches’.

It provides concrete examples of the role of the bureaucracy in negotiating the terms of exploitation.

While Labour seek to manage Welsh capitalism in a way that is most amenable to the bosses, this is implemented by the incorporation of the top level trade union structures into that management; hence, we see a mechanism of ‘co-option’ of trade union resistance to austerity, in particular, reoccurring again and again.

Rhetorical sympathy offered to those entering the arena of resistance by AMs has the power of providing on the one hand a seemingly practical aim to strive for, but also has the power of setting the terms of that resistance; therefore, in many cases limiting demands well within the parameters of Welsh reformism, leading resistance down what often turns out to be a totally blind alley and squeezing the political ground that revolutionaries would normally seek to occupy.

For example, during the Remploy campaign: following the one march through Cardiff by workers from factories across South Wales, the rally was addressed by Mick Antoniw, a Labour Assembly Member (AM), who declared that the Welsh Government would “save Remploy” thereby meeting with the obviously desired strategy of the bureaucracy.

No more was heard of the Remploy campaign from the unions since then; and no more was heard of the Remploy factories, because there soon were none.

The roots of devolution

It’s not the case, as Neil Davidson recently argued in the ISJ, that under “neoliberalism” power is devolved to the lowest possible level as a means for “passing the buck” for implementing austerity. In Wales at least, devolution is a result of the labour movement seeing it as useful to its own ends.

In the 1997 referendum, the turnout and vote in favour of devolution wasn’t actually that impressive; however, it did represent a massive swing to the Yes Campaign compared to 1979. This was not due to an upsurge in Welsh cultural nationalism, but rather the impact of the 1980s. Both the effects of the actual ‘counter-reforms’ and defeats suffered by our class, made the Labour Party and trade union movement swing behind the idea of devolution – a Welsh Government in Cardiff was seen as a bulwark against a Tory government in Westminster.

This also has to be seen in the context of the unrelated growth of Welsh political nationalism, starting in the 1950s and 1960’s but finding new life 20 or so years later and reinforced by the actuality of the Assembly’s presence.

Plaid Cymru and Welsh nationalism

Today, Welsh political nationalism finds it main organisational form in Plaid Cymru – the Party of Wales, but in the past has seen a number of formations.

Historically, Welsh nationalism has very weak roots as Wales has never suffered national oppression.

The flooding of Tryweryn - when a Welsh village was flooded to provide water for Liverpool - in the 1957 brought the national question into prominence.

The period during the 1960’s and 1970’s saw the first development of direct action groups, primarily concerned with the Welsh Language. Even though today this is an at best marginal activity, the issue was taken up by young people who were rebelling against wider injustices; this wrestled the issue from the oldreactionaries and pushed nationalist discourse to the left.

This influence manifests itself in Plaid Cymru’s move towards the left with it’s growing identification with “decentralist socialism”. This shift had begun following World War Two, when liberals and socialist members increasingly came into conflict with the party’s right-wing leadership who openly supported fascists.

Its initial electoral breakthrough came during the 1966 Carmarthenshire bye-election, which arose off the back of discontent with the Wilson Government and local pit closures. This led to further near breakthroughs in the Rhondda and Caerphilly where Labour’s majority was severely cut.

This does not mean that Plaid Cymru politics were anything other than that of a bourgeois nationalist party in the post
war period: it’s social base was still largely restricted to Y Fro Gymreag, the rural areas where the Welsh remained its predomiance and primarily talked the language of cultural nationalism. Furthermore, until recently its model for an independent Wales was still the ‘Celtic Tiger’.

However, whether this simple characterisation fits Plaid Cymru today is less clear. Today, Plaid Cymru is led by Leanne Wood. Her victory in the 2012 leadership race and her subsequent manoeuvres can be seen as a significant change in the trajectory and orientation of the party.

Her emphasis on “decentralist socialism” has shifted the party’s economic policy away from the ‘Celtic Tiger’ model towards a mixed economy with a localist emphasis where ‘workers co-operatives’ play a prominent role.

This has also translated into a not insignificant growth in Plaid’s membership - particularly amongst young people who see it as a viable socialist alternative to Labour.

But more significantly, is the question of the trade union bureaucracy. Leanne herself is a former officer for NAPO and Chair of the PCS Cross-Party Group within the Welsh Assembly; leading figures, such as the Chair of FBU Wales who has played a significant role in Unite the Resistance locally is also a member of Plaid Cymru.

Indeed, such has been the growth of the link between Plaid Cymru and the unions that Andy Richards, Unite Wales Secretary, felt compelled to explicitly attack Plaid in a statement for enourecing on ‘Labour’s territory’.

This is not to say that Plaid Cymru is now a workers’ party, but we must recognise that significant changes - most significantly to its social base - have taken place and continue to do so.

We should also be clear that Wales lacks the capacity to be an independent capitalist state, as is outlined in the Silk Report which Plaid Cymru has accepted.

To us as revolutionary socialists, it is easy to see it as the fantasy politics of an illusionary world view. But alongside the material reality of Wales’s ‘reformism with reforms’ - from free prescription charges to banning black listing firms from public contract – it is important in understanding why reformism plays out in Wales the way it does and maintains the vitality to continually present alternatives to the status quo.

This creates a specific political landscape which revolutionaries must have the flexibility to come to terms with - as a means to push beyond.

**Political landscape**
The Welsh Assembly's powers are limited to specific policy areas. Although it has strengthened them since the 2011 referendum, its powers still remain limited enough for the Welsh Government to be conveniently vague as to what it can offer.

This allows the Welsh Government to make pronouncements about how it is shielding Wales from austerity and creates the space for it to pledge its sympathy with resistance; this, in part, so that it can align itself with a social base for ratcheting up the pressure for ‘devo max’.

So, how do we respond? It may be useful - as a case in point of what not to do - to look at the response from the rest of the left! It is no coincidence that Wales is one of the key strongholds for the Socialist Party.

The Senedd provides the perfect back-drop for their brand of left reformism. Whilst speaking the language of revolution the SP’s political orientation is entirely focussed on the Welsh Government setting a needs budget - either by denouncing it into embarrassment or commandeering it for themselves through electoral work.

This will echo calls familiar to any Comrade in a District where the Socialist Party have some strength with regards to the local authority. However, the political terrain outlined above has provided fertile ground for their growth in recent years in a way rarely reflected elsewhere. This provides another voice to the calls that so often lead resistance down blind alleys, but also serve then to somehow clog up the political space for the genuinely revolutionary left.

But what this means in practice is that where they will win the argument to do so - calling for countless boring lobbies of the Welsh Assembly and making moralising denouncements for it for failing to follow Liverpool in the 1980s - it often leaves activists with little enthusiasm for what they offer, leading them into passivity and inaction.

**Prospects for revolutionaries**
Let’s be clear, resistance in Wales is not determined just by the factors outlined above. It is not the case that Welsh workers are in any way less militant or willing to fight than their English counterparts.

The vast majority of the Tories’ counter reforms have a direct bearing on the lives on people in Wales: tens of thousands of people are still suffering the welfare attacks and are being forced to pay the hated Bedroom Tax.

But tens of thousands have also struck against Tory austerity in areas where the Welsh Government has no baring, notably UK Civil Service workers in the PCS.

However, the key question is how revolutionaries can steer the course and implement a strategy that places workers self-activity as the central question, in a context where reformism offers a simple solution attractive for its seeming easiness for resistance.

What we have sought to lay out is the basis for an analysis of the nuanced political reality in Wales - namely the way reformism operates under devolution. We cannot claim to have the definitive answers to these profound questions. What we seek is to initiate a debate in the party, particularly in our District, through which we can seek to develop a sophisticated analysis that enables us to effectively intervene and implement the national strategy in the political terrain in which we find ourselves.

Both Unite Against Fascism and Unite the Resistance - through which we organised a very successful unofficial demo on May 10th 2012 - have already shown themselves to be absolutely indispensable tools in the current period. But we seek bigger and better things than we presently have managed to achieve: more roots in the class and recruitment; more resistance and more victories.

But we do ask that the Party nationally to aid the development of our analysis, namely with coverage of events in Wales. When the NUT and NASUWT pulled their members out of strike action the Paper should have carried an article denouncing the unions’ actions.

The same all too often occurs with other events. The development of a vibrant Pro Choice group in Cardiff to which the SWP was central was slow to receive coverage. When Occupy Cardiff was smashed up on its first day (the only camp, at least in Britain, to be smashed before the first night), it received only minimal coverage despite it being the first time the 1994 Criminal Justice Act was used against political protestors.

But looking outwardly: in the coming months the Welsh Government’s arguments that it can protect workers will wear thinner as its manoeuvrability in managing austerity becomes more limited.

(1) Earlier this year, the Cardiff and Vale Health Board sent out 188 notices to a number of its staff. Whilst on the other hand, we’ve already seen the development of a campaign against the NHS rationalisation programme, including a demonstration of 800 strong demo in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Whilst there is no sense that the NHS is under general attack in Wales - after all it is not being privatised - the question of budget cuts and ‘rationalisation’ will rise in prominence.

(2) Funding for Welsh local authorities is set to fall by an average of 5%; a senior council executive within Cardiff County Council recently remarked that within 5 years the council is likely to employ just 50% of the staff that it does now. This could see a real revival of the antiguts movement in Wales; already, budget cuts implemented by Cardiff County Council earlier this year led to a militant demonstration of 300 people that was supported by Unison and GMB.

(3) Furthermore, on the industrial front the FBU is already in dispute with the Welsh Government and has struck against it as part of the UK wide action.

The fact that the Welsh Government will not be able to manage austerity in as
effective a way certainly opens up possibilities for resistance. However, this does not mean that the mechanisms described in the article above or worker’s reformist illusions in the edifice of the Welsh Assembly are simply going to fall away.

Conclusion

To pose the question that Comrades in Wales face: on the coaches to the TUC’s ‘A Future that Works’ demonstration last October, a letter from the First Minister, Carwyn Jones, was distributed, which signed off with the line “In Wales, we are building the Future that Works”!

What we need is a resistance that can win.

THE STANDPOINT OF THE PROLETARIAT

Rhetta (Manchester City Centre)

“The standpoint of the proletariat.” What does it mean? And why the SWP cannot be a revolutionary socialist party that exists to intervene in the working class in ways that will bring forward a socialist revolution - without it.

This contribution addresses a fatal flaw in the DC commission report about how to change our procedures. With Mark K, in September, I put forward amendments to the proposed DC process to the National Committee which then appeared in IB1. The amendment that addresses that flaw is now specifically concentrated on here. I explain what the standpoint of the proletariat is and why, in our DC procedures, we must consciously work from a position that is as close to this standpoint as we can get - this side of the socialist revolution.

Definition of terms

The proletariat are the many. We are the overwhelming majority of people in the world who are exploited and oppressed under capitalism and who have an intrinsic, exclusive and collective interest in overcoming class divisions within the class (including racism, sexism, homophobia etc.), and in overthrowing the existing social order, i.e. in creating a classless society: it isn’t just a ‘good idea’!

The standpoint of the proletariat is the place from which this overwhelming majority can both perceive the totality of the means through which we are exploited and oppressed and can work out how to overthrow it.

Every individual who is a member of the proletariat i.e. belongs to the group that is the overwhelming majority of people exploited and oppressed under capitalism, has the potential to perceive from this standpoint and to be a part of trying to overthrow capitalism. However, for every one of us, in practice, the process of actually perceiving where this standpoint is, and trying to perceive from it, is both continuous and conscious.

