

October 2009 ● Socialist Workers Party pre-conference

BULLETIN 1

CONTENTS

Conference perspectives 2009-2010	
Central Committee.	3
Anti-fascism in the 21st Century – how to fight the BNP and EDL	
Central Committee.	7
Socialist Worker – the paper we need now	
John and Mike (Hackney).	10
Holding the line on No Platform	
Dean (Waltham Forest), Paul (South London), Julie (Hackney), Jim (Central London)	13
A change in strategy from the Nazis means we need a change in our anti-Nazi strategy	
Andy (South London)	14
Scale of mobilisation	
Kieran (Central London)	15
Building a DCH group from scratch	
Ben (South London).	16
A turn to the working class	
Steve (South East London).	18
Encouraging new speakers	
Emma (East Anglia & Norwich).	18
Nurturing the roots in Kings Lynn	
William and Jacqueline (East Anglia & Norwich)	19
At the crossroads	
Martin and Anne (West London).	20
Proposed Central Committee	
.	21
SWP Constitution	
.	22
Commission on party democracy	
.	24
Two motions on “No Platform”	
.	34
National Committee nomination form	
.	36

CONFERENCE PERSPECTIVES 2009-10

[1] The world economy has experienced in the past year the most severe slump since the 1930s. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest World Economic Outlook (October 2009) forecasts that global output will shrink this year by about one percent. World trade is projected to fall by nearly 12 percent. This hasn't happened since the end of the Second World War.

Two mainstream economic historians, Barry Eichengreen and Kevin O'Rourke, have shown that in 2008-9 industrial production in the main economies fell as sharply as, or even more than it did at the start of the Great Depression in 1929-30.

The slump is completely at odds with the picture of global capitalism painted till recently by official ideologists. Even in October 2007, after the onset of the financial crisis, the IMF was claiming that the world economy had entered a new golden age of strong and stable growth. What we have seen instead in the past two years is the explosion of the underlying contradictions of the system, above all the long-term crisis of profitability that has gripped the advanced economies since the late 1960s.

Increasingly the leading capitalist states, and in particular the United States, sought to manage these contradictions by encouraging the development of financial bubbles based on cheap credit as a way of sustaining demand and growth. The deflation of the latest bubble, centred on the US housing market, has shattered the global banking system and precipitated a global economic slump.

The present crisis is an event comparable to the Great Depression of the 1930s. This doesn't mean it is following the same course. Industrial production fell continuously for three years in 1929-32. But this time the leading capitalist states responded to the financial crash of September-October 2008 that followed the collapse of Lehman Brothers by rescuing the banks, flooding the markets with vast quantities of effectively free money, and increasing spending to counter the fall in demand for goods and services.

This has brought a degree of temporary stability to the world economy. The contraction in output is coming to an end, at least for the time being, and production is beginning to rise in most of the big economies. Bloated with government money, the surviving banks are announcing big profits and resisting rather perfunctory government attempts to regulate them more closely and to cut bonuses. The stock markets have moved sharply upwards, creating widespread fears that a new bubble is developing.

The IMF warns against this renewed optimism:

"Complacency must be avoided. Despite these advances, the pace of recovery is expected to be slow and, for quite some time, insufficient to decrease unemployment. Also, poverty could increase significantly in a number of developing economies where real GDP per capita is contracting in 2009 for the first time in a decade. Activity may pick up quickly in the short term. Yet the forces that are driving the current rebound are partly temporary in nature, including major fiscal stimulus, central banks' support for credit markets, and restocking following exceptionally large cutbacks in production and draw-downs of inventories. These forces will diminish during the course of 2010."

The damage suffered by the financial system is a major obstacle to a sustained recovery. According to the IMF's latest estimate, the major US and European banks are carrying \$2.8 trillion worth of losses, and have yet to own up to \$1.5 trillion of this total. This means they will remain dependent on state support and reluctant to lend new money. Meanwhile, ordinary households in countries such as the US and Britain are burdened with very heavy levels of debt that they are struggling to cut. This means that consumer demand is likely to remain weak.

Double-dip

Fears of a "double-dip" recession – in other words, another economic collapse once the prop of state support is removed – help to explain why the latest G20 summit in Pittsburgh decided that governments should continue with their fiscal stimuli for the time being. But the financial markets are now targeting the higher government debt that was necessary in order to rescue them and to halt the economic contraction.

The demands for cutbacks in public spending that are rising to crescendo level throughout the advanced capitalist world are essentially an attempt to displace the cost of the crisis onto ordinary working people. The resulting struggles are likely to dominate politics in coming years.

Ideologically neoliberalism has been reduced to shreds by the crisis. The right-wing historian Niall Ferguson admits that "one of the lessons of the recent – and in my view continuing – financial crisis is that not everything the Marxists said was wrong" and warns that Hilferding's and Lenin's predictions of the rise of "state monopoly capitalism" are being vindicated. But the ruling classes have no alternative ideological and political framework to neoliberalism. For sections, the lesson of the crisis is the need to radicalise neoliberalism, as is reflected in the outgoing grand coalition in Germany writing a balanced budget requirement into the constitution of the Federal Republic, and the frenzied response of the Republican right to Obama's health-care reforms.

The drive to cut public spending has to be seen against this background.

[2] Major economic crises can also accelerate redistributions in power among the major capitalist states. It has become a cliché to say that the present crisis marks the end of the global dominance of the US.

But the US remains far and away the largest economy in the world, accounting for 23.5 percent of global output in 2008, compared to the 7.25 percent share of China, which tends to be seen as the main potential challenger to US hegemony. The continuing economic weight of the US is indicated by the fact that, as in 1929, it was an implosion there that dragged the rest of the world into slump.

Damaged

Nevertheless, the same fact – that the US started the crisis – has badly damaged Washington's prestige and its claim to global leadership. It has exacerbated the crisis of legitimacy that the US suffered as a result of the Bush administration's disastrous Iraq adventure. Russia was able to exploit the US's difficulties to inflict a bloody nose on its would-be Georgian attack dog in August 2008, and got away with it thanks in particular to its ability to play off leading European states, notably Germany, against the US.

Meanwhile the Chinese state has played an important role in stabilising the world economy. The Chinese banks – on government instructions – lent over \$1 trillion in the first half of this year. According to Barclays Capital, China accounted for all the growth in global economic output in the second quarter of 2009. The crisis has done nothing to reduce the US's financial dependence on China. In 2008 China lent the US more than \$400 billion – equivalent to more than 10 percent of Chinese gross domestic product.

China's spectacular growth in recent decades involves enormous contradictions – between state and private capital, the coastal and inner provinces, the elite and the vast mass of the population. It also rests on the Chinese state continuing to underwrite investment in expanded productive capacity and on the ability of the rest of the world to absorb the resulting exports. At some stage these contradictions will explode. But, in the short term, the crisis has undoubtedly increased China's relative power.

The response of the Obama administration to this situation has been essentially to seek to maintain US primacy while making a virtue of what the Bush administration was forced reluctantly to acknowledge towards the end of its second term – that Washington needs the cooperation of other powers in order to maintain its hegemony. This is reflected, for example, in the way in which the G20, which includes China, India and the other leading Third World economies, has supplanted the G8 as the

major forum through which the main capitalist states coordinate their response to the crisis.

Obama has also conceded Russia's demand to scrap Bush's plans to include the Czech Republic and Poland in the missile defence system. It's not clear how significant this is in military terms, both because of Washington's huge nuclear lead and because of the plans announced by the Pentagon to surround Iran with missile defences based in the eastern Mediterranean.

But the administration has, despite Ahmadinejad's fraudulent re-election and the repression of the Iranian opposition, persisted in its policy of negotiating with Tehran, against the misgivings of its main European allies. This policy of combining pressure with a willingness to take may be beginning to pay off following the Geneva talks at the beginning of October.

Elsewhere in the vast sweep of western Asia where the "war on terrorism" has been concentrated, Obama faces a much more intractable situation. So far Israel's most right-wing government to date has succeeded in blocking US efforts to revive the so-called peace process. Plans to reduce US troop numbers in Iraq and pull them out of direct combat operations depend on the fragile set of political understandings embracing the main forces within the country alongside Iran.

Obama's main initiative, to mount a surge of US troops in Afghanistan, is already running into severe difficulties amid fierce Taliban resistance and the corruption and unpopularity of the Karzai regime. The predictable demands by the generals for yet more troops are confronting Obama with the kind of dilemma that faced the Kennedy and Johnson administrations over Vietnam in the 1960s.

Pressured

The administration has successfully pressured the Pakistani military into attacking the jihadis in the border areas with Afghanistan, though there is a high risk that this may further destabilise Pakistan – as the siege at Army GHQ in Rawalpindi and the attacks in Lahore and other cities show. All this makes the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Obama especially bizarre.

The US nevertheless has some strong cards in its hand, among which is the weakness of some of its leading potential rivals. The response of the European Union to the crisis has been shambolic and divided. Despite the eviction of the Liberal Democratic Party from office after more than 50 years in power, Japan is unlikely to break out of the position of geopolitical subordination to the US in which it has been locked since the Second World War.

But the combination of the economic crisis and the perceived weakening of the US has undoubtedly increased the conflicts among the leading capitalist states. The slump hasn't provoked the flood of pro-

tectionism that caused the world market to break up during the Great Depression.

Nevertheless, there has been a surge in protectionist measures, from the "Buy America" clause that the US Congress inserted into Obama's fiscal stimulus, through a wealth of job subsidies, to the German government's orchestration of a takeover of General Motors' European operations that seeks to minimise the impact on Opel's German plants.

Moreover, China has become markedly more assertive in attacking the dominance of the dollar and US "anti-dumping" measures directed against its exports.

Against the background of continuing crisis, global capitalism is becoming harder to manage. The weakness of the EU response reflects the reliance of capitalists on the nation-states with which they are most closely interwoven to defend their interests.

We are likely to see continuing conflicts over the measures needed to overcome the crisis. Thus the two biggest exporting economies, China and Germany, are resisting pressures from the US and Britain to export less and consume more, as part of an effort to "re-balance" the global economy.

The negotiations leading up to the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December are bedevilled by the efforts of the leading states to shift the burden of cutting CO2 emissions onto one another. The crisis was in large part a consequence of the blind competition among capitals and state, but it is exacerbating this competition.

[3] The political situation in Britain is dominated by two facts – the decay of the New Labour government in the face of its likely defeat by the Tories in the general election next year and the certainty that whichever party wins the election will seek to implement severe cuts in public spending.

Labour's precipitous decline is partly a matter of the long-term erosion of its working-class roots, a process that has been going on for decades, but that has accelerated under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. But it also belongs to a larger crisis of political representation that involves the erosion of support for all the mainstream parties.

The scandal over MPs' expenses has, of course, intensified this crisis. The government has been hit harder by this, partly because Cameron has been considerably more adroit in responding than the hapless Brown, partly because expectations of Labour are higher.

It's important not to confuse the crisis of political representation with a depoliticisation of British society. After all, the rise of the Stop the War Coalition in the first half of the decade involved the largest demonstrations in British history. Large numbers of people are politically engaged, sometimes around specific issues such as Third World poverty or climate change, sometimes on broader questions, but they have switched off Westminster politics.

So, if Cameron makes it to 10 Downing Street, he won't be carried there by a wave of popular enthusiasm, or even the narrower but intense class mobilisation that sustained Thatcher. He will win largely by default, because of the unpopularity of Brown, and of New Labour more generally. And a Tory victory is no racing certainty. The Financial Times's Lex column wrote on 15 October: "The economy is moving in Gordon Brown's favour... If the recovery continues, a Conservative majority is far from being a foregone conclusion."

All the same, we have seen in recent months a closing of ranks in business and the media behind the Tories around a very nasty programme directed against public services and public sector workers. To repeat, this is a naked class attack, mounted by the bankers and the bosses more generally, to displace the costs of the crisis onto working people and the poor. It now has the endorsement of the IMF, which is demanding that "costs" – i.e. jobs – in the National Health Service be cut.

Austerity

Does the imminence of a Tory government with an "austerity" platform mark a pronounced shift to the right in British society? At the top there certainly is a significant change in the tone of politics as the business lobbies, think tanks and media commentators rush to abandon New Labour for the Cameroons. But what we're seeing is the confrontation of two political machines that use political technique as a substitute for their atrophied mass bases against a background of popular indifference or hostility.

The Tories' lack of confidence is reflected in the way in which Cameron is trying to balance between the soft-centre focus that has defined his leadership of the Tory party and a tilt back to Thatcherism. Both sides were reflected in his conference speech – a Reaganite attack on "big government" and the proclamation of the Tories as the true champions of the poor.

Brown's best hope lies in rekindling bitter memories of the Thatcher and Major governments. This is unlikely to save him, but the more polarised political atmosphere in the lead-up to the general election may see a degree of rallying back to Labour especially among trade unionists old enough for these memories to be real.

New Labour's particular troubles are one incident in the larger crisis of social liberalism, which is marked by the disappearance of the historic parties of the Italian left, the implosion of the French Socialist Party, and the humiliation of the German Social Democratic Party in the recent federal elections. Social democracy is being punished for its embrace of neoliberalism. The centre right has been the main electoral beneficiary, but – with the important exception of Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing populist coalition in Italy – this has not re-

flected a significant shift in popular support towards them. Moreover, social democracy isn't finished, as PASOK's victory in the Greek elections demonstrates.

The strong scores of Die Linke in the German elections, the Left Bloc in Portugal in both the European and parliamentary elections and by People Before Profit in the Irish council elections last summer shows that well-placed radical left formations can make advances in the present conditions. The very different kind of initiative represented by our comrades of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA), which is based on a formally revolutionary programme, will continue to shape the development of the radical left in France.

What we are seeing is a weakening of the centre and a polarisation further leftwards – and rightwards. The hard neoliberal Free Democrats were one of the winners in the German elections. The Nazi BNP won their two European parliamentary seats despite a lower popular vote thanks to the collapse in Labour support – a warning of how the decay of the centre creates openings for the far right. The strength of anti-migrant feeling, constantly fanned by mainstream politicians and the media, is very dangerous, since it could provide the impetus for a more generalised shift to the right.

The collapse of the Scottish Socialist Party and Respect in 2006-8 temporarily silenced the radical left voice in British electoral politics. The No2EU list in the European elections was no substitute, either politically or in terms of the votes it won.

The appeal that the Socialist Workers Party launched after the European elections for a united left alternative to New Labour was very well received. But it isn't easy to translate sentiments into deeds, particularly since such an alternative requires the different fragments of the radical left to acknowledge that their own electoral projects have failed.

Nevertheless, there is some prospect that the initiative planned by Bob Crow of the RMT will succeed in uniting most strands of the radical left on a single platform. Assuming that a basis can be agreed that is acceptable to the SWP and our allies, this should allow us to stand a limited number of candidates in areas where we have a good track record electorally in next year's council and parliamentary elections.

Whatever the outcome of these discussions, the experience of the past ten years has shown how difficult electoral work is and how fragile its successes can be. But we need to persist with it.

One dimension of the decay of Labourism is the deepening fracture between New Labour and sections of the trade union movement. This will require continuing, patient efforts on our part to develop an electoral alternative that can win the support of significant numbers of voters.

[4] Since the beginning of this year

there has been a qualitative shift in the class struggle in Britain. The experience of past crises and the analyses of great Marxists such as Trotsky show that there is no mechanical relationship between economic slump and class struggle. Crisis doesn't necessarily mean either a surge of mass strikes or a collapse into despair. One important factor is the state of the working class as it goes into the crisis.

Thus, when postwar capitalism first ran into serious economic trouble at the beginning of the 1970s it confronted a workers' movement that was strong and confident after decades of full employment and that in countries such as Britain had powerful and militant shop-floor organisation. The result was a series of massive class confrontations and major victories for workers.

A decade later, however, as the economic crisis of the early 1980s hit, workers' organisation had already been worn down by mass unemployment and corporatist deals such as the Social Contract in Britain between the unions and the Labour government of 1974-9.

The balance of power in the trade unions had shifted from the rank and file to the bureaucracy. This didn't stop big battles taking place as Thatcher and Reagan launched their assault on the organised working class, but the dead hand of the bureaucracy ensured that these struggles were defeated.

Contradictory

So how did the British working class enter this slump? Its condition is best described as a contradictory unity of old and new. On the one hand, we see a highly bureaucratised union movement, where both full-time officials and activists are profoundly shaped by the experience of defeat over the past three decades. Action when it happens tends to be selective and controlled from the top.

On the other hand, many workers are much too young to have direct experience of these defeats. They often experience much harsher working conditions than the old shop stewards would have tolerated and many aren't unionised but, if they can be won to struggle, they don't have the kind of low horizons that have dominated trade union action in recent decades.

As Charlie Kimber shows in September's Socialist Review, the class struggle under the present recession is a struggle between old and new. The old was demonstrated a year ago when the leaderships of the NUT and the PCS – two unions well on the left of the TUC – reacted to the financial crash by killing off the public sector pay revolt, despite the fact that their members had voted for strike action.

The new is visible in the struggles in the past few months at Prisme, Visteon, Linamar, Lindsey, Vestas and Tower Hamlets College. These have involved the rediscovery of the methods of struggle that

workers last used in the upturn of the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of these is the factory occupation. Another is the all-out strike – backed in the case of the Lindsey strike by solidarity action by other workers, in defiance of the anti-union laws. Most importantly, these struggles have delivered a number of real victories. Militancy pays – a lesson that contradicts the common sense of the union movement since the defeats of the 1980s.