It is a striving to uncover the totality of the means through which we are being exploited and oppressed at any given time and in any given place (historical period and geographical location). At all times we are working towards fully realizing this standpoint, towards occupying this precise position.

What being in the proletariat does to my ways of seeing

By definition, if I am a member of the proletariat, it has been demonstrated to me and I have been told – with more or less sublety, but repeatedly – that I am not worthy of occupying any standpoint at all.

Fundamentally, what happens to me as a human being in the society, and how I think and feel about that, are irrelevant. I am a worker cog – child or adult – in the capitalist machine, and the idea that I could occupy the sole position that carries the potential to act collectively, end class society and create a world future that is in the interests of the vast majority is anathema.

This is because the ideology of the capitalist system is contradictory. At the same time, it denies that I – the proletarian individual and the proletariat collective – even exist, and it seeks define what my existence is. Faced with this contradiction, for me to insist on my interpretation of my existence is to act in the face of a twinned assault on my:

• Very existence
• Right to have a view about my existence

When this contradiction is clear to me, then, with this understanding, I can begin to try and pick apart how I see myself and those around me. A myriad of distorted forms of my existence exist.

Through my own lens (i.e. how I see me as opposed to how anyone else sees me), those distorted forms are developed by an alienated person who understands that I am alienated, and who understands that I am separated from myself and from those around me because of the nature and forms that our human relations take. I understand that these human relations derive from the economic mode of production that is capitalism i.e. the ways in which human beings are organized to produce and reproduce and the social relations that arise out of that production mode.

Among other things, to reach this understanding involves me ploughing out of - and staying out of - a belief about myself that I am not worth taking seriously which, in turn or concomitantly, derives from being a proletarian and - therefore - being incapable of having a standpoint as a proletarian.

Being a proletarian who is a woman

Ironically, over the last year, the nature of the attacks that have been visited upon certain members of the Disputes Committee (the majority of whom are women who have been attacked, in the majority, by men) has thrown the history of the derided or unworthy self who is a proletarian woman - born in a caravan in 1960 – into relief.

I am not assumed to be worthy in any way and I certainly do not command the self confidence that my contemporary from the ruling class might take as read. The ruling class woman might not even know that there could be any doubt about their worth in the world because that is their assumed right, the right to be self-confident.

As a young, working class girl, I am sexualised from an early age. This comes partly through the lack of educational expectation that surrounds me so that the most important thing about me and that I am expected to do is to be a mother. This will be my highest achievement. It also comes partly through the absence of pathways through which it is possible for me to express my process of maturation from girl to woman.

Not so many working class girls manage to sublimate the emotional and physical convulsions of their adolescence through access to a self-expressive range: writing, drawing, painting, dancing, being a musician, a designer, a novelist, a director, a philosopher. Come on! Who do you think you are?

Now, I know who I am.

I am consciously and continuously striving to occupy the standpoint of a proletarian because I believe that it is possible to permanently engage with life through that dialectical motion, that toing and froing between the truth, that is concrete, and what the system tries to make me, and every other prole, believe about the world.

I want me - and every other proletarian – to consciously resist being inhibited to the point that we don’t interfere with the capitalist world view, either in theory or in practice. On the contrary, I want me - and every other conscious proletarian - to take ourselves seriously. I believe that, at any given moment in time, it is possible for me to command and communicate about a standpoint that is as consciously proletarian as it is possible to achieve on this side of the end of capitalism.

I joined an organisation that shares this perspective about the legitimacy of the standpoint of the proletariat and that, consciously and consistently, seeks to reach it in practice in every sphere of life.
fact, that why I joined the SWP. This is an SWP that understands the centrality of this perspective for being able to achieve the victory of the proletariat in practice.

Then, some comrades began to argue that it is not possible for someone who ‘knows’ a comrade to be able to consciously work to understand the truth – that is concrete – and to perceive and act upon that comrades’ actions from the point of view of what is in the interests of the proletariat. More, the argument has run that if a comrade is accused of actions that ‘make this an issue of rape’, then any comrade who ‘knows’ the comrade who stands accused, is incapable of doing anything other than colluding with them or covering up those actions.

Any capitulation that this view is legitimate for a revolutionary socialist organisation limits the proletariat - to the extent that revolution becomes impossible. To me, there is no point in belonging to that kind of organisation because it ceases to be revolutionary.

PEACE AND DEMOCRACY ROADMAP
Tom (Tottenham)

The bitter civil war that has engulfed the SWP since at least last year shows little sign of ending. Both sides are growing increasingly shrill and abusive. Like many non-aligned comrades I’m finding it ever more difficult to separate the truth from the falsehoods. However I don’t think we should consign ourselves to a damaging, potentially terminal split.

Below are some brief, sketched ideas (there have been enough verbose articles in the IBs already) for taking some of the heat out of the dispute, strengthening and renewing the party’s democratic structures and, ultimately, rejoining the battle against the Tories’ neoliberal programme to restructure British society in the interests of capital.

1. Set up a new, independent commission, chaired by a someone as far removed from the dispute and the party as possible (a sympathetic non-SWP left wing lawyer or labour movement figure perhaps) to examine to decisions and actions of individual central committee (CC) members (and any other relevant people) after the first woman complained to the CC in 2010 and establish, in so far as it is possible, an agreed sequence of events relating to her complaint and subsequent complaint by the second woman. This would allow the wider membership to decide if there should be a political reckoning as the opposition claim or if the central committee acted properly in the circumstances.

2. Publish the minutes of CC meetings routinely with anything sensitive, such as tactics for an anti-fascist demo or strikes, redacted.

There is nothing sensitive about political differences. The membership and the working class movement have a right to know about them and it is insulting that arguments in the past have been suppressed. One of the most troubling aspects of this crisis (as well as the Respect crisis) is that the membership has been left in the dark about disputes on the CC.

3. Replace the slate system for electing the central committee with individual elections. This would allow the membership to determine the composition of the central committee, hold individuals to account and promote new comrades as they emerge in the struggle. If we can’t trust the membership to do this then we may as well give up.

4. Elect the editor the Socialist Worker, International Socialist Journal and other party publications, to ensure that every area of the party’s work responds to the class struggle and conforms to the democracy expected by radicalised workers and young people. It would also ensure that a variety of opinions are expressed and party disputes are covered objectively.

5. Ditch the speaker slip system. It is anti-democratic to try and structure debates at public meetings. Even if the selection process is totally objective it reeks of Stalinism and top-down, old-fashioned managerial politics. Let the debate flow and the chair decide in front of the whole meeting who is called and who is veering off topic.

6. Create an online strategy fit for the 21st century. As most comrades now rec

The party has let itself down in the way it practice education.

It seems odd that we have so many educationalists in the organisation and yet such a conservative approach to the way that we engage the majority of members, and non-members, in our ideas.

I think this is demonstrated in the fact that the 25-minute lecture is the almost the only way we get members and non-members to learn about our political ideas.

Just to say, the problem isn’t lectures in and of themselves, sometimes and for some people they’re useful. it is to say, there are many ways of allowing people to do so - of facilitating the kinds of discussions that actually engage people and undermine the reification of theory.

The Educationalists were a big step forward, yet the focus was often more on the comrade booked to speak than the change of methods used to explore the ideas discussed.

When it comes to the students our members come into contact with in schools, colleges and universities, we would always want them to learn through critical engagement, to question everything.

Understanding comes from context, from the way that ideas arise in relation to other ideas. Why do we think then, that our meetings, teach-ins and conferences need to be a set of talks? What we want to be able to do is thrash ideas out.

Let’s be honest - faced with a large room, just after academics have articulated clear positions for 25 minutes, you end up thinking that you either have to deliver your own 3-minute thesis, or just ask a question. This is no basis for actually thrashing ideas out.

We title branch meetings ‘has the working class changed’, and then deliver our position before that question can actually

‘WHO TEACHES THE TEACHERS THAT TEACH THE TEACHERS?’ – PARTY EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY

Soren (Goldsmiths SWSS)

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We title branch meetings ‘has the working class changed’, and then deliver our position before that question can actually
be asked. This is before we even talk about the fact that lots of people find it very difficult to concentrate for such a period of time - it simply not accessible for some people.

Often our practice reflects the fact that the lecture format, with time for contributions afterwards, is inadequate. 'Going for a coffee', i.e. having long one-to-one discussions with individuals or pairs, is another pedagogical technique, but isn't really treated as such. What's problematic about that is that it isn't seen as part of our party education programme, and is in no way systematic.

Worse still, it strengthens the idea of 'party education' and party theory as something that is conveyed from teacher to taught. Yet this is completely at odds with the actual process of party education programme, and is in no way systematic.

There's a problem with treating our theory as a tradition to be won to. It's a conceptualisation that actually mirrors Gove's filling-young-minds-with-rote-facts. What it encourages is the idea that we the IS tradition is an iconoclastic stake in the ground. Yet the early history of our organisation showed that there was far more strength in heterodoxy than orthodoxy.

Whilst we have in the last few decades demarcated ourselves from autonomists, the early growth of the IS bears a remarkable similarity to the growth of the anti-Stalinist workerist and autonomist left in Italy, more than we did with many Trotskyist organisations. Tony Cliff didn't come up with State Capitalism. State Capitalism was incredibly important, in countering Stalinists and social democrats, but the Berlin Wall fell over 20 years ago. It can't be the way we define who we are and what we do. Why should this be controversial?

Bearing witness to this reality - that our tradition is not solid but fluid - is not weakness, doesn't undermine unity in practice, it can be the basis for it. Members who are actively aware of nuances and able to hold different opinions are the fundamental basis of democracy in an organisation.

The active engagement of the mass of membership with the strategic and theoretical direction of the party seems to have far more relevance in terms of the way we define ourselves as revolutionary socialists.

We need active members, who are capable of simultaneously designing a leaflet for their workplace, but also of writing the political content and of inverting, reporting on and theorising the nature of 2013 capitalism - not just in the international markets but in their own workplace.

We do have these comrades, but as a result of individual members making a concerted effort to challenge and develop them, not as a result of systematic work.

Estelle, one of the people who has been seen making these precise efforts, has pointed out several times just how few women wrote for the publications, and just how small the pool of contributors was in general.

This isn't the hallmark of an organisation of active members, but of an organisation where a division of labour has taken place between members who are active and members who are theorists.

Ironically there has been a degree to which the crisis has seen a democratisation of theory. By having to articulate what kind of organisation and politics we actually want, far more of us than usual have taken the time to attempt to write, inquire, theorise and explain.

In their failure to anticipate the effect of the accusations against Comrade Delta the CC majority exhibited they too were out of touch.

Kimber and Callinicos are hypocritical in their assertion that "The specific issues that sparked this process are very important" as their article continues to downplay what happened and how it has affected the Party.

For over a year their faction has stonewalled on the issue of sexual harassment. Initially "our procedures" were defended to the hilt. Now we have much better ones. Comrade Delta was "a member in good standing" but now he has left. By writing off the initial accusation as "unproven" Kimber and Callinicos continue this defensive minimising strategy.

Proving sexual misconduct is of course very difficult but does anyone dispute that a young comrade felt very badly treated by a powerful Party leader and that afterwards she was not properly supported in complaining about this? Does anyone dispute that her young friends in the party were harassed for supporting her?

Also why do Kimber and Callinicos not make it clear that the complaint leading to a "subsequent hearing" was also an accusation of sexual harassment by Comrade Delta?