It would be a mistake to romanticize these struggles, as the two most high-profile disputes illustrate. When building workers at the Lindsey oil refinery first went on strike at the end of January, they did so under the slogan "British jobs for British workers" – a disastrously divisive slogan that was encouraged by union leaders desperate to avoid a real fight for jobs.

Setting this alongside the second Lindsey strike in June – a much clearer class fight won by solidarity – shows the very mixed consciousness with which even the best organised workers carry with them into struggle.

The occupation at the Vestas wind turbine plant in July and August also had an enormous impact. It made the argument for green jobs much more effectively than any amount of speeches or pamphlets could. But its influence outside – both on the Isle of Wight and across Britain – was vastly greater than the strength of the occupation itself, which involved only a small minority of the workforce.

The Visteon occupation in Enfield, where the workforce held the plant till they won an acceptable settlement, represents a much better model of how to win.

Nevertheless, the new struggles collectively represent a real bridgehead. For the first time in many years we can point to real examples of successful militancy – and ones that have taken place in the depths of a great economic slump. Building on them is our first priority as a party.

Dispute

The most important test facing us currently is the postal dispute. In many ways, the Communication Workers Union is a real fusion of old and new – at the top a left leadership that has striven to defend the link with Labour, down below a workforce with probably the strongest traditions of rank-and-file militancy in the contemporary union movement.

The postal workers now face a determined management attack, backed by a government determined to privatise Royal Mail, and sustained by a major scabbing operation that has been exposed in Socialist Worker. The "Strategic Overview" document leaked to Newsnight confirms that Royal Mail bosses are determined to crush the union.

Whether or not the postal workers succeed in fending off this attack will have a decisive effect on the broader struggle

around the cuts (though a compromise between management and union leadership that would postpone the confrontation can't be excluded). We need to throw the entire party into building solidarity with the CWU.

[5] Starting in September 2008 and culminating at the SWP conference in January, the party underwent a fierce internal debate over its perspectives. This arose from the drive by the majority of the then Central Committee to reorient the SWP to a focus on building and supporting the resistance to the effects of the recession.

This shift was opposed by a minority who were not re-elected to the CC in January. They argued (somewhat contradictorily) that building the Stop the War Coalition should remain the SWP's central focus and that responding to the recession required the launch of a national united front modelled on Stop the War.

Reorientation

The reorientation has been thoroughly vindicated by the experience of the past year. Of course, as we argue above, the "war on terrorism" continues, and indeed is intensifying in Afghanistan. The fact that, according to a recent opinion poll commissioned by the BBC, 56 percent oppose British military involvement in Afghanistan is remarkable, given the support that all the major parties give to the war and the virtual cult of the dead mounted by the government and media around soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

This cult has proved double-edged, as is shown by the growing bitterness against the war in working class communities where army recruitment is high. The level of casualties being taken by the army – 19 Light Brigade has just left Afghanistan after losing 70 soldiers killed fighting the Taliban – is politically very dangerous for whichever party is in office after the election.

Afghanistan has become a major issue in British politics, as is shown by the government's conflicts with the military, which have been dramatised by the ex-head of the army joining the Tory shadow cabinet.

It remains essential to continue building Stop the War, not simply because of Afghanistan, but because of our strategic understanding that the long-term crisis of US imperialism is likely to lead to more wars. Moreover, the wave of mass protests and student occupations provoked by Israel's assault on Gaza in December and January underlines the potential of anti-imperialism as a mobilising factor.

So Stop the War is a valuable united front that needs to be maintained. But the war no longer dominates the political landscape in the way it did, roughly speaking, between 9/11 and the London bombings. Stop the War's capacity to mobilise has accordingly declined – though this trend has been interrupted by upsurges of anger provoked by Israel's wars on Lebanon and

Gaza. There may well be more such explosions. Nevertheless, as the last meeting of the International Socialist Tendency in July agreed, the real debate about the anti-war movement is how to keep it going as a long-term project in conditions where it has become much harder for it to bring large numbers of people onto the streets.

But the dominant issue for us as a party – as it is for mainstream bourgeois politics – is the economic crisis and how to respond to it. Where we have made mistakes – for example, around the G20 protests on 1 April – they have arisen from not focusing on this priority sufficiently single-mindedly.

Whoever wins the election will try to force through major cuts in public spending that will directly hit jobs, wages and conditions. Indeed, these attacks have already begun. Tower Hamlets shows that they can be fought off but, as we have seen, a much bigger struggle is brewing in Royal Mail.

In seeking to build this resistance, we can't simply counterpose old and new, important though the recent struggles have been. In the unions where we have some influence, we are part of the "old".

In other words, our comrades belong to the layer of union activists that have held union organization together over the past few decades, but have in the process been worn down by the experience of defeat. In some public sector unions, notably the NUT, PCS and UCU, the role of our comrades as activists respected for their consistency and militancy means that we have an influence on the official machine and seats on executives.

This official presence is an important asset. It helped to deliver the support of the key left unions for the Jobs, Education and Peace demonstration at the Labour Party conference in Brighton on 27 September. But there is an obvious danger, that our comrades' involvement in the official machine can lead to their integration in the left bureaucracy.

It is essential where comrades win official positions that they maintain their political independence and are prepared to use it – as the SWP members on the NUT and PCS executives did when they broke with the rest of the left to vote against the suppression of the pay revolt.

Fraction

Getting things right is partly a matter of developing strong fraction organisation capable of holding comrades in official positions to account. But more fundamentally it depends on whether the dialectic of old and new leads to the renewal of the old or to the old dragging the new down to its level.

In other words, where we have influence in unions and workplaces we have to fight for the new methods of struggle – for all-out strikes, for occupations to defend jobs, and for rank-and-file control. This will have no hope of success if it's not linked to building rank-and-file organization at the

base. The importance of the new struggles is that they make this objective much more feasible than it has been in recent years.

In all our work, the united front will continue to play a fundamental role. One very broad united front, which stretches from us to deep into the trade union bureaucracy – Unite Against Fascism has assumed special importance since the BNP's breakthrough in the European elections.

UAF will continue to be of great importance as we build on the successful mass mobilisations against the Nazis over the summer. But this experience underlines that we must maintain our capacity for independent initiative. When UAF in Birmingham blocked the second mobilisation against the English Defence League (EDL) in early September, we called a counter-demonstration as the SWP – an action that paid off amply.

As we explained in the debates in the lead-up to the last conference, building united fronts against the recession is considerably more complicated.

Here we confront on its home ground a highly fragmented and opportunistic trade union bureaucracy that still has many ties to Labour. In the past 18 months, the charter that we initiated proved still-born, because it had little credibility even within the party, while the People's Charter has not produced any real activity, because its main sponsors were preoccupied with the disastrous No2EU adventure.

None of this means that new united fronts are not in prospect. The new electoral initiative, if it comes off, will be one, particularly since it is likely to be a fairly loose coalition of organisations. And building the 27 September demonstration depended on a rough-and-ready working relationship that developed with sections of the left bureaucracy. The Fight for the Right to Work conference on 30 January offers an opportunity further to develop this relationship. This depends on our making the conference a real attraction for a large number of trade union activists (a detailed document on this initiative will appeal in the next IB). But, as in the case of UAF, it is essential that we maintain our capacity for independent initiatives.

[6] The turn we made in September 2008 towards building the resistance to the effects of the crisis has led to something of a renaissance of the SWP. We have been at the centre of the Gaza protests and the mobilisations against the BNP and the EDL and in building solidarity with the new workers' struggles.

We immediately challenged the slogan "British jobs for British workers" and helped to crystallise opposition in the trade union movement to this very dangerous development. We also organised a successful mini-Marxism at the beginning of December 2008 and a superb Marxism 2009.

These achievements have depended on the greater political clarity achieved during the internal debates of last winter. But they

also are a product of the efforts to rebuild party structures over the past five years. While it was absolutely right for the party to turn towards the movements after Seattle and 9/11, it is now clear that the way in which this turn was carried led to a near-collapse of basic party organisation that has had damaging long-term effects.

The crisis in Respect underlined the importance of ensuring that in building wider united fronts, proper resources and attention are devoted to the party itself. Important steps have been taken in the past five years to re-establish the organised network of branches that should be the party's basic skeleton. Without these efforts, the disintegration of Respect would have had much more devastating effects on us.

Discussions

The discussions around the Democracy Commission and the Special Conference in June focused further attention on renewing the party's traditions of democratic debate and strengthening its structures. There is, however, absolutely no reason for complacency.

Branch organisation and party finances should be much stronger. The debate that the last National Committee started about reorienting Socialist Worker to relate to the shifting class struggle will be meaningless unless it is translated into higher paper sales.

Moreover, the turn towards workers' resistance has exposed other weaknesses. Though, in broad terms, our activity in solidarity with the new struggles and mobilising for 27 September has been successful, it has also been very uneven.

This reflects the fact many branches no longer have around them the networks of working class activists on which they can rely, and which they can strengthen by collecting for strikes, taking strikers round, etc.

Rebuilding these networks must be one of our main priorities. Once again, this can't be separated from expanding the sales of Socialist Worker, since the regular delivery of the paper to the activists we know is the best way of nurturing our relationships with them. Building solidarity with the postal workers is a very important opportunity to develop these networks. We need to develop far more interventionist branches for which workplace collections become routine.

And, above all, we need to grow. The efforts that we have put into student work in recent years have more than paid off. We need to continue to pay special attention to building SWSS and recruiting students to the SWP. Constructing lively SWSS groups is partly a matter of activity – against the Nazis and the war, fighting the higher education cuts, in solidarity with workers in struggle. But it also requires intervention into the ideological turmoil provoked by the twin crises of imperialism

and neoliberalism – through debates, initiatives such as the Capital Reading group at King's College London, and regular SWSS meetings.

So the necessary renewal of the party is more than a matter of numbers, important though numbers are. We need to help the new members we have won to transform themselves into revolutionary socialist cadres rooted in the Marxist tradition.

This is partly a matter of practical experience, but it also requires formal education and training. The programme of party cadre schools needs to continue but also to be further developed. (More detailed documents on party-building and students will appear in the next IB.)

We have made real progress as a party since our last conference. For this progress to continue we must persist in the path that we have started on – of orienting towards and building the resistance provoked by the global economic crisis.

If we work correctly – in the short term by throwing everything we can into the postal workers' dispute – we can help shape the struggles provoked by the class offensive around the public sector cuts.

Central Committee

ANTI-FASCISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY – HOW TO FIGHT THE BNP AND EDL

The fascist British National Party gained its first seats in the European Parliament in the 4 June election this year. BNP leader Nick Griffin narrowly took the final seat in the North West of England region with 8.0 percent of the vote. Andrew Brons, a former National Front chairman and another lifelong Nazi, took the final seat in Yorkshire & the Humber with 9.8 percent of the vote. Across the country the BNP polled over 940,000 votes.

The European election results did not come out of the blue. The BNP has gradually been building up support and electoral representation over the past decade, going from three councillors in 2002 to over 50 today. They narrowly missed getting MEPs in the 2004 European elections.

Last year the Nazis won a seat on the London Assembly. So the MEP seats are the culmination of a process that has been under way for years.

Nevertheless the results represent a qualitative breakthrough for the Nazis. No fascist party in Britain has ever won elections at a national level previously. Their

election has led to sections of the political and media establishment capitulating to the BNP and accepting them as a "legitimate" political party. The BBC's disgraceful decision to invite Griffin onto Question Time is a symptom of this malaise.

The BNP's breakthrough has been accompanied by related developments, such as the return of racist thugs to the streets under the guise of the English Defence League. While the BNP and EDL claim to have nothing to do with each other, the two organisations are linked in both spirit and directly. Anti-fascists thus have a double task of defeating the BNP politically and defeating the EDL on our streets.

We warned at the beginning of this year and during the election campaign that the BNP were poised to win MEP seats in June. Unlike some anti-fascist groups we did not try to "talk down" the threat of the BNP or indulge in premature triumphalism. Nor did we try to pretend that the election results did not represent a qualitative step forward for the Nazis in Britain. Instead we have consistently argued that we need to face up to the threat and urgently need to build a broad anti-fascist movement in response to that threat.

Electoral gains

What were the factors driving the BNP electoral gains in June? It is important to note that it was not because of large numbers of people switching to the BNP. The Nazi vote actually fell in both the regions where they took seats. Rather they were the result of a significant drop in turnout. All the mainstream parties suffered from this, but Labour was particularly badly hit. The Labour vote in Yorkshire & the Humber, for instance, was only 56 percent of the figure it polled in 2004.

It is also worth noting who exactly is voting for the BNP. One common explanation is that BNP voters are disaffected former Labour voters who have switched to the fascists because they believe Labour has abandoned the "white working class". The implication is either that the BNP vote is a "protest vote" directed against Labour that has little to do with racism, or that working class white people are irredeemably racist and little can be done to alter this.

However, an extensive survey of over 32,000 voters conducted by the YouGov polling firm in the run-up to the European elections (www.bit.ly/megapoll) gives a detailed picture of the BNP vote that goes against this received wisdom. To begin with, the majority of BNP voters define themselves as politically right of centre and prefer the Tories to Labour. The bulk of the BNP's support comes not from disaffected Labour voters but from petty bourgeois bigots and working class Tories.

BNP voters are more tightly clustered around the middle income bracket – with a gross annual household income of between

£20,000 and £30,000 – than the population in general. Compared to voters for other parties, BNP voters are the least likely to say they have “enough money to live comfortably” and the least confident that “my family will have opportunities to prosper in the years ahead”. But they are also the least likely to choose economic issues such as unemployment or pensions when asked to pick the “most important issues facing you and your family”.

The YouGov poll also explodes the notion that BNP voters are not racist. It shows that BNP voters are significantly more likely to agree with racist statements than the general population. Nevertheless, the BNP is drawing on a much wider pool of racist attitudes that have spread deeply into society, especially on the right. This is expressed most strongly in terms of racist bigotry against immigrants and Muslims.

So the evidence suggests that while BNP voters are not particularly worse off economically than the population in general, they are significantly more dissatisfied and resentful – and far more likely to buy into racist discourse about immigrants, Muslims and ethnic minorities. It is this combination of racism and resentment that drives them into the arms of the BNP, rather than notions of a multicultural elite betraying the “white working class”.

That is not to say that traditional Labour voters are not angry with the government and the party. They are – but their typical reaction is to stay at home rather than to switch overnight to the fascists. And contrary to the media hype about a “white working class” riddled with racism, Labour voters (who are predominantly white and working class) are consistently less likely to agree with racist attitudes than the population at large.

Underlying dynamics

It's important to get these figures right because they tell you what the underlying political dynamics are driving the Nazi vote. What we are seeing is not a general shift right in people's political views (as arguably happened in 1979), but a political polarisation.

The economic crisis is feeding into a catastrophic decline in support for mainstream parties (just as it did in Britain in the 1930s). This process will accelerate next year as the new government (probably Tory) implements deep cuts in public services, pensions and people's living standards.

Currently the right wing aspect of this polarisation is expressing itself as an increasing BNP vote. Right wing voters, or those with right wing views who previously did not vote, are being attracted by a BNP message that combines a “British jobs for British workers” message (what the BNP calls “common sense economic nationalism”) with vitriol directed against immigrants and ethnic minorities.

Our role here is to organise the left wing

of this polarisation. That means intervening in militant industrial disputes such as the post strike and the occupations at Visteon and Vestas. It means helping to build a viable left electoral alternative at the ballot box. But it also means building a united front against the fascists that draws together as wide a range of forces as possible.

If we get this right, we can build confidence in the working class and strengthen the revolutionary current within it. If we fail, we will end up isolated and the opposition to the BNP will be divided, perhaps fatally so as happened in 1930s Germany.

While the principles behind the united front remain similar across different historical periods, the precise tactics vary dependent on circumstances. In the 1970s the struggle against the National Front took place with the backdrop of a downturn in industrial struggle but a rising level of anti-racist ideas and movements.

In the 1990s the battles against Tyndall's BNP took place in the final term of a hated Tory government as Labour was preparing for power.

Today they take place in the context of seemingly endless wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East, a thoroughly discredited New Labour government and an almost equally unpopular Tory opposition, together with a global economic cataclysm whose effects on ordinary people are only beginning to be felt.

Shifts in the nature of racism

Importantly there have also been significant shifts in the nature and extent of racism over the past few years. In 1997, when New Labour came to power, it seemed as if a chapter had turned irreversibly in the history of racism in Britain.

Some desperately racist and nationalist campaigns by the Tories had failed to prevent a Labour landslide. The new government ordered the Macpherson report that forced the Metropolitan Police to admit that it was institutionally racist. Immigrants and immigration featured low down or not at all in voters' lists of concerns and policy priorities. Britain seemed finally at ease with the idea of being a multicultural and multiracial society.

This soon began to change – first with government attacks on asylum seekers, then with the riots in northern cities in 2001 sparked by Nazi attacks on Asians. The Cantle report into the riots acknowledged that the far right had triggered the riots, but nevertheless explained the riots in terms of “self-segregating” ethnic minorities and introduced a new jargon of “community cohesion” to replace the previous multicultural and anti-racist paradigm.