A year ago their faction used a bureaucratic excuse to deny the existence of this complaint although the comrade had made it to the full conference of the Party. A few weeks ago a member of the Central Committee continued to defend this dishonesty during a meeting of my branch.

The faction fight has thrown up political positions on both sides that I am opposed to. For example Comrade Delta loyalists have written off all the Party's students and talked about replacing them easily with the next crop. On the other side a minority have illusions in their future prospects if they split.

On the issue of sexual harassment these are divisions. This issue has shown that we have had a leadership that could not anticipate trouble, that is complacent about how we are perceived, that cannot admit they have made a mistake, that has still to apologise to the young women involved, that failed to grasp the importance of power relationships in this area and that did not have the sense to listen to the many comrades who smelled a rat and voted against the DC report.

We need to replace this leadership with comrades who maintain closer links with the membership and show better understanding of the politics of sexual harassment.

MISSING THE POINT

Norman (Wandsworth & Merton)

In their article in ISJ 140 on 'The Politics of the SWP Crisis' Kimber and Callinicos further exemplify the failure of the majority of the Central Committee to get their heads around the significance of the accusations against one of the Party's most influential members.

For over two years they have minimised the mistakes made and the damage done to the Party's credibility. This failure of leadership can only be repaired by removing from the CC those who have fought so hard for Comrade Delta.

I agree with Kimber and Callinicos's political perspective. I have spent my life as a workers' representative in engineering, construction, health and education.

For the three years since retiring my most important contribution has been in a team selling SW every week outside a large hospital and issuing a party leaflet every few weeks where half of the content is about struggles within the workplace.

I remain committed to the view that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class and the power of the working class is in their role in production.

I agree that Counterfire is a movementist split to the right where German, Rees and Nineham have become out of touch with the realities of workers' struggle, possibly because of years of unchallenged full time roles in the Party and Stop the War.

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BUILDING THE PARTY IN WALTHAM FOREST

Chaz, Jacqui, James, Laura, Lis, Matt, Mona, Roderick and Sam
(Waltham Forest)

Many comrades have written in previous Internal Bulletins about the successes of the party in building and shaping local and national strikes, campaigns and movement events.

A valuable aspect of being in an organisation such as ours is that we are able to share and learn from one another’s successes, with the intention of generalising them. This is undoubtedly one of the realities that have kept many comrades in the party this last year, despite our difficulties.

We remain convinced that the SWP continues to be an important tool for revolutionaries in the 21st century, and this is what has made us so determined to fight to overcome its current internal crisis.

But we do not learn everything we need to about the state of class struggle and how we need to organise to shape that struggle from looking at our successes alone. It is important also that we are our own harshest critics, conducting honest assessments of where things have not gone so well, and attempting to work out why.

Just as we hope to generalise our successes, we should also attempt to learn from our mistakes and minimise our failures. This requires the ability to recognise that every member of the SWP, whether acting independently or alongside other comrades, and whether or not they are part of one of the Party’s leading bodies, is capable of making a mistake. There is no shame in getting things wrong, or in trying out a strategy and realising that it has not worked.

The ability to look reality in the face in this way is what makes the IS tradition distinct. It is in this spirit that we are responding to the article ‘Building the SWP in Waltham Forest’ that appeared in IB2. We believe that the piece offers a somewhat partial account of events in Waltham Forest over the past year, and feel we should set the record straight on some aspects of what the comrades have written.

Leytonstone branch

As the IB2 piece describes, Leytonstone branch was closed down in August. It is worth re-stating here the reasons that Leytonstone branch was set up in the first place. The party had recruited a number of members in the south of the borough, as well as further east along the central line, which connects to Leytonstone but not to Walthamstow. Local school students had joined the SWP around the student demonstrations, and we wanted to reach out to these new recruits and attempt to push outwards into the South of the borough more generally.

It is correct to say that attendance and activity dropped slightly after the January conference and fell further through the spring. However, to imply that this is simply a result of the disillusionment or introversion of the comrades who had supported the faction, as we believe the IB2 piece does, is overly-simplistic and inaccurate. A faction motion in the run up to special conference was passed in Leytonstone by only one vote - eight votes to seven - rather than by an overwhelming majority. When attendance at branch meetings declined in the spring, those comrades who voted against the motion, including the branch secretary, were among those not regularly attending.

The comrades’ IB2 piece glosses over the lack of support and communication Leytonstone branch received from the District Committee. Early in the summer, there had been some discussion about how to strengthen the branch. At the same time there were rumours of a merger. A Leytonstone comrade asked the District Committee whether a merger was being discussed, and was told that there was no such plan.

Given that the issue of the relative weakness of Leytonstone was brought to the attention of, and acknowledged by, the District Committee, we might have expected the DC to take action to support the weaker branch and make efforts to strengthen it. Instead, the DC initially denied it was planning to close the branch, then proposed the merger of the branches while several leading members of the Leytonstone branch were on holiday.

The article ignores the attempts by comrades (including a number that had supported the faction) to re-build the Leytonstone branch over the summer. At a branch meeting on 25 July, the branch put in place a plan for meetings over the summer. Everyone present agreed to do a branch meeting in the forthcoming weeks, including a comrade who had not taken part in the faction and more than one who had never given a branch talk before.

Branch meetings were maintained throughout the summer up until the merger. When a member of the DC came to the branch unannounced on 15 August to present the arguments for merging, this came as a surprise. Despite summer holidays, seven members of the branch were present at this meeting, while at least four regular attendees were on holiday. This was clearly a viable branch.

Moreover, the WF DC’s piece is demonstrably misleading in some of the numbers it quotes in order to make its case. It says that only one person from Leytonstone attended a local march against the bedroom tax. In fact there was a demo against the BNP at Downing Street the same day that six members attended. This had been discussed in that week’s branch meeting, and it was decided collectively that we should split our forces in this way.

In the event, the anti-bedroom tax demonstration was larger and livelier than comrades in the district had expected, and it would have been useful for more comrades from across the two branches to attend. To use this as evidence of the failure of Leytonstone branch is misleading. Further, it is incorrect to say that only two people from Leytonstone built the successful bedroom tax meeting; at least four comrades helped out with leafleting and door-to-door canvassing.

As the IB2 piece describes, the two branches in the district were merged on 21 August. The District Committee argued that this would be for the summer only, to allow the district to pursue a strategy of building for the UAF demo in Tower Hamlets and the 29 September demonstration in Manchester and to build in the local 6th form college. The comrades explained that the branch could then be re-launched in late September/early October, off the back of successes to be delivered by the district as a whole under the guidance of the District Committee.

At the time of writing, Leytonstone branch has not been re-launched. We would argue that the reasons for setting up the branch remain as strong as ever, and that the branch should be re-opened at the earliest possible opportunity, with support from Walthamstow where required.

District committee

The way concerns over Leytonstone branch were handled are reflective of wider issues concerning district-level leadership. For instance, following special conference, the District Committee decided that all branch and district committee meetings should be closed, and that only those party members elected to these committees should be allowed to attend. Attempts by members to attend branch and district committees, even as observers, have been met with hostility.

While there may on a small number of occasions be good reasons for such restricted committee meetings, we would expect any branch or district leadership to welcome the involvement of other members. Our experience earlier this year, of branch committee meetings of three people, means that in effect decisions affecting the strategy of the entire district may be being made by a tiny minority of members.

The branch meetings should serve as a buffer to this situation, but in reality they do not. The agenda for the second half is usually set in advance by the branch committee, and has at times proved rather inflexible. When a new member at the college raised the fact that the college would be balloting for strike action over victimisations, for example, the chair, a member
of the branch committee, explained that this was not on the agenda, and could be discussed further in the pub later. Similarly when a member currently attempting to build a union in her workplace asked for advice on this in a branch meeting, the chair allowed two comrades a minute each to respond.

And this inflexibility extends to discussing our intervention locally. At a recent meeting, a member explained that she had been on the firefighters’ picket line and that the firefighters had been supportive of the idea of organising a Unite the Resistance meeting locally. She was told that this would have to be raised at the trades council that week before a decision could be made. The following week, she asked for an update. At first this was ignored, with the chair just moving on to the next item on the agenda. When she insisted, she was told that the branch committee had not yet discussed it, but that a comrade on the trades council would talk to her after the meeting. Consequently, despite finding a strike the borough, we have not been able to initiate a call for a meeting in order to connect to these workers.

As the comrades pointed out in IB2, the first part of the meetings in Walthamstow can be very good, with a high level of discussion and debate. But the branch meetings should also be the place where discussions on strategy take place, drawing on the ideas and experience of as many comrades as possible. These strategic discussions are as important as the theoretical education that our newer members are receiving. Similarly, the educational meetings organised before the summer were good, and the members of the District Committee now responsible for educational work should re-establish these so that members can complete the course.

Moving forward
After Marxism, those comrades on the branch and district committees who had been part of IDOOP were systematically excluded from playing a role in the leadership of the district.

The NC members in the branch were not allowed to give NC reportbacks on the basis that they ‘disagreed with the Central Committee’. Despite this, members of the opposition have sought to maintain a constructive relationship with other comrades and have been involved in branch activities including public and industrial sales, the local anti-bedroom tax campaign, UAF work and the People’s Assembly. Members of the opposition also actively reaffirmed their commitment to building the party in Waltham Forest, recruiting to the party, set-ting up a new paper sale and building party events.

We make these points, not to make accusations against comrades with whom we have disagreed over the handling of the disputes cases, but because we believe that the above examples are illustrative of wider problems that need to be addressed in the culture of the party.

The organisation previously recognised the negative impacts of the defensive culture that had become established in the organisation as a result of a long period of downturn, and took active steps to redress this. But we appear to be at risk of regressing in relation to those changes. We cannot allow a culture to re-develop where minority voices are marginalised, articles critically reflecting on our activity and ideas are rare, and it is regarded as democratic for districts to entirely block minority positions from being elected to conference.

The last few months have undoubtedly been challenging for our district. We have seen inspiring strikes and protests by local teachers and NHS workers, and lively demonstrations around the NHS and bedroom tax. But we have not yet been able to transform these individual struggles into successful alliances such as a local Unite the Resistance event. Similarly, the benefit justice and bedroom tax campaign appears to have stalled. Having said that, the hugely successful UAF demonstration against the EDL last year illustrates that Walthamstow does have a lot of potential, and shows what it is possible to achieve when we work together.

Intervening successfully in these campaigns requires both a clear political strategy and a commitment to building democratic leadership within united fronts and the party locally. This means seeking to include the maximum number of comrades, trade union militants and activists, whilst developing a wider layer of revolutionary socialists. The wealth of experience among both new and longstanding comrades in Waltham Forest is a strength to be celebrated and offers the possibility of building a wider collective district leadership accountable to all members. Access to becoming part of this leadership should be open to all.

A Proper Accounting
Mike Telford

No political party will ever be perfect but there are normally bigger issues to fight. Yet sometimes the problems come thick and fast so you have to confront them.

Like most members of the SWP less than a year ago had no idea that I would be involved in the current debates. The first I heard of a row that had been simmering over the behaviour of a leading member was in December 2012 when a fellow member of the ISJ board asked me if I had heard what was going on? I said no. Contrary to claims that the opposition rushed to wash our dirty linen in public – he said that I had better wait to find out by the normal process. Six months later, with no less discipline, he resigned from the SWP having, as he saw it, been bullied out. But he did so with a letter to his friends and comrades that he asked to be kept confidential.

Meanwhile the whole mess had come into the public domain [how could politically astute people think that it would not?] and the party was split. I know very little about the original incidents and I fully accept that the party made a genuine attempt to deal with them fairly. But when I looked it became obvious to me that the process was flawed.

As a TU rep and caseworker I would have been shouting loudly that the process could not be seen to be fair if such a thing had happened in my workplace. Nor is this simply a question of bourgeois justice. Although a socialist party within capitalism cannot fully prefigure the future it ought to make sure that its procedures meet the basic standards of a socialist justice too. There is now widespread agreement, even amongst those following the party’s line, that the process was flawed.

At this point there could have been some reckoning of the procedural inadequacies. Instead it was then declared that this was an issue of democratic centralism and that on the basis of a narrowly won vote critics should ‘put up and shut up’. Whilst I believe in democratic centralism I most certainly do not believe that there is one infallible version of this and that it is incarnated in any political organisation at any one point in time – i.e. the SWP in early 2013. And I most certainly do not believe that democratic centralism can declare that wrong is right or that red is really blue. Nor do we really believe this either as a matter of logic or politics and history. We derive from a tradition in which people fought for their positions against the majority – Lenin in the Autumn of 1917. And we criticise those like Trotsky who we suggest later too easily accepted that ‘the party is always right’. But on behalf of some spurious perfect ‘democratic centralist’ model we are now asked to accept an imperfect process and decision.

The next jump was then to declare that this was a matter of ‘Leninism’. It now also appears agreed that this was an unwise jump though the implications of this recognition have not been followed through. The idea of ‘Leninism’ is not the best way to capture the essence of what Lenin did and we should aspire to do. Leninism in the 1920s was a code word in Russia which people threw at out another even as they abandoned the essence of what had really been Bolshevik practice in 1917. So I fear was the way in which people attempted to use the term earlier this year.

Because fighting for a spurious ‘Leninism’ now seems so dubious the next jump was to declare that the issue was neither the original incident nor the procedures of the party to deal with these but fundamental political differences rooted in epochal issues over the nature of – well you name it.

And if these were not evident to those opposing the centre then this was because
they had not realised that their opposition was pregnant with future deviations. For my part I do not recognise these deviations. I think that too many on the left are throwing the baby out with the bathwater but I also want to have an honest and comradely debate about this. Richard Seymour may be the devil incarnate for many reasons but not because of his views (as is said in the ISJ article) on the penetration of neo liberalism in the working class.

Now we are not only being asked to sign up to defend a set of procedures but also a set of imagined political positions which have cobbled together for us by in order to prevent an honest accounting of the mistakes made. More we are being asked to sign up against comrades inside the party and against those hitherto sympathetic too us outside of the party of the grounds that they too are sliding irretrievably in the wrong direction and we will be better by getting rid of them.

This to me makes no sense or sadly it does. One of the problems with being interested in the history of our movement and the especially places like Russia is that you carry the burden of the past with you all the time. We have always argued that the degenerations that occurred in Russia and elsewhere did not have to happen. Our critics said that they did. To show our critics wrong we have not only to write better history, have better theory but also to have a political practice that refutes their arguments on a day to day basis.

The strongest argument for a socialist alternative that does not degenerate is the embodiment of the best traditions in the day to day activities of those who claim to be the alternative. If we do not do this then we cannot blame our critics or those who may be uncertain for their doubts – we hand them on a plate the evidence that they need to confirm their doubts.

Charlie and Alex keep asking the question what the opposition will do if they lose? I have not been party to any discussions and at an individual level I genuinely do not know what I will do. I have been in the SWP for four decades. But we can easily turn the question around. What will ordinary SWP members do if they support Alex and Charlie’s position? Politically the relative strength of their supporters may have grown but this is because of what used to be called salami tactics – winning by encouraging the slicing off of bits opposed to you.

Will a post vote organisation be any different? How can we as ordinary members know? Even now perhaps there is another case bubbling away – being dealt with inadequately or perhaps it will happen the day after or the week after. Will we then be expelled for mentioning it somewhere?

And how do we know that the leadership we are about to elect is not fundamentally riven with splits already if all talk of differences is suppressed?

Did you understand the scale of the differences that led to the Respect debacle? I did not. Were you aware of the differences that led to Rees/ German split? I was not. Did you foresee that Chris Bambery would leave and take others with him? I did not.

So how can I, or you, be sure that the slate that we vote for today will not split apart tomorrow in the way that past ones have done?

The only convincing answer that I have is by honestly recognising what has gone wrong.

WE NEED AN ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP – WE NEED A PRINCIPLED MARXIST PROGRAMME

Justin (national member)

There has been a lot of talk about the need for leadership accountability, but what has been missing is an emphasis on the necessity of a programme. It would give the organisation direction, which is clearly lacking at present.

The leadership will say that a programme would restrain us. What that really means is the leadership would have something by which the members may be able to hold them to account. Without a principled Marxist programme the CC is free to change the ‘party line’ whenever it believes that, say, an opportunist alliance will bring it some short-term advantage.

Witness the recent turns in relation to students. The CC disingenuously claimed that the student protests of 2010 represented an emerging new militancy and that new student recruits could help galvanise the SWP. But, now that we have lost most of our students, it seems the new recruits were just ‘movementist’ all along.

Then there is the Scottish referendum on independence. Socialist Worker calls on Scots to vote Yes “to support the break-up of the United Kingdom” and “weaken the British state”, even though it admits that an independent Scotland would “retain the royal family, sterling, the Bank of England and Nato”.

In fact an independent Scotland would also weaken the unity of the Scottish, Welsh and English working class in the struggle to overthrow the UK state. According to Socialist Worker, “It is hypocrisy to oppose Scottish nationalism and claim that it is reactionary, while remaining silent about British nationalism or, even worse, championing it.” But isn’t it just as hypocritical to oppose British nationalism and champion the Scottish variety?

So the CC wants us to be part of an alliance with the Murdoch-collaborating SNP in the name of making things inconvenient for the British state’s imperialist interests. As if that would prevent troops being sent abroad. To support either a Yes or No vote means lining up with one band of reactionary nationalists or the other.

A principled Marxist programme would stand for working class unity and against nationalism of all varieties. It would help us avoid such opportunistic, ‘movementist’ errors as tailing Scottish separatism, on the one hand, and joining forces with the pro-British-nationalist No2EU, on the other. This is another blunder waiting to happen. As I have said in previous IBs, we should not take a reactionary position in favour of a British withdrawal from the EU, but favour the overthrow of the EU bureaucracy and the European bourgeoisie, and a united fight across the continent for a workers’ Europe.

LEARNING AND CHANGE

George (Tottenham)

One of the great strengths of the Marxist tradition and the SWP has been to start with the outside world, and not with ourselves. I think this should be the case when we are discussing the issues surrounding the charges of sexual harassment and rape that have arisen inside the Party over the last period.

Externally, we have seen the destruction of the halo around Jimmy Saville’s head by ITV’s documentary – symbolised by the removal of the grave’s headstone – followed by a relentless catalogue of abuse with the BBC, NHS managers and police officers time and time again turning a blind eye. The good thing to come of this is that more and more women have been encouraged to come forward with their own stories of abuse often at the hands of people in privileged positions.

A common theme throughout these complaints and other stories of abuse including those of young boys in care homes, boarding schools or under the ‘protection’ of the Church is that the trauma that victims have suffered makes the reporting of the abuse difficult. This is compounded by the fact that the perpetrators are often in a position of power relative to the victim.

These events have propelled the issue, here in the UK, to be of major national debate and concern. The numbers of reported rapes are on the increase. To what extent this represents a greater confidence
among women to come forward or, regrettably, a real increase in the incidence of sexual assault it is perhaps too early to tell. Unfortunately, the number of reported rapes leading to a successful conviction has fallen.

The complaint by comrade W that she had been raped by M, a leading member of the Party and whose standing was at an all-time high, came as a profound shock to the Party. It must have been doubly difficult for those comrades who have worked closely with M over many years. The current National Secretary and the majority on the Central Committee have I believe attempted to deal with the complaint by closely following the then rules and procedures covering the operation of the Disputes Committee.

The evidence suggests that they acted honestly and in good faith when dealing with the case, it’s just that they were quite unprepared to deal with such a complaint and the procedures in place were never intended to deal with such a situation.

This led to a significant minority of the Party who either felt dissatisfied or at least had concerns with conduct of the hearing, which in turn led to the formation of the faction in early 2013 and the calling of a Special Conference.

From what I have heard and read by both Charlie and Alex it is clear that they recognise the short comings of the original hearing as much as anyone and have helped to steer the CC to deal with the second complaint in a better way.

In addition, the review of the procedures governing the operation of the Disputes Committee will lead to changes welcomed by a broad spectrum of the Party. No doubt we still have more to learn. Finally, the latest motion from the CC to the coming conference recognises these shortcomings and the hurt and suffering caused to the two women complainants.

It would be helpful to re-uniting the Party if the Rebuilding The Party faction publicly welcomed and recognised the changes that have occurred and are proposed. They shouldn’t think why have the CC changed its position as if it is part of some conspiratorial plan. Isn’t that the purpose of the faction, to bring about changes to policies and procedures surrounding the handling of complaints of sexual assault and harassment? At the same time it would be useful if the CC acknowledged we wouldn’t have got all these of these changes if the faction had not existed.

Unfortunately, the process of learning and bringing about change has been become poisoned by the activities of a small number of people who have since left to form the ISN. The leaking of internal Party discussions on to the internet was a shameful episode and was done only to serve their own political ends rather than further the cause of women.

Unfortunately, it has helped to foster inside the Party a current which is highly intolerant and is out to smash the faction and institute a wave of expulsions. The response from the official Faction appears to be to call for heads to roll on the CC aimed at those who allegedly fought to stop the hearing of the second complaint.

Comrades we have lost sight of the objective which should be develop a set of policies and procedures on the nature of and the handling of cases of sexual assault which will put the Party back where it belongs: at the forefront of fighting for woman’s emancipation.

BRIEF REPORT FROM RED STUFF PRINT SHOP

Jon (Canterbury)

If there is one item in this bulletin you don’t get round to reading, then it should probably be this one. However, we thought we should give comrades an update on what we are trying to do with the printshop.

Background

In 2008 we met with two CC members and discussed setting up a small in-house print facility to fill the gap between the office photocopier and the commercial print contracts we have for publications, flyers, posters etc.

It was agreed to set it up very much as a ‘party printshop’ - under the purview of the party, though with no funding from the stretched resources of the party. This is essentially what we managed to do, and we are currently established formally as a ‘volunteer workers co-operative’, run out of rented accommodation, a little way out of London.

Merchandise

Aside from printed paper, we have produced and sold much of the party’s merchandise for a number of years raising thousands of pounds for the party over that time.

We seem to make regular appearances in the Daily Mail (before the Milibands made it fashionable). The ‘Thatcher’s Gone Party Pack’ sales reflected a public mood, eighteen months before her final departure.

Printed paper

We have a set-up that allows us to print from hundreds to tens of thousands of flyers at very short notice. We can also rush out posters, placards and stickers. This has proved very useful to the party over the years, particularly to the industrial department.

We are not able to economically print full colour glossy flyers at the moment, but are able to print thousands of ‘traditional’ red and black flyers, very quickly, very cheaply.