The attacks on multiculturalism in general and Muslims in particular were vastly accelerated with the launch of the “war on

terror”. Following the 7 July 2005 London bombings it became routine to portray the Muslim community as having a “problem with extremism” that could only be eradicated by constant supervision and moralism from the government. On top of that the increase in migrant workers from Eastern Europe following the 2004 EU accession was accompanied by a new wave of paranoia over immigration, which sparked a turn by New Labour towards more overtly nationalist and Islamophobic ideologies and policies.

The end result has been a political establishment paralysed in the face of the rise of the BNP. There is a deep reluctance to admit that racism has steadily risen over the past decade, both in the press, in terms of government policies, and on the streets, in terms of grim and rising statistics for race attacks. This racism has both fed the BNP vote and weakened the forces opposed to the Nazis.

The impact of UAF

Unite Against Fascism has had an extraordinarily busy year and the campaign has begun to impact on popular consciousness in a way we had not seen until now. Throughout the election period we put out 2.5 million leaflets and newspapers pushing a consistent message – that the BNP was a Nazi party, that there was a serious danger of them winning seats, and that they could be stopped if enough people turned out to vote against them.

In May, Love Music Hate Racism (LMHR) and UAF put on an anti-racist festival at the Britannia Stadium in Stoke-on-Trent, together with Stoke City Football Club and Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The event, headlined by Kelly Rowland and Peter Doherty, was a great success and attracted a crowd of 20,000, most of whom were local young people.

The BNP had previously boasted that Stoke was the “jewel in the crown” of the party. It has nine councillors there. But the LMHR festival demonstrated that the majority of people in Stoke rejected the BNP's racism and that the city was multi-racial and proud of it. The success of the festival delivered a body blow to the fascists in the city and helped contribute to the failure of BNP deputy leader Simon Darby to take a seat in the West Midlands region.

The Stoke festival was just one example of how LMHR has become enormously successful this year. Everybody wants to work with the campaign and the scale of the gigs allows us to strike blows against the Nazis right at the centre of their so-called heartlands.

This year also saw LMHR take a group of artists to a major festival in Hungary to help launch a similar initiative in that country against the fascist Jobbik party and anti-Roma violence. We also saw the “Love Music Hate Racism” logo plastered on bus shelters and beer bottles up and down the

country as part of a promotion with Beck's beer and Hard-Fi. LMHR aims to build on this success next year with ambitious plans for two carnivals in the north and south of England.

Throughout the election campaign UAF worked closely with the trade union movement. We helped out with the PCS's Make Your Vote Count campaign. Teaching unions such as the NUT and NASUWT provided sponsorship for anti-BNP adverts in the local press and for a UAF ad van that toured the country. We also worked with the Muslim Council of Britain to produce anti-BNP leaflets aimed at the Muslim community.

On the night of the count UAF organised an anti-BNP demonstration at the count in Manchester, which for a short time prevented Griffin from entering the building. UAF also held a series of demonstrations in Manchester, Liverpool, Preston, Sheffield, Leeds and York in the week after the results were announced.

Most notably, UAF activists successfully disrupted Griffin's attempts to hold a victory press conference outside the Houses of Parliament on 9 June. The worldwide media coverage of Griffin getting "egged" completely undercut the triumphalist message the Nazis had hoped to put out that day. Griffin was also chased around Manchester by anti-fascists the next day, being eventually forced to hold his press conference in a pub owned by a BNP supporter.

UAF kept up the momentum in the months after the June elections. In July the campaign organised a conference in Manchester that attracted 400 people. In August UAF brought thousands of people to Codnor, Derbyshire, to successfully "kettle" and disrupt the BNP's "Red, White & Blue" fascist rally. The campaign has also mobilised against the EDL and its affiliates, holding successful counter-demonstrations in Birmingham, Harrow and Manchester.

Potential and pitfalls

The anti-EDL demonstrations highlight both the radicalising potential and possible pitfalls of anti-fascist activity. The huge and mostly self-organised mobilisation of Asian and black youth in Birmingham and Harrow show that young people are not just angry at racists and fascists – they are confident enough to take to the streets against them.

But there have been political problems associated with these protests. The first UAF counter-demo in Birmingham in August was followed by a storm in the media over the clashes between local youths and the EDL that followed the official demonstrations. There was a concerted effort to isolate UAF and paint anti-fascists, Muslim youths and EDL racists as "extremists" who were "equally to blame" for the violence that followed. Local papers carried police pictures of black and Muslim

youths as well as EDL thugs, painting them both as "troublemakers" rather than acknowledging that the EDL had set out to intimidate the Muslim community of Birmingham, not vice versa.

In the event this effort was headed off and other forces on the left in Birmingham – notably Salma Yaqoob – decided to concentrate their fire on the EDL while launching a "positive" anti-racist initiative dubbed Birmingham Unites that UAF agreed to back, while Salma lobbied for the authorities to ban the planned September EDL demo. However, what happened was that the council and police refused to ban the EDL and instead pulled the plug on the planned anti-racist Birmingham Unites initiative.

The local UAF leadership decided against holding any kind of counter-demo, leaving the SWP and other anti-fascists to protest against the EDL alone on the September date. The EDL were considerably more aggressive on this date, attacking counter-demonstrators, openly making "Sieg heil" salutes and trashing their coaches on the way home.

In Harrow, where the EDL and a group called "Stop Islamisation Of Europe" (SIOE) decided to protest outside the local mosque on Friday 11 September, UAF activists started from a position where the local political establishment was hostile to any idea of a counter-demonstration. Local UAF activists set to work leafleting and petitioning the community, as well as drafting a statement that condemned the EDL as racist and called for solidarity with Muslims but stopped short of calling for a counter-demo.

This meant that by the day of the demo much of the local political establishment had been won round to the idea of counter-demonstration. The local Labour MP, Tony McNulty, spoke at the street rally outside the mosque and gave a sharp left wing speech drawing parallels between those who marched on mosques today and those who marched on synagogues in the 1930s. While there was a media outcry at images of young Muslims attacking the police, these were tempered and muted by overwhelmingly negative press coverage against the EDL and SIOE.

Each individual local mobilisation against the EDL will have its own dynamic and its own difficulties. But certain lessons can be drawn. It is necessary for anti-fascists to be both "soft" and "hard" simultaneously – reaching out to elements of mainstream opinion that are nervous at the prospect of counter-demonstrations, while insisting on the right to mobilise independently even if the political cover does not transpire.

Failure to do the former leaves anti-fascists isolated and black youths in particular exposed to crackdowns from a racist police and political establishment. Failure to do the latter means "unity" is gained at the expense of any effective action. It leaves the anti-fascists movement weakened and

damages its credibility in the eyes of young black and Asian people.

The Manchester demonstration against the EDL on 10 October saw a great response from anti-fascists with some 3,000 mobilising. But the EDL were also able to attract much larger numbers than previously, bringing around 500 people to their protest. The far right is making a conscious and deliberate attempt to recruit a street army from the football terraces and draw young people into a fascist lifestyle. To cut it off we have to go into the terraces too. This means UAF and LMHR working with football fanzines, clubs, supporters' associations and campaigns such as Show Racism The Red Card and Kick It Out.

No platform

The arguments around confronting the EDL on the streets have been paralleled by arguments around the "no platform" policy against the BNP. The BNP gaining two MEP seats has led to a concerted effort by the liberal establishment – and by the BBC's senior management in particular – to break the "cordon sanitaire" that once surrounded the Nazis and to treat them as a legitimate and democratic political party.

This has led to hard ideological arguments both in the media and within the anti-fascist movement that pits a liberal idealist common sense that favours debating the Nazis against a socialist and materialist tradition that backs "no platform" and confrontation rather than debate.

The arguments around "no platform" have always been hard to win and the implementation of the policy has always involved making difficult tactical calls. But the underlying principle – that Nazis should be forcibly excluded from wider civil society – is one that revolutionary socialists adhere to.

Regardless of the positions our allies in UAF may take, SWP members will be sticking to our "no platform" position – and in practice leading SWP members have been defending this position physically when confronting Nazis on the streets. Our task is to work out how to win wider layers of anti-fascist activity and sentiment to this position without cutting ourselves off from them and needlessly denying ourselves opportunities to push a radical anti-fascist message.

And numbers are the key to winning this argument. When "no platform" has caught on in the past it has been because it has been carried through by a mass movement. The experience of mass movements is far more important than subtle ideological arguments in persuading people that "no platform" is the right stance to take. This is one instance of a wider truth – that mass movements are the key to defeating fascism, not small squads of committed individuals no matter how brave and uncompromising they are.

There are other contingent factors that

currently make the arguments about “no platform” difficult. One is that low levels of confidence in the movement’s collective abilities to stop the Nazis lead people into wishful thinking about the BNP “exposing themselves”, or to cook up other justifications for granting them a platform. A second is that the direct experience of Nazi organisations whipping up and organising racist violence on the ground has to a certain extent receded.

And third, wide layers of society – especially the middle class – profess to abhor the BNP but in fact sympathise with the fascists on questions such as immigration and Muslims.