We are currently developing a way of providing branches and districts with short runs of economical print for local meetings, events and campaigns. We hope to provide up to date information about this at conference.

The future

We have had a tough year, for a whole number of reasons. But we intend remaining a small but useful resource for comrades intervening in a whole number of struggles. And we are looking forward to revamping our fundraising activities through RedStuff in the coming year.

RAPE CULTURE, WOMEN’S LIBERATION AND THE SWP

Kath (Birmingham Stirchley)

We as materialists are supposed to try and see the world as it is, and develop an ideology from that, not try and impose one we already have. We all acknowledge that struggle can change things- which means that things can change and we have to work with the current situation.

This isn’t to say anything about ‘neo-liberalism changing the class’ or any other straw man argument against the faction.

The CC motion needs to be split in two, or the faction’s opinions risk being misrepresented as they usually agree with most of the second part of the motion- views on the class etc. Thinking there should be an apology is not incompatible with this unless you are viewing an apology to women who brought complaints of rape or sexual harassment as a betrayal of party values.

Personally I think there needs to be other changes in the party, but I don’t claim my views are those of the majority of the faction- though they may agree with some of the ‘dogma’ point further down.

This article will summarise current women’s liberationist/feminist (there is not the clear cut distinction between the two that there might once have been) opinions, and ways I believe the SWP is failing to keep up with the mainstream left on the issue of women’s liberation from sexual and other exploitation by men.

Rape culture

Rape culture is the ways in which attitudes normalize and condone rape. Women are objectified, rape myths are repeated, victims are blamed. Men believe they are entitled to women’s bodies. There is a lack
of legal or other consequences for rape, so men can rape with impunity. Perpetrators’ characters are lauded and detached from what they’ve done, so as to minimize their crimes and seek to elicit sympathy for them. There is a denial of the frequency of rape or its traumatic effects, or a lack of awareness that most rape happens between partners or ex-partners.

War rape is used as a form of torture and oppression. In general, many cultures have a “war culture” in which masculinity and violence are celebrated. This is also a risk in revolutionary socialist groups.

Call out culture
Young left wing people today tend to have a ‘call out’ culture— if they see oppressive behaviour from individuals amongst the cadre they will not turn a blind eye, they will feel they have to challenge it, call it out, or they are condoning it. I think this is one reason those who left to join the ISN left, because they couldn’t turn a blind eye to what had happened. We have to confront abuse when we see it or we’re doing nothing to stop it happening again.

Moral outrage is a good thing. Alex Callinicos at the Birmingham aggregate accused those shocked by how the party has acted of having ‘moral outrage.’ I am morally outraged and proud. As revolutionaries we rage at injustice and corruption, that’s what drives us. We don’t stand by and watch as people are oppressed.

We are losing and will lose more people to Labour, as we did the women who left after ‘Women’s Voice’ was closed, because Labour actually have better politics when it comes to women’s issues than we do. They still have the working class white male perspective to an extent, but like most organisations on the left have striven to counteract it within themselves.

It’s not just about the legalistic processes of the Disputes Committee, as we can see from mainstream society, these are not enough for justice to be done, there needs to be change in attitude to women.

Listen to marginalised voices
Men should listen to women— of course we all should listen to each other but men are listened to all the time, and they can’t have a full awareness of women’s experience, as women have been silenced. In the SWP, talk of confidentiality has been used to silence women. There should be no secrets from the class (except personal details such as names of victims.) Our interests shouldn’t be separate from those of the class. We have nothing to hide if we conduct ourselves well. Naming alleged perpetrators encourages others to come forward.

But the CC motion seems to be claiming someone saying something you don’t like on the internet is the same as having to rebuild your life all over again, as W and X have, for reporting that they felt sexually violated. In aggregate, they claimed that is not what they think. I’m glad to hear it.

Feminism does not conflict with Marxism
Marxists should pinpoint all factors in society and how they interact to create struggle. Instead, some are workerist, economistic mechanical Marxists, failing to see that work is not everything in struggle.

Feminist struggle which builds women’s relationships with each other builds up the class, as class struggle which boosts the independence of the class also helps women’s liberation.

Individual working class men can benefit from women’s oppression
Working class men can get domestic slaves, sexually available, catering to their needs. That they are oppressed by the capitalist class doesn’t stop them perpetrating, for instance, violence against women or in other ways exploiting the power differential between the sexes.

If we continue to deny this obvious fact, oppressive behaviour by men in the party will continue, and it is that which will divide the party, as has been seen. Uniting the class requires the recognition of divisions in it and helping to remove them.

Of course men benefit from women’s oppression— to say otherwise contradicts reality.

Male dominance (as with class dominance) is on one level based on physical force and the threat of force; physical strength and ability to penetrate/impregnate. Submissiveness gives women a hope of protection by men. Male dominance takes different forms in different societies.

Male dominance is not superior to class, nor is class superior to sex or gender oppression. You cannot subordinate any form of oppression. To think that not only possible but desirable or necessary is offensive, and invisibilises women’s oppression, allowing it to continue. There are power imbalances between men and women.

Class trumps all
A lot of socialist organisations have a hierarchy of oppression where as Louise Whittle says, class trumps all. This is reductionist and invisibilises oppression. This workerism also alienates and marginalises disabled people, those not in employment either through ill health or bad luck, carers and so on.

When it comes to the ‘class trumps all’ argument, women seem to be an easy target, as denying women’s particular oppressions is more politically acceptable than denying others’.

Consider the following statements and imagine they were given as responses to gay, disabled or ethnic minorities’ experiences of oppression:- ‘heterosexual people are oppressed as well’ ‘able bodied people are oppressed as well’ ‘white people are oppressed as well’

I like to think no-one in the SWP would dream of using these unacceptable, politically incorrect, disgusting arguments. And yet some feel able to answer women’s oppression with ‘men are oppressed as well,’ an argument used by Male Rights Activists.

Talk of class, such as at the January conference, prefaces discussion of men’s oppression of women, to remind us that we try to ignore working men’s violence towards women and other ways they exploit women. ‘Remember what we are here for, who we are about- the working class’ i.e...

White working class male heroes
If there’s a league table of members based on activity, that’s one of the ways some will be seen as more dispensable than others, and this hierarchy can be abused.

People may feel more able to do certain things than others, such as paper sales or protests, for instance for health reasons. If activity in the workplace or unions is given higher status than other work, this again excludes those not in work or underemployed for whatever reasons— often women, ethnic minorities or those with disabilities, or carers who find it hard to get the time away from their responsibilities.

Those who’ll have time and ability to be the most active are of course primarily relatively economically secure (by implication white as ethnic people tend to earn less so need to work more, and so can’t travel as easily to events), able bodied young men.

Heaven forfend we claim these ‘poster boys of the left’ ever do anything wrong that would give the lie to the idealisation of the class. But even Engels recognised that after the revolution, even in that utopia, men may still be violent towards women.

The debate is about building the party
We could regain or recruit hundreds of members we’ll otherwise lose. Our relationship to the class and other activists might no longer be one where we are turned away and renounced, seen as rape apologists.

The faction are accused of being less active in the party. But some of us have been very active. And of those who aren’t, why are faction comrades less active?

We feel we can’t totally support the party after what’s been done, plus some have even been told they’re not welcome
at their branch. They may feel unable to recruit new members to a party which is not as safe a space as it could be.

**Dogma**
Marxism should not be formed into dogma, especially if bits are added on which weren’t even in Marx or Engels etc., originally, articles of faith first uttered in the 1980s for instance. If anything becomes a party line, sound-bite or catchphrase, a ‘thought terminating cliché,’ it’s harder for ideas to develop.

It is cults that follow their leader rather than using their own minds, although of course when it comes to alleged abuse it’s easier to blame survivors than question someone in the hierarchy.

We are supposed to be about the class, not the party. I disagree with the CC motion about more national committee meetings which then report back to branches after they’ve decided things, as this risks being about controlling branches from above, and suppressing dissenting opinions. This suppression and excessive hierarchy have been part of the problem.

A true wider democracy would be for branches to discuss things and then feed their opinions upwards. Of course there is not time for this at branch, but it could be done for instance with a mailing list perhaps.

**Disputes Committee Review**
The Disputes committee review is slightly promising, but if it’s implemented only as much/as fast as the Democracy review several years ago, no-one has to worry that it will be too much too soon.

At the Birmingham aggregate it was claimed that the DC just rules on whether people are in line with our politics. But it also rules on conduct such as violence, sexual harassment etc. and so it should. This is just another way of absolving responsibility. And I would hope exploitation is not in line with our politics.

It is not a court of law so a civil standard of proof is acceptable, especially as expulsion is the most the Disputes Committee can do. To protect members we need to work on the balance of probability. If it’s good enough for the GMC it should certainly be good enough for us.

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**Motions**

**MOTION FOR SWP CONFERENCE**

**Central Committee**

Conference believes:
1. That we have achieved real successes in the last 12 months, but this has been a difficult and divisive year for the party.
2. The December 2013 conference has to debate fully the contested issues in the party and then move forward united. There will continue to be constant discussion, but it will take place within the party rules and without permanent factions.
3. The immediate issues that have divided the party flowed from the Disputes Committee (DC) report at the January 2013 conference. But these have meshed with and highlighted a series of important political questions that have simmered inside the party for a decade or more.

Conference recognises:
1. That all the comrades involved in the DC hearings sought to apply our politics in a principled way at all times and tried honestly to do the best they could in the circumstances. All DC hearings have been conducted with integrity.
2. That our disputes processes can be improved and were shown not to be adequate to deal with the cases of sexual misconduct and their aftermath. We hope the review of the DC procedures will deliver a widely-acceptable and credible process. We support the broad sweep of the DC review (subject to amendment by conference).
3. Many people have suffered real distress as a result of taking part in or giving evidence to the DC, or due to slurs on the internet.
4. The two complainants suffered real distress because of flaws in our disciplinary procedures and because of the way in which the two cases became a subject of political conflict within the party and on the internet. This was a collective failure that the SWP greatly regrets.

Conference restates
1. Our continuing total commitment to fighting against women’s oppression and for women’s liberation.
2. That this fight, like that against all forms of oppression, can only be won as part of a wider fight for the socialist transformation of society and an end to exploitation.
3. Our view that the key agency in winning such a transformation of society is the working class.
4. Our view that a party broadly within the Leninist tradition is a necessary part of winning that revolutionary change.

Conference resolves:
1. To call upon all comrades to go forward from this conference, to work together to rebuild trust and engage in comradely debate as we seek to test our ideas by putting them into practice together.
2. In order to strengthen a broader leadership and ensure more regular debate inside the party the National Committee should meet at least six times in 2014. We call on NC members to play their role in reporting back from the NC to branches in their own district and other districts which do not have NC members.
3. The existence of permanent factional organisation damages our ability to operate effectively as a party and must cease. Unless this conference votes to support permanent factions, any attempt to continue such factions outside a pre-conference period will lead to disciplinary action to defend the collective decisions of the party.
4. To publicise this motion widely inside the SWP and on the SWP website.

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**AMENDMENT TO CC MOTION**

**Newham branch**

1. At end of first section headed Conference believes, point 3, insert new sentence:

   "It is this combination which has made the arguments inside the party so polarised."

2. In section headed Conference restates, at point 4, delete “broadly within” and insert “which stands in”.

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MOTION ON WORD LIMITS FOR BULLETINS
Bradford branch

Motion: Increasing democracy/participation by introducing word limits for pre-conference Internal Bulletin (IB) articles

The screen reading version of IB1 is 354 pages, with one article alone contributing 31 pages ie. longer than a 10,000 word student dissertation.

The length of party Internal Bulletins is disenfranchising members who do not have the time to read such long-winded articles. Word limits exist for all other publications (inside and outside this organisation) in the way that time limits operate for speaking in debates/meetings etc. This discipline helps ensure that debate is not dominated by the most verbose members who are not necessarily those with the most insight in their branches/our activities.

This conference mandates the national secretary, on behalf of the party, to issue an 800 word limit for pre-conference IB contributions from members and 1,500 words for Central Committee contributions.

MOTION ON DEBATE AND DEMOCRACY: IMPLEMENTING THE DEMOCRACY COMMISSION REPORT
Bury & Prestwich, Colchester, Hornsey & Wood Green, Canterbury, Oxford, Norwich and Thanet branches and the Unite fraction

Pre-amble:
The Democracy Commission was set up in 2009 following the resignation of several CC members in the wake of the Respect crisis. Its final Report was endorsed by a Special ‘Democracy Conference’ in June of that year, and also at the January 2010 Party Conference. The Commission was...

...charged with reviewing the totality of the SWP’s structures and processes of debate and decision making and producing proposals... for improving and enhancing the party’s overall culture of democracy and accountability.”

As the ‘Statement of General Principles’ at the beginning of the Report put it:

“The establishment of the [Democracy Commission] reflected the widespread view in the party that recent events, especially with regard to the split in Respect and subsequent divisions in the Central Committee, revealed certain deficiencies in these areas and that as a result the CC had become to some extent out of touch with the membership.”

The Commission developed its recommendations after “extensive deliberations” and taking input and feedback from meetings it held across the UK. It recognised “the need for leadership, in the class and the party”, and that “an effective revolutionary party needs all its members to try to lead in the class struggle and its most able members to lead inside the party at local, fractional and national level.”

However, it also recognised that “precisely this necessity for leadership and initiative makes it all the more important that the leadership is held to democratic account by the members. This in turn requires not just formally democratic structures (we have always had those) but a genuine culture of democratic debate and decision making.”

The Report then went on to state:

“Clearly the very existence of the Democracy Commission is an acknowledgement of the fact that our democratic culture has had deficiencies and is in need of improvement.”

And it observed:

“The main form of democratic difficulty we have experienced has been reluctance, at all levels of the party, of comrades with sincerely held doubts and/or differences to speak up. One reason for this has been the tendency to put down dissenters so severely and comprehensively as to deter any repetition or imitation.”

The Democracy Commission Report concluded that this problem could “not be overcome by words alone” and so put forward “proposals for procedural change aimed to facilitate debate”. It also gave “a clear statement of the democratic culture we want the SWP to achieve”, and made the following points:

• “We therefore state unequivocally that within the boundaries of socialist principle and the party’s programme, as expressed in What We Stand For, every member has a right, and in a sense a duty, to bring their criticisms of, or differences with, the party’s policies or practice to their fellow members at branch, district and national level and to be heard with respect.”

• “Obviously this right cannot be exercised without restraint or time limit --- we debate in order to decide and act --- and in no way precludes vigorous political argument, but vigorous political argument should not include personal denigration or abuse.”

• “There should also be some regard for proportionality: comrades who happen to be in the minority should not be crushed to the point of humiliation...Nor should there be fear as --- with reason -- - there has been in the past, of exclusion, isolation or ostracism for the expression of dissident views.”

• “The Democracy Commission is united in calling for a more open, democratic culture in the SWP, conductive to the frank debate of political differences.”

The culture in the party that the Democracy Commission condemned and set out to change, has re-emerged during the recent crisis. Once more, the party needs to make a determined and concerted effort to foster a truly democratic culture.

The Democracy Commission Report recognised that “of particular importance in the development of this democratic culture is the handling of disagreements within the Central Committee.”

It observed that “For some time now the custom and practice has been for all differences within the CC to be hidden from the wider membership (except for close personal confidants) with all CC members presenting an image of more or less total unity until the last possible moment”. This problem has persisted, despite the acceptance of the Democracy Commission’s recommendations. The divisions on the CC that led to both the Counterfire split of John Rees and Lindsey German in 2010 and the split of Chris Bambery’s International Socialist Group in 2011 were not openly debated in front of the membership.

This ‘custom and practice’ has also been a feature of the most recent crisis this year, where significant differences (or even alleged “nuances”) between Central Committee members have been kept hidden not just from the membership as a whole, but also from the National Committee and Party Council.

Once again, only the close personal confidants of CC members have been made aware of them. This results in a handful of “trusties” being allowed to be “in the know”, whilst the rest of the membership is kept in the dark.

This practice does nothing to prevent rumour and gossip within the party or on the internet. Rather, such “not in front of the children” style secrecy only encourages and perpetuates rumour and gossip.

The Democracy Commission Report observed that, in tackling this problem:
“Obviously, we don’t want to go to the opposite extreme of every minor political difference being brought to the NC or permanent multiple factions. But the responsible discussion of serious political differences when they arise would help educate comrades and train them in thinking for themselves.”

It went on to state that:

“Democracy is not an abstract question for a revolutionary socialist party. In this political period our democratic structures have to be base around maximum participation and debate combined with the need to be the most effective.”

Regarding the role of comrades who are employed by the party and work on the ISJ, Socialist Review, Socialist Worker or at Bookmarks or the National Office (as distinct from district organisers) and “their ability to intervene in the political debates in the party”, the Report found that:

“If these comrades feel precipitating [in] debates --- or even intervening [in] debates is inappropriate, or likely to earn them the sack, then our democracy is hindered.”

The Report recommended that “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.”

However, since the onset of the current party crisis over 20 party workers either have felt the need to resign, or have been sacked.

Proposals:
1. Significant or important debates within the party leadership on the Central Committee, at National Committee or at Party Council, over questions of theory, perspectives, or strategy must be reported to the membership via Party Notes, the National Committee, and Party Council.

2. National Committee members and delegates to Party Council must be required to Report Back to the branches and/or districts, and to report in full the debates that have taken place.

3. Debates within the party will be featured regularly in the party press (i.e. Socialist Worker, Socialist Review, and the International Socialism Journal, as appropriate).

4. Comrades employed as party workers or “full-timers” (as distinct from district organisers) must be allowed to express their own political opinions and take part in party debates without being subjected to any detrimental treatment by the party at any level.

MOTION ON AN APOLOGY

Bury & Prestwich, Canterbury, Colchester, Euston, Hornsey & Wood Green, Cambridge, Lewisham, Norwich, Medway, Oxford and Thanet branches and the Unite fraction

Conference believes
1) The findings of the commission reviewing the procedures of the Disputes Committee should not lead to a reopening of the original case brought by W against M, but they do call into question the process adopted to hear that case and implicitly recognise that they were not fit for purpose.

2) Shortcomings in the procedures and processes obstructed the party’s attempt to act in line with its political traditions and so left W feeling she had been failed by the party.

Conference notes
1) Despite the second woman formally lodging a complaint in March, the CC/DC did not agree to a hearing going ahead for several months, after numerous attempts to block it taking place at all.

2) The recognition of the failures in dealing with the first case led to a special body being set up to handle the second one.

3) The Disputes hearings in the case involving the second woman concluded, based on the evidence they heard, that M has a case to answer for sexual harassment. It also concluded that the Disputes Committee procedures needed to be revised to make them “fit for purpose”.

Conference further believes
1) The failures outlined above caused deep divisions in the party, lost us members and damaged our reputation amongst supporters and friends in the wider movement.

2) The two women who made the complaints suffered more than anyone else as a result of the failures outlined above.

3) The party must never repeat the mistakes made, must publicly acknowledge them, learn the lessons and revise the Disputes Committee procedures to make them fit for purpose.

Conference resolves that
1) The SWP apologises to W for the hurt and distress caused by the failures in processes and procedures employed to deal with her complaint and for the negative consequences suffered as a result of her treatment.

2) The SWP apologises to the second woman for its failure to deal with her case promptly and for the hurt and suffering caused by the speculation and bullying she endured and for the negative consequences suffered as a result of her treatment.

LEWISHAM MOTION

Lewisham branch

Conference believes:
1. That we have achieved real successes in the last 12 months, but this has been a difficult and divisive year for the party.
2. The December 2013 conference has to debate fully the contested issues in the party and then move forward united. There will continue to be constant discussion, but it will take place within the party rules and without permanent factions.
3. The immediate issues that have divided the party flowed from the Disputes Committee (DC) report at the January 2013 conference. But these have meshed with and highlighted a series of important political questions that have simmered inside the party for a decade or more.

Conference recognises:
1. Conference recognises that the disputes processes can be improved and were shown not to be adequate to deal with the cases of sexual misconduct and their aftermath. We hope the review of the DC procedures will deliver a widely-acceptable and credible process. We support the broad sweep of the DC review (subject to amendment by conference).
2. The two complainants suffered real distress because of flaws in our disciplinary procedures. We apologise to them. We will publicise the apology widely inside the SWP and on the SWP website.

Conference restates
1. Our continuing total commitment to fighting against women’s oppression and for women’s liberation.
2. That this fight, like that against all forms of oppression, can only be won as part of a wider fight for the socialist transformation of society and an end to exploitation.
3. Our view that the key agency in winning such a transformation of society is the working class.
4. Our view that a party broadly within the Leninist tradition is a necessary part of winning that revolutionary change.

Conference resolves:
1. To call upon all comrades to go forward from this conference, to work together to rebuild trust and engage in comradely debate as we seek to test our ideas by putting them into practice together.
2. In order to strengthen a broader leader-
ship and ensure more regular debate inside the party the National Committee should meet at least six times in 2014. We call on NC members to play their role in reporting back from the NC to branches in their own district and other districts which do not have NC members.

3. The existence of permanent factional organisation damages our ability to operate effectively as a party and must cease. Unless this conference votes to support permanent factions, any attempt to continue such factions outside a pre-conference period will lead to disciplinary action to defend the collective decisions of the party.

4. To publicise this motion widely inside the SWP and on the SWP website.

it is possible to have a political blog that encourages new writers, discussion and up-to-date coverage of live events (such as Marxism 2013).

Conference resolves
1. That the party should strive to improve all areas of its internet work, including improving its use of social media, and more regular and varied updates to the Socialist Worker website.

2. That the party should launch a discussion blog along the lines of Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century.

MOTION ON INTERNET WORK
Tower Hamlets branch

Conference notes:
1. The motion passed at the 2012 conference calling stating: “That greatly improving our online work can help improve the quality, standing and circulation of the paper and other publications as well as the profile of the of the organisation,” and calling for the opening “a period of discussion of the party’s internet work.

This would consider how we can utilise every avenue available to boost the visibility and profile of the party and how we can in turn use this to build our activities and the party. It would also consider how our existing publications and our internet work are best integrated into a strategy for intervention in struggle and building the revolutionary party.

2. The redesigned Socialist Worker website that went online earlier this year.

Conference believes:
1. That the period of discussion failed to meaningfully materialise after the 2012 conference. This was unfortunate as it meant that there was no debate around the issue at the following conference.

2. That the redesigned Socialist Worker website is a welcome improvement, but is not yet meeting its full potential for offering up-to-date news, analysis and comment.