They see attempts to deny the BNP a platform or disrupt press conferences as exactly what they are – actions that delegitimise the BNP and delegitimise its racist views. That is why they rush to defend the BNP on “free speech” grounds.

Nevertheless, the complexities around the “no platform” arguments are often simplified when given a concrete example to mobilise around. For instance, the Bectu union opposes the BBC decision to invite Griffin onto Question Time and backs the planned demonstration against Griffin – despite the fact that it does not accept “no platform” more generally.

This shows how anti-fascists who argue for “no platform” and those with a weaker position can nevertheless unite to build the kind of direct action that is likely to increase people’s confidence in harder anti-fascism.

Key tasks

Fighting to prevent the creeping legitimisation of the BNP – as exemplified by the Question Time demo – will certainly be one of the key tasks for anti-fascists in the months ahead. But there will be others too. We need to build a “good sense” against Islamophobia and anti-immigrant racism among wide layers of society to counter the bile pouring out of the right wing press and increasingly belligerent politicians.

We need to build UAF deep into the working class movement, both in terms of labour organised in trade unions and the wider class at large. We need to offer a pole of attraction to young people radicalising over the question of opposing fascism, while maintaining the institutional links to trade unions and reformist campaigners that are necessary to both protect anti-fascist activists and spread the anti-fascist message.

Overall we need to combine ideological, political and industrial struggles against fascism, tapping into and cultivating the nascent “Spirit of 77” so many tasted outside Harrow mosque this September. These actions are not purely defensive – they can play a crucial role in encouraging a revival in class confidence and thereby building a more radical left wing challenge to the system, at the ballot box and beyond.

This year it has become increasingly clear that some on the left are adamantly opposed to any of this happening. Certain sections of the union bureaucracy are so wedded to Labour that they are unwilling to cooperate with any anti-fascist election campaign that is not closely tied to boosting the Labour vote, and are positively hostile to anything that smacks of popular mobilisation against the BNP.

In particular, Searchlight magazine’s Hope Not Hate (HNH) campaign has become a magnet for those looking for a “safer” alternative to UAF that restricts itself to electoral work and passive internet-based lobbying campaigns while steering away from mass demonstrations that could involve confrontation with the fascists or flash points with the police.

UAF’s insistence on calling on people to “use their vote against the Nazi BNP” is also a sticking point for some Labour Party officials, who would like to see a more explicit call for a Labour vote. But this would be a disastrous strategy. It would split the unity of the anti-fascist movement by repelling anyone who was not a Labour supporter – such as Green voters, socialists and anarchists – and so reduce the base of activists to a pro-Labour rump.

More dangerously, the BNP has been in part able to grow because of New Labour’s failure to address the problems of the working class. There is, rightly, a great deal of anger against New Labour among working class people – and therefore it weakens the movement to simply argue for a Labour vote to stop the BNP.

These strategy differences express themselves in terms of unions backing the UAF campaign. Unison and Unite – the two big Labour-supporting unions – have been reluctant to fund UAF and prefer to put their resources into HNH and pro-Labour campaigns. The smaller unions that are either unaffiliated to Labour or involved in bitter struggles against the government – such as the CWU and PCS – have in contrast been more willing to back the united front approach.

All of these difficulties underline the urgent need to build UAF as a mass membership organisation with grassroots activists and local union branches affiliated to the campaign. Building from below in this fashion achieves two things. It gives us workplace roots in localities where we are campaigning – such the close involvement of Harrow bus garage in the Harrow mosque protest. It also increases the pressure from below on union bureaucrats to work with UAF rather than opting for less demanding and less effective alternatives.

We also need to put on regular UAF rallies and LMHR gigs across the country to build the anti-fascist movement. Next year we aim to run two carnivals in the north and south of England in the run-up to the general election. We know the BNP will be targeting Westminster seats in Stoke-on-Trent, Barking and Dagenham, as well as

running serious campaigns in around 50 other locations where they polled strongly this year.

The final crucial element of our anti-fascist strategy is to build militancy in the working class. It is impossible to underestimate the impact a rise in working class struggle can have on wider questions of racism and fascism.

The Front National in France suffered heavy setbacks in the mid-1990s as the workers’ movement rose up in opposition to the Juppé neoliberal attacks. Conversely, the defeat of postal workers in 1974 in Britain laid the soil for a concerted effort by the National Front to infiltrate the service. This memory is one reason why today the CWU – a union going into crucial industrial battle as we write – is one of UAF’s strongest supporters.

And working class militancy is not just vital in building the anti-racist and anti-fascist movement in the here and now. Fascism and racism are both ultimately defensive moves by the ruling class to protect the capitalist system from the workers movement. To eradicate their threat we have to eradicate capitalism. That means going on the offensive against the ruling class and building tight links between the anti-fascist movement and workers going into struggle.

All this will take place at a time when anger at New Labour is at a high and despair caused by the recession is beginning to run rampant. As unemployment rises, so will the levels of racism and scapegoating in the media. The ruling class will encourage racism to help weaken the workers’ movement and head off any popular resistance to its programme of cuts.

These factors will all help sustain the BNP and EDL. The Nazis are not going away in a hurry – and it is our task to build a broad, deep anti-fascist movement that can fight back against them – while also offering hope to working people by helping build a genuine radical left alternative to the discredited mainstream parties.

Central Committee

SOCIALIST WORKER – THE PAPER WE NEED NOW

‘This document on Socialist Worker was produced by John Rose and Mike Simons and formed the basis of a very positive National Committee meeting in September on the type of publication we need to take full advantage of the changing political situation.

It is intended as “work in progress” and we are submitting it to IB 1 in the hope that it will kick start a discussion about the paper we need and how branches, individual comrades and the wider readers relate to it. SWP members should discuss this document and those that follow to ensure conference delegates are in the strongest possible position to vote on final proposals for the paper.’

Some ideas to start discussion

Socialist Worker needs to change to meet the needs of the party and the working class.

Martin Smith summed up the current political position succinctly in his perspectives piece “A test for the Left” in Socialist Worker (5 September 2009). After describing the modest, but significant increase in industrial militancy, he wrote:

“At the centre of this revival in working class struggle is the bitterness and anger caused by the economic crisis.

“But a number of political factors are also interacting with each other, which in turn feeds the willingness to fight. The MPs’ expenses scandal, the war in Afghanistan and the new round of bankers’ bonuses are all fuelling bitterness and raising questions about the priorities of the system and the legitimacy of the government.”

However the sheer scale of the multiple crises, economic, climate change, Afghanistan/Iraq/ Palestine/Libya etc combined with broader failure of the Left makes this arguably the most difficult period ever for Socialist Worker.

Of course it remains easily the best paper on the left, but it needs to make changes in form, content and its relationship with its readers to relate to this new situation and influence it.

This situation is not new in Socialist Worker’s 40 year history. Different periods have always required different types of publication, but sometimes a more fundamental change is needed.

If Socialist Worker was autonomous from the party, we would expect the editorial team alone to make the changes, but it is not. Socialist Worker is the primary party publication and it is both wrong and unfair

to expect the editorial board alone to make the changes.

The paper is at its best when the party understands the political period and what is to be done. Then the collective impact of the paper is far greater than the individual weight of each article.

The paper is at its weakest at turning points in the class struggle, when the party is not clear about its perspectives. At these times, a series of brilliant articles, and there are many in SW, do not always add up to a coherent whole. Instead of punching above our weight, we struggle to punch our weight.

Different periods require different papers. In the late 1960s Socialist Worker marked itself out from other far left publications by its focus on the organised working class.

The paper produced to relate to workers in the downturn of the early 1980s was very different to that produced a decade earlier at the height of class struggle. The paper produced to relate to the new movements from the Millennium onwards, was different from the paper produced in the downturn, and the paper we need now is different again.

To get these changes right we need to be clear about:

- 1) **Our target audience**
- 2) **The purpose of what we write**
- 3) **The style of the paper needed to relate to that target audience**
- 4) **The relationship that is necessary between the editorial team, wider party and readership to deliver the necessary publication.**

Target audience

1) The paper must be much more focused on the working class, rather than being a reflection of the social movements. It needs to relate to workers in struggle, occupying Visteon, for example, their experience, hopes, fears and level of consciousness. But also to workers who are not in struggles, the vast majority, unfortunately, at least at the moment, but who are frustrated and angry at everything they see around them.

Of course we continue to intervene and build the social movements, Climate Change, Stop War etc Indeed we want to be at the forefront of them. But SW needs to be particularly sensitive to how they are perceived by workers. SW wants to help build the working class composition of these movements.

Purpose

2) The purpose of what we write is to ‘patiently explain’ as Lenin once wrote in a different context but also to answer his question, ‘What is to be done’.