3. That the Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century discussion blog has proven...

1. The 2012 conference agreed “That greatly improving our online work can help improve the quality, standing and circulation of the paper and other publications as well as the profile of the organisation” and called for the opening “a period of discussion of the party’s internet work.

This would consider how we can utilise every avenue available to boost the visibility and profile of the party and how we can in turn use this to build our activities and the party.

It would also consider how our existing publications and our internet work are best integrated into a strategy for intervention in struggle and building the revolutionary party.”

2. We believe it is possible to have a political blog that encourages new writers, discussion and up-to-date coverage of live events.

3. The CC should implement the 2012 conference decision and improve all areas of its internet work, including its use of social media and more regular and varied updates to the Socialist Worker website.

MOTION ON INTERNET WORK
Lewisham branch

1. The 2012 conference agreed “That greatly improving our online work can help improve the quality, standing and circulation of the paper and other publications as well as the profile of the organisation” and calling for the opening “a period of discussion of the party’s internet work.

This would consider how we utilise every avenue available to boost the visibility and profile of the Party and how we can in turn use this to build our activities and the Party. It would also consider how our existing publications and our internet work are best integrated into a strategy for intervention in struggle and building the revolutionary party.”

2. The CC failed to organise a meaningful discussion in 2012, so there was no debate at the January 2013 conference. While the redesigned Socialist Worker website is a welcome improvement, it falls well short of its potential.
3. The Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century discussion blog ((revolutionarysocialism.tumblr.com) has proven that it is possible to have a political blog that encourages new writers, discussion and up-to-date coverage of live events (such as Marxism 2013).

4. The CC should implement the 2012 conference decision and improve all areas of its internet work, including its use of social media and more regular and varied updates to the Socialist Worker website. The Party should launch a discussion blog building on the experience of Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century.

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**MOTION ON THE INTERNET**

**Bristol North branch**

1. The 2012 conference agreed “That greatly improving our online work can help improve the quality, standing and circulation of the paper and other publications as well as the profile of the of the organisation” and called for the opening “a period of discussion of the party’s internet work. This would consider how we can utilise every avenue available to boost the visibility and profile of the party and how we can in turn use this to build our activities and the party. It would also consider how our existing publications and our internet work are best integrated into a strategy for intervention in struggle and building the revolutionary party.”

2. The CC failed to organise a meaningful discussion in 2012, so there was no debate at the January 2013 conference. While the redesigned Socialist Worker website is a welcome improvement, it falls well short of its potential. It is possible to have a political blog that encourages new writers, discussion and up-to-date coverage of live events (such as Marxism 2013).

3. The CC should implement the 2012 conference decision and improve all areas of its internet work, including its use of social media and more regular and varied updates to the Socialist Worker website.

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**MOTION ON BRANCH MEMBERSHIP**

**Tottenham branch**

Recent events have led to disputes about which branch comrades belong to, particularly in larger cities. It is important that the question is considered collectively within the overall political perspectives of the Party and not as a matter of personal choice.

All members of the SWP should seek to be part of local networks of militants. They should aim to sell papers to people they work or study alongside, to local contacts and on public sales. They should pay reasonable subs following a discussion with the local treasurer. To do this most effectively they should be members of the local branch that covers the area in which they live, work or study.

Personal circumstances should be taken into account, but exceptions to the above should be rare. For example, within a District the District Committee may feel that a particular comrade should move branches in order to make effective use of the breadth of experience across the District. Such decisions should be made collectively not individually by the comrade.

The Central Committee has the ultimate authority over the allocation of comrades to branches.

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**MOTION ON THE ELECTION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE**

**Canterbury branch**

ELECTING THE SWP CENTRAL COMMITTEE FROM CONFERENCE 2014 ONWARDS

**Preamble:**

In January 2013 the majority of the Central Committee justified a late change to their proposed slate and opposition to a “unity” slate on the grounds that there were “nuanced” differences which would get in the way of a united leadership.

Throughout 2013 it has been revealed that there are deep and destructive divisions within the Central Committee.

Instead of dealing with these politically, the Central Committee continues to hide these from the membership. The 2009 Democracy Commission conference decided:

“Of particular importance in the development of this democratic culture is the handling of disagreements within the Central Committee. For some time now the custom and practice has been for all differences within the CC to be hidden from the wider membership (except for close personal confidants) with all CC members presenting an image of more or less total unity until the last possible moment.

“Obviously we don’t want to go to the opposite extreme of every minor practical difference being brought to the NC or permanent multiple factions, But the responsible discussion of serious political differences when they arise would help educate comrades and train them in thinking for themselves.”

The slate presented by the outgoing Central Committee in B1 represents a continuation of the attempts to deal with serious political issues by fudge and manoeuvre rather than open political debate.

The slate includes all the members of the Central Committee minority who have played the most destructive role in the party crisis, the Central Committee majority, and proposed new Central Committee members with a range of views stretching from the most destructive to the middle ground, but nobody involved with the opposition.

It is neither a “unity” proposal nor a slate united around a common perspective. It is an attempt to federate support from enough sections of party opinion to prevent any individual Central Committee member being accountable for their actions or political positions.

Conference deserves better than this. Conference delegates must be able to hold Central Committee members to account and the best way to ensure that this can be properly done in future is to change the way we elect our Central Committee.

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**Motion on the election of the Central Committee:**

Conference resolves that for future conferences, beginning with Conference 2014, the Central Committee shall be elected by a method similar to that currently used to elect the National Committee.

Therefore, the part of our constitution that reads:

“The outgoing Central Committee selects and circulates a provisional slate for the new CC at the beginning of the period for pre-Conference discussion. This is then discussed at the district aggregates where comrades can propose alternative slates.

At the Conference the outgoing CC proposes a final slate (which may have
changed as a result of the pre-Conference discussion). This slate, along with any other that is supported by a minimum of five delegates, is discussed and voted on by Conference.”

Shall be deleted and be replaced with the following process:

- Candidates for the Central Committee must be nominated by five comrades, and the nominee has to agree to be nominated.
- Candidates have to be registered members of the SWP and up to date with their subs (this also applies to the comrades nominating the candidate).
- Nominations will be invited at the beginning of the period for pre-Conference discussion.
- Full slates or shorter lists of candidates may be recommended by groups of five comrades or more.
- Central Committee nominations and recommended slates or lists should then be discussed at the district aggregates, where comrades can recommend alternative slates or lists of nominees.
- At the Conference, the outgoing Central Committee, branches, districts, fractions, and groups of not less than five delegations may recommend slates or lists of nominees.
- The election of the Central Committee will be held by a ballot of Conference delegates voting for individual candidates, with the candidates receiving the highest votes being elected.
- The size of the new Central Committee shall be the same as the outgoing Central Committee, unless Conference decides to change this before the new Central Committee is elected.

The SWP Constitution shall be amended accordingly.

**MOTION ON PARTY ORGANISATION**

**Sussex aggregate**

1. Branches and districts
   (Replaces section 3 of the current SWP Constitution)

The geographical branches of the organisation are its key building blocks. All members of the organisation will normally be members of a geographical branch.

Where workplace or campus groups operate, they will report back to their local branch. Branch members may decide in a meeting to establish some kind of responsible branch structure to direct the branch’s work.

Such structures can, when so empowered, make binding decisions, subject to review and possible alteration by a full members meeting or higher body. In addition to helping to coordinate united front work of all members (who will also be working with the relevant national faction in the respective union or campaign), branches will have four distinct roles.

- The organisation of appropriate public meetings at least six times each year;
- The organisation of paper sales and local interventions around disputes, campaigns, mobilisations and meetings;
- Education of new members in the revolutionary socialist tradition, through formal mentoring and reading groups using guides, material and expertise provided either locally or centrally;
- The progressive expansion of branches’ role to become local sites of debate and discussion with other sections of the Left and the trade union movement as well as organising centres for the party

With the support of the district, branches will assist in arranging childcare, and will, as far as possible, time key activities so that shiftworkers can attend.

District aggregates will bring together branches in an area so as to enable the wider sharing of the experiences of branches and members in the implementation of Conference perspectives, and the interpretation of perspectives by the National Committee, and to debate issues of content at, or motions for, the national Conference or the National Committee.

District aggregates will be open to, and advertised among, all members in a district. Districts will hold an annual election for a Chair and a Secretary.

A District Aggregate will occur at least once each year, before the national Conference, but can be called by the majority decision of branch secretaries in the District, or by the majority decision of two of the branches in a district at meetings where the proposal has been announced to all members at least a week in advance.

Every aggregate will have a political introduction from a member of the Central Committee.

2. National bodies – 2.1 National Conference
   (Amends section 4 of the current SWP Constitution)

Replaces: “Branches and/or districts elect delegates to Conference on a basis proportional to their membership, as determined by the Central Committee” with:

“Branches of 20 members or more will be entitled to send delegates to the National Conference after the issues to be debated have been discussed at district aggregates; branches of less than 20 members will be aggregated with the nearest large branch for the purpose of Conference representation. Election of Conference delegates will take place in branch meetings after the date of the appropriate aggregate, or amongst respective branch members at the end of an aggregate.”

2.2 National Committee
   (Replaces section 6 of the current SWP Constitution)

The National Committee will consist of 50 members elected at Annual Conference. It will assist the Central Committee in providing political leadership for the Party, and review the Party’s political and organisational work between Conferences. Its decisions are binding on the Central Committee.

In the event of a major disagreement between the Central Committee and the National Committee, the latter has the right, by majority vote, to call a Special Conference.

The National Committee will meet on at least eight occasions each year – i.e. approximately every six weeks. Members of the National Committee will undertake responsibility to liaise with specific branches and districts to which they will be allocated. After each National Committee meeting, National Committee members will seek to report back to their allocated branches or to a district aggregate. Each branch or district will receive a report from the National Committee at least three times each year.

In addition to motions from National Committee members, local bodies of the Party (branches and district aggregates) are entitled to send resolutions to the National Committee on matters of national concern, which the National Secretary will place on its agenda (local bodies will not normally submit resolutions on specific local issues).

The NC will decide by majority vote which issues they believe to be of national concern and that are necessary to be debated at NC. In cases in which such resolutions call for a decision of the National Committee, the National Secretary will inform submitting local bodies of the outcome of a vote.

It is the responsibility of the National Secretary to place on the agenda of the National Committee all major issues on which the Central Committee has moved to a vote (excluding issues of special confidentiality).

The National Secretary will provide to the NC a report of CC meetings since the last NC. It is the responsibility of the National Secretary to provide these reports and these records to the National Committee.

These matters are confidential to these committees, and to Party members to whom National Committee members report back verbally. The Central Committee may initiate a process of electronic consultation with NC members where prompt discussion is required on a major issue of political contention.
2.3 Central Committee and full-time organisers
(Replaces section 5 of the current SWP Constitution)

The Central Committee consists of members elected by the Conference and is responsible to the National Committee for effective implementation of Party policy as agreed at National Conference, and at meetings of the National Committee. Between Conferences the Central Committee is entrusted with the political leadership of the organisation, and is responsible for the national direction of all political and organisational work, subject to the decision-making powers of the National Committee. The Central Committee will meet regularly, either face-to-face or by means of secure e-communication.

Membership of the Central Committee will reflect the party’s collective experience in workplaces and unions, including student unions; in branches and districts; in united front campaigns; in theoretical and international work; and within the full-time apparatus. Ideally, not more than one-third of the members of the Central Committee will be full-time employees of the Party. At least four members of the Central Committee will be current or recent key activists in the trade union movement.