At its most basic level it is about how to fight and win, it is about stoking up class

anger and try to organise it, it is about putting a revolutionary line against the key ruling class arguments of the day as they are expressed in the mass media. Debates on the left need to be addressed in terms of what they mean to workers on the ground.

Last, but not least, the purpose is to turn working class militants into revolutionary Marxists.

Style

3) The style of the paper needs to change. Articles need to be written from the perspective of its core audience. They need to be shorter and written more simply. The paper should provide its audience with bullets they can fire in the class struggle – a pithy fact, the short, sharp, funny expose of the madness of the system, a convincing two-minute argument, as well as the longer more nuanced or theoretical pieces.

This sort of approach is just as important to the longer-standing members of the party as it is to the new, first time reader. For the first time reader, they make the paper accessible and relevant.

For the established comrades they show the sorts of arguments to deploy to the new audience. Inevitably, changes in Socialist Worker mean some articles and arguments it currently carries need to move to the Review or the SW website.

Relationship

4) We need a campaign to bring the paper closer to the party members and readers. This means renewed, systematic efforts by the editorial board to tap the knowledge of the party membership and their contacts.

It means a campaign to get members everywhere to send in reports of local campaigns, scandals, local debates etc. It requires a consistent set of priorities on the editorial board to bring in new voices, a constant campaign by the wider party leadership to make it happen and an acceptance by the local leadership that it is their responsibility to ensure their activities and the issues in their area are reflected in the party publications.

Put bluntly, the editorial team need to spend more time talking to members and to workers on the party’s periphery. We need a strategy, particularly an online strategy, that makes it easy for party branches to convey what is going on. Some of this is a question of resources. If we know what we need to do, the resources will be found.

Much of what has been outlined above may seem to be stating the obvious, but putting these ideas into practice is not easy. Fortunately we have a great history and a great deal of experience to draw on, and the rest of this contribution tries to do just that.

We can learn from Paul Foot's page at the Daily Mirror

In the 1980s Paul Foot was given contract-protected editorial control over one page every week in the Daily Mirror. Mirror boss Robert Maxwell may have hated it but he knew Paul's socialist journalism helped sell the Mirror to working class people: hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of workers read Paul's page. The page exposed the big ways and the little ways capitalism, daily, exploited and abused ordinary people and the wider society.

Now Paul would have been the first to say that many of his successful skills were tested & developed at Socialist Worker. What were those skills?

1. Listening very carefully to what workers said. He spent a huge amount of time, listening, questioning, asking for clarification about the experiences workers reported to him. He would spend nearly as much time writing very carefully what he had heard, quoting directly where possible.

The written English was simple, clear and concise, the grammar obeyed standard rules: care was taken here even within flexible journalistic licence. Accuracy was essential. Trust was the key to Paul's approach. Every contact knew that he or she could read the article, and make changes if necessary, before it went to print.

2. Paul knew that workers had extraordinary insights into the system but often didn't know how to, or were not sufficiently confident to, express them. Here the skill was to 'tease out' the story, if necessary getting the person or someone h/she trusted to research the background detail.

3. Very often this approach provided Paul's page with highly original stories, real journalistic 'scoops'. Not necessarily huge stories, but short sharp exposures of capitalist corruption, greed, waste, inefficiency, incompetence & injustices against ordinary people. And the built-in implication: if ordinary people were in control none of this would happen.

4. This often exposed a funny, absurd side. A sense of fun & good jokes were often to be found on the page.

5. Sometimes the page would be cleared for a major scoop. Sometimes Maxwell was forced to give him more space, even the Mirror's front page. The origins may still have been with a chance remark Paul picked up from a casual conversation with one of his many working class contacts, but over the years Paul had learned something else about capitalism and socialist journalism.

6. There are many individuals in all social classes, sometimes even at the top, who become appalled by what they see and hear. Often they carried mind boggling information in their heads and want to use it to expose all kinds of abuses they have witnessed. Locating these individuals, though Paul & his page's reputation meant they

often contacted him, was itself a skill he developed over time.

7. Finally, of course, sometimes the search for the story depended on just knowing what to read. But that sometimes meant surprising sources, the Daily Telegraph, Hansard, the day-by-day of parliamentary debates: these days of course the internet.

8. Very finally, very often, Paul picked up his stories from SWP branches.

Applying this to SW

What can today's SW learn from this? First, here is the 'target audience' for SW. Of course we cannot hope to match the Mirror's circulation but nevertheless it is obvious that not enough workers are reading our paper at a time when there is so much anger at the system & a real thirst for ideas, arguments, information on how to fight and alternative ways of running society in the interests of ordinary people.

We can learn from Socialist Worker in the early 1970s

We also need to add four more points which didn't fit with Paul's page but which he and Chris Harman and others pioneered in the SW of the early 1970s. This was SW at its most successful. Of course the main reason was this was the height of the industrial and political struggle against the Tories in the aftermath of 1968.

But the composition of the editorial team is worth noting. Two brilliant, highly trained investigative journalists, Paul Foot and Laurie Flynn, one of '68's most outstanding revolutionary intellectuals and activists, Chris Harman, and a journalists' and back-up support team, sub editors, page designers etc led by SW Editor, Roger Protz, who insisted on the importance of journalists' copy meeting professional standards.

At the same time, all journalists were in almost permanent contact with how the growing branches were relating to the struggles.

Dozens of others passed through SW's offices, unemployed workers, students on holidays. Unfortunately also there were some rather dubious triumphs. SW was partly responsible for the journalistic training of two of today's infamous and grotesque media 'celebrities': the former Trotskyite brothers Hitchens!

The 4 points are

1. The thorough reporting of strikes, struggles, campaigns against employers, governments with clear guidelines on how to win.

Some criticisms of SW are implied below. But it should be stated here that SW has very thoroughly implemented this point in response to recent struggles like the factory occupations at Visteon and Vestas as well as other TU struggles. Getting this right is central to our political strategy. Fail here and everything else will fail.

2. Topicality: knowing the big news stories of the week which workers will be

talking about & how to respond to them ideologically & journalistically both on the front page & inside the paper

3. The need to introduce the ideas of Marx and the SWP theoretical tradition which provide the paper's orientation and in different ways inform all of the articles in it.

4. Workers arguments and arguments with workers should be in the paper

The 4 points complete a standard of measurement. But there is one more now in the 21st century.

5. How to integrate the internet & the SW website in particular.

An example of the problem we face

In Hackney SWP there are 4 bus SW sales. They've been going on for many months with highly experienced sellers. Yet not a single regular reader of SW has been secured. Two reasons are given but there is shyness about the third.

The two reasons are the collapse of the struggle over pay & conditions and the negative bitterness this is felt about the union leaders and sometimes the union itself. Also a complex shift system means that the SW sellers often don't see bus workers they have got to know on a regular basis and who have sometimes bought the paper.

But a third reason has to be the paper isn't quite clicking with that minority, admittedly still small, but that is ready to engage with the paper that SW must aspire to become.

We know this because in one or two bus garages elsewhere in London the breakthrough to this group has been achieved. Eg. A former African communist activist was identified on the sale and he was persuaded to sell SW inside the bus garage. Nevertheless he, also, reports difficulties selling the paper. He says it is too dry. Too many long articles, not enough short ones, too often not relevant, no jokes, not relating to workers properly. Look back at our measuring stick, it is easy to see why the paper is failing.

There is another point here. How many of you reading this document have carried out a similar exercise in your own branch or workplace? How many of you know what readers think of the paper, especially workers not familiar with the culture on the Left? We need to build mechanisms in the branches to obtain regular feedback.

This discussion points to:

The need for a comprehensive plan to improve the SW

Here are some proposals but there are more & you should add to them.

a. Immediate introduction of a page

that was once called 'Inside the System' – very short stories 1 or 2 paragraphs exposing greed, incompetence etc, + jokes, cartoons, + very brief quotations from socialists and/or radical writers, artists .

b. Search for original stories 'scoops' great or small. SW may have missed one at Vestas when a Vestas worker reported to a meeting that New Labour had offered to buy Vestas & the company refused. Maybe this was just a rumour but it required meticulous following up. SW has had great scoops in the past. See for example Arthur Scargill's rare compliments for the paper during the miners strike.

c. More attention to the big stories of the day that matter to ordinary people. SW has not properly covered the crisis over Obama's US health care reforms. Obama still represents hope in a terrifying world for millions of people, we must take him very seriously. Again, SW needs to be clear about the politics when it does cover the big stories. Eg SW Sept 5th had an excellent piece about the proposal by a top finance government official supporting the Tobin Tax which has split the ruling class, only then to deny that the Left should support it – despite Alex Callinicos's Anti Capitalist Manifesto making it very clear that the Left must do so.

d. Workers arguments and arguments with workers should be in the paper. The SWP stood almost alone in its principled opposition to the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers'. This argument continues to linger. A page could have been cleared for workers to have the argument where all sides are put, either through interviews or tape recording & then transcribing a 'live' argument but with a brief SW editorial if necessary on the same page.

e. Using the SW web site: this technology gives us an unprecedented opportunity to experiment with many of the ideas above without always having to commit the 16 page weekly SW where the competition for space can be crippling.