The outgoing Central Committee may circulate a provisional slate for a new Central Committee at the beginning of the period for pre-Conference discussion. This slate, along with any other slates proposed by a minimum of five branches across a minimum of three districts, and which is supported by a minimum of 25 delegates at Conference, or which emerges during a national Conference with the support of at least 25 delegates, will be discussed and voted on by Conference.

The Central Committee will centrally appoint all full-time organisers to districts, as appropriate. District organisers represent, and are responsible to, the Central Committee. They will work together with the Party members in their district to ensure the effective implementation of Party policies.

2.4 Fractions
(replaces section 9 of the current SWP Constitution)

All members will normally be involved in united front activities in trades unions/students’ unions and in campaigns, and the nature of these activities will be determined by the members of the appropriate fraction, nationally, in consultation with the Central Committee and in line with Conference policy. Members of a fraction may also need to organise local or regional meetings, or on-going organisation, in appropriate circumstances.

All fractions will elect a national co-ordinator or fraction secretary and may have local coordinators who will liaise with the relevant geographical branches. The Central Committee will allocate one of its members to all fractions and campaign activity, and to activity in the student movement. National meetings of the fractions will occur at least once each year, and the National Committee will receive a report from all fraction secretaries and campaign coordinators at least once each year.

**AMENDMENT ON CONFIDENTIALITY**

Thanet, Hornsey & Wood Green and Cambridge branches

Delete all section 3 in DC report and replace with:

**Conference resolves**

1) That confidentiality is an important part of bringing forward any complaint. That all parties should feel they can use the process safely.
2) That confidentiality, its characteristics and uses, must be raised in ways which are politically coherent – not via threats
3) That it is crucial that the issue of confidentiality does not take on greater importance than the case itself.
4) Confidentiality must not be used as a gagging clause.
5) That confidentiality is not used to prevent a comrade explaining to others what has happened to them.
6) That when a serious case around sexual misconduct is being investigated the complainant must not be made to feel that they are becoming the object of investigation due to ‘breaches of confidentiality’.
7) That when a serious case around sexual misconduct is being investigated the Disputes Committee must be clear that it’s absolute priority is the investigation into the charge, and not concerns about ‘leaks and breaches in confidentiality.

**AMENDMENTS FROM THE CC Central Committee**

1. Section on Co-option: (page 43, column 1 of IB1)
Add at end new sentence – “We believe it is essential for the integrity of the process that in the main disputes cases are dealt with by members elected to deal with the whole range of cases that might arise rather than be selected to deal with particular cases and that unless there are exceptional circumstances elected members should form the majority of any panel.”

2. In final para of Recommended Process (page 44, column 2 of IB1)
Delete: “then an ad hoc committee should be elected… document”.
Insert: “Then the appeal should be referred to the incoming Disputes Committee. Members of the DC hearing the original complaint should not sit on the appeal. If necessary the newly elected DC could use its power of cooption to create an acceptable panel to re hear the case.”
Proposer: Central Committee
Passed by the National Committee

**AMENDMENT ON EQUAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Kingston, Thanet, Canterbury and Bury & Prestwich branches

The original DC rules were set up to ensure that if the CC was bringing a complaint, the person against whom a complaint has been made would have an opportunity to see the evidence against them and respond properly.

As the cases heard by the DC were mostly brought by the CC the rules were formulated to ensure transparency and to prevent the CC using its position to remove political opponents without proper explanation.

This has particular implications in cases involving rape and/or abuse. Activists have fought for the right of women to have proper access to evidence in courts in rape cases to ensure that women in an already potentially emotional and vulnerable state are not cross examined, are not put on the spot with
evidence that they might not have proper chance to process, that can cause the individual to feel that they are being disbelieved, and that can have a triggering effect (can cause people to traumatically recall negative experiences or events) and that can add enormously to what is often already a traumatic experience.

It is therefore important both to be consistent with our politics on women’s oppression, and to achieve the basic standard expected in a trade union process, that we include provision in the DC rules to allow equal access to information for all parties.

The current proposals in the DC review do not allow for equal access to information to both parties. Only if the accused provides a written statement does it guarantee equal access. In normal cases this is less of a problem as the comrades will be present in the same room when evidence is being given. In more serious cases where the comrades will not be in the same room, the proposed changes do not ensure equal access.

**Equal access to information**

Two amendments:

i) In point 5 of the section on ‘Recommenced Process’, insert the text italicised below:

The constitution currently states that, “Unless the DC rules that exceptional circumstances prevail, comrades receive in advance a written statement of the case against them and are present when evidence is given to the DC.”

In addition, the comrade against whom a complaint has been made should be invited to reply to the statement against them in writing.

The comrade complained against may, for example, wish to indicate whether they dispute the facts, interpretation or politics of the case against them. The comrade may want to wait until the hearing to respond.

A copy of any written reply should be sent to the person making the complaint. Written statements should normally be exchanged no later than 4 weeks before the hearing.

If the comrade waits until the hearing to respond, if necessary the comrade who has made the complaint should be given reasonable time to adjourn to reflect on this information before being questioned. This time should be agreed by the DC and the complainant. In exceptional circumstances if new evidence is presented which would require time to refute- the DC should consider whether the hearing must be postponed. These rules would apply vice versa.

ii) In the section on ‘Additional guidelines for cases of sexual misconduct’, insert a point 8:

8. It is especially important that comrades have equal access to information. In less serious cases if the comrade against whom a complaint has been made does not provide written evidence in advance, the person making the complaint should have the right to have one of their support people present while this person gives evidence.

This information should then be relayed to the person who has made a complaint in an oral or written form. The content of this must accurately reflect what the person against whom a complaint has been made says and must be agreed with them.

In this case the person should then have adequate time to reflect on this information before being questioned, the length of time to be agreed between the DC and the complainant on the day, and potentially this might involve having to reschedule the hearing to a later date.

In cases involving rape and more serious abuse it should be insisted upon that the person against whom a complaint has been made must present their evidence in advance of the hearing to allow the person making the complaint the opportunity to process the information and prepare a response. It is important that this happens to be consistent with our politics on women’s oppression and to prevent a comrade being cross examined or put in a situation that might have a triggering effect.

These rules could also apply where the comrade who has made the complaint might be experiencing mental health problems exacerbated by waiting to hear the response.

**AMENDMENT TO ‘EQUAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION’ MOTION PROPOSED BY THE FACTION**

**Birmingham aggregate**

Add the following text at the start of the new point 8:

“During the hearing the DC should be mindful that the person bringing the complaint should be kept informed of the basis on which the complaint is being contested and given a chance to discuss, process and respond to any evidence provided. (And vice versa for the person complained against). All parties should be given reasonable time to adjourn to reflect on any information given and in exceptional circumstances the DC must consider whether the hearing should be postponed to allow more time.”

In new point 8 delete from faction’s proposal:

“In less serious cases if the comrade against whom a complaint has been made does not provide written evidence in advance, the person making the complaint should have the right to have one of their support people present while this person gives evidence.”

Reason for deletion:

Given the heightened tensions that can exist around cases, it will not always be appropriate for a person nominated by the person bringing the complaint to be in the room when evidence is given by the person complained against.

Therefore I propose replacing the deleted section above with:

“It is important that all parties to a DC case are kept informed, at intervals during the process, of the basis on which a case is being pursued and contested. For this purpose the DC should be given discretion to appoint a note-taker during hearings where it thinks one necessary, to be responsible, along with the DC, for conveying to the other party not represented in the room what has taken place during sessions of the DC hearing.”

Then insert the following part of the motion as proposed by the faction:

“In this case the person should then have adequate time to reflect on this information before being questioned, the length of time to be agreed between the DC and the person on the day, and potentially this might involve having to reschedule the hearing to a later date.”

Delete the following part of the faction’s motion:

“In cases involving rape and more serious abuse it should be insisted upon that the person against whom a complaint has been made must present their evidence in advance of the hearing to allow the person making the complaint the opportunity to process the information and prepare a response. It is important that this happens to be consistent with our politics on women’s oppression and to prevent a comrade being cross examined or put in a situation that might have a triggering effect.

These rules could also apply where the comrade who has made the complaint might be experiencing mental health problems exacerbated by waiting to hear the response.”

Reason for deletion of this part:

We believe this removes from the DC their necessary right to exercise discretion in how they apply the rules to specific cases.

No one can actually compel anyone to present their evidence in advance in written form, and comrades will be able to envisage cases where comrades might have good reasons not to wish to do so.

We should not have a blanket rule, with no room for exceptions within it, that would presumably require us to expel any
comrade who did not agree to respond in writing to a serious allegation about him or herself.

Furthermore we believe that the addition of a responsibility on the DC to keep comrades informed of the evidence being presented, and of time to process new information to be agreed between the comrades and the DC meets the need for the procedure to avoid creating a triggering effect, and is consistent with our position of opposing women’s oppression.

**The amended motion would therefore read:**

In point 5 of the section on ‘Recommended Process’, insert the text italicised below:

The constitution currently states that, “Unless the DC rules that exceptional circumstances prevail, comrades receive in advance a written statement of the case against them and are present when evidence is given to the DC.

In addition, the comrade against whom a complaint has been made should be invited to reply to the statement against them in writing. The comrade complained against may, for example, wish to indicate whether they dispute the facts, interpretation or politics of the case against them. The comrade may want to wait until the hearing to respond. A copy of any written reply should be sent to the person making the complaint. Written statements should normally be exchanged no later than 4 weeks before the hearing.”

*If the comrade waits until the hearing to respond, if necessary the comrade who has made the complaint should be given reasonable time to adjourn to reflect on this information before being questioned. This time should be agreed by the DC and the complainant. In exceptional circumstances- if new evidence is presented which would require time to refute- the DC should consider whether the hearing must be postponed. These rules would apply vice versa.*

In the section on ‘Additional guidelines for cases of sexual misconduct’, insert a point 8:

**During the hearing the DC should be mindful that the person bringing the complaint should be kept informed of the basis on which the complaint is being contested and given a chance to discuss, process and respond to any evidence provided. (And vice versa for the person complained against). All parties should be given reasonable time to adjourn to reflect on any information given and in exceptional circumstances the DC must consider whether the hearing should be postponed to allow more time.**

It is important that all parties to a DC case are kept informed, at intervals during the process, of the basis on which a case is being pursued and contested. For this purpose the DC should be given discretion to appoint a note-taker during hearings where it thinks one necessary, to be responsible, along with the DC, for conveying to the other party not represented in the room what has taken place during sessions of the DC hearing.

In this case the person should then have adequate time to reflect on this information before being questioned, the length of time to be agreed between the DC and the person on the day, and potentially this might involve having to reschedule the hearing to a later date.

**AMENDMENTS TO DC REVIEW**

*Tower Hamlets branch*

1) Section on Co-option
Para 1 delete sentence; “We feel that co-option ……. is well known in the organisation”.

Third sentence delete “also”

Add at end new sentence – “We believe it is essential for the integrity of the process that in the main disputes cases are dealt with by members elected to deal with the whole range of cases that might arise rather than be selected to deal with particular cases and unless in exceptional circumstances that elected members should form the majority of any panel”.

2) Appeals
Delete “then an ad hoc committee should be elected… document”.

Insert “then the appeal should be referred to the incoming Disputes Committee. Members of the DC hearing the original complaint should not sit on the appeal. If necessary the DC should be expanded to 8 members to facilitate this whilst remaining small enough to be a properly working body”. 