A website editor attached to the editorial team should encourage SWP branches to send in stories (and video?), many of which can appear on the website but which couldn't get into the paper. This could be a great training ground to develop socialist writers in the localities for SW, and the best of the stories should go into the paper.

Over the next few months we need to develop a comprehensive plan that can be put to the new year SWP conference. At the height of SW sales in the dim distant past there was an SW slogan

Turn buyers into sellers and readers into writers. We can't raise that now but we should aim to in 6 months time: with agreed targets for branches to increase their sales.

John and Mike (Hackney)

HOLDING THE LINE ON NO PLATFORM

A discussion has been taking place in the party about our stance on No Platform for the BNP. While our commitment to denying the fascists a platform is not in doubt, there have been calls from comrades centrally involved in Unite Against Fascism to scrap our opposition to debating with the BNP leadership in the media. We believe this would be a serious error of judgement, for the following reasons:

1. The No Platform battle is not over

The reaction to the election of two BNP members to the European Parliament has revealed political divisions within the Labour and Trade Union movement. Some leading social democrats, like Jack Straw, have no qualms about debating Nazis, while others, like Alan Johnson, have stated that on principle he will never share a platform with Nazis.

The election has also exposed the gulf in attitude between the complacency of those in the media who rush to invite Griffin into their studios, and the fury of anti-racists who want to drive them out of the media and off our streets – Birmingham, Harrow, Codnor.

These mobilisations are worth more than a million words aimed at Griffin across a TV studio. Will debating Griffin help build the protests? No. Instead, it will undermine the argument for No Platform: 'Why shouldn't our student union host a debate with the BNP – Martin Smith/Weyman Bennett appears on TV with them?'

2. We need to hold our nerve

The fight to limit the BNP's access to the public arena is not a one-way process: Griffin has not won permanent and irreversible access to the mainstream media with his invitation to Question Time.

The decision can be reversed if a sustained campaign makes the BBC's position untenable. In other words, the BNP's quest for legitimacy does not end with Question Time. The party needs to satisfy its hard core while pursuing respectability. This will lead to confrontations on the street, as we have seen with the English Defence League, along with racist and anti-Semitic outbursts that will give renewed vigour to calls for it to be denied a platform.

Although at times it may appear that the BNP has crossed a threshold and achieved respectability, this will remain fragile and vulnerable for the foreseeable future. There may come a time when the BNP has

achieved a level of legitimacy comparable to the French or Italian fascists. We would then have to re-evaluate our stance in the light of a different balance of forces.

This is not the position of the BNP today – they are fighting for legitimacy and we should be the most radical and militant champions of No Platform – the most important weapon in our armoury today. Any concessions to their status made now will only contribute to legitimising their presence in the public arena.

3. We are not 'No Platforming ourselves' by refusing to appear with Griffin

This clumsy formulation has been used several times by those advocating debating the fascists. We need to be clear about what kind of platform we're talking about.

There is no comparison with the position Gramsci found himself in under Mussolini in the 1920s and the political landscape of Britain in 2009. The working class is not defeated and our comrades are not being assassinated by fascist hit-squads.

We are not in a position, nationally, to be invited onto the media to discuss our take on revolutionary socialism. Locally, though, we do have significant positions that may involve tactical decisions about whether to appear on platforms with the BNP when they also have prominent roles, as councillors, in tenants' associations etc.

To refuse in such circumstances might amount to sacrificing a key role in a campaign for the sake of holding a line on the BNP that could be detrimental to the wider campaign. At present, however, the only way we are likely to appear on Question Time is on the back of Griffin's ticket.

If we appear, we will give legitimacy to that ticket and the campaign in question – to contest BNP respectability – will be undermined. It is a self-defeating exercise, which is why there is not a single example, in the entire sorry history of the resurgence of fascism in post-war Europe, of any fascist party's progress being held in check by a TV debate.

4. We should have no illusions about our ability to 'expose' or 'smash' the BNP in the media

Some comrades argue that debating with the fascists is now a tactical necessity, and that we can make a virtue of it. Better, they claim, that we be the people to debate the BNP than the reformists and liberals. This is simply naïve.

The BNP's status will be enhanced by the mere fact of its appearance on shows like Question Time. Who wins the clapometer contest once the show is underway is just a secondary consideration. No

matter how many plaudits we might gain by defeating Griffin in arguments over the question of rights for whites or Holocaust denial or drowning refugees, the simple fact that we have been reduced to debating the BNP's agenda with it will mean that we have been defeated by the exercise.

Social democrats place enormous faith in ego and rhetoric. Yet we know that BNP support contains a strong irrational element. This means that argument is a less effective weapon against fascism than force, no matter how talented and persuasive the orator.

5. We need to resist defeatism

Electoral politics, as we have learnt to our cost, can distort reality. Comrades are coming under pressure from the social democrats we work with in UAF, whose understanding of the BNP's strategy is distorted by the prism of electoral politics.

Their calls to backtrack on the question of debating with the fascists are a panicked response to the Euro election result. We may lose the argument on the UAF Steering Committee, but its stance is not shared by the majority of UAF activists.

Our own position on No Platform is based on our distinctive analysis of what fascism is and how to fight it. This gives us a cutting edge within the anti-fascist movement. We now acknowledge that failing to assert our independence proved a major handicap during the Respect experience.

Comrades have worked hard, and successfully, to hold UAF together and play an independent role within it. This is no time to start importing the shortcomings of Respect into UAF.

6. Engage with the debate inside the movement: campaign for the No Platform position

The No Platform position is perceived by many to be undemocratic and cowardly – 'Surely we can defeat the BNP in rational debate?' We can't, because - by their very nature - the Nazis are deceptive liars, distorting and exploiting the real issues of racism and immigration for opportunistic gain.

To win the No Platform position demands patient political explanation. It needs to be campaigned for over time, involving propaganda, meetings, cultural events and organisation. For example, Media Workers against the Nazis or Pull the Plug on the Fascists, with the production of petitions, leaflets, bulletins, stickers and badges.

And – most importantly – producing concrete action involving people on the ground: pickets, protests, cultural events, demonstrations and meetings. It is only by organising and campaigning that we can

work with those around us in our workplaces, colleges and estates.

Our aim is to build mass opposition to the Nazis – failing to hold the line on No Platform would hinder our ability to do this, with comrades lending the Nazis democratic legitimacy by engaging with them in public debate.

Dean (Waltham Forest)
Paul (South London)
Julie (Hackney)
Jim (Central London)

A CHANGE IN STRATEGY FROM THE NAZIS MEANS WE NEED A CHANGE IN OUR ANTI-NAZI STRATEGY

The first point I want to make is that the party has a long history of having the correct strategy to deal with the Nazis. In the 70s against the NF, and in the 90s against the BNP, our work through the ANL was critical in driving them off the streets. Arguably, the ANL remains our greatest success.

During the last few years, we've been involved in a slightly different strategy inside of UAF, that while it has focused on marginalising the BNP vote and support, has mirrored the Euro-fascist strategy of the BNP by concentrating mostly on elections, whilst also occasionally pulling off public demonstrations (Leeds, Stoke, Codnor amongst others) and working alongside LMHR.

There are a lot of strengths to the UAF approach and the party's role within it. Nearly every major union in the country has affiliated, and many have given financial support. It has a fluffy enough image that huge numbers of politicians and public figures have signed the UAF statement; undoubtedly this helps to marginalise the BNP in mainstream politics. And as stated, it has been involved in big mobilisations of anti-fascists. All of this fits with the strategy we have fought for inside the organisation. But some recent events have led me to question whether this is enough.

Over the past few months, a ragtag bunch of Nazis and football hooligans, calling themselves the English Defence League, have attempted to march in a number of towns and cities. This is the first time for a long time we've seen Nazis trying to march regularly in city centres. The first time they did this in Luton, they went on the rampage, attacking passers-by

and Asian businesses. On every occasion since then, the party has pushed for and organised counter-demonstrations, very successfully in the case of Birmingham and Harrow. However, this has not always been with the support of UAF.

Specifically in the cases of the second EDL march in Birmingham, and their attempt to attack the Al-Quds demo in Central London, UAF has not agreed to call counter-demonstrations. On both occasions, the SWP has had to step in and call the counter-demos ourselves. In Birmingham we got away with this – the Nazis were chased off the streets and were escorted out of town on buses (and were later fined for smashing up said buses). In Central London, the call for the counter-demo went out less than a day beforehand, and we mobilised just 30 people. As one of the 30, I spent a good couple of hours thoroughly expecting to get my head kicked in – the Nazis slightly outnumbered us, and doubtless would be handier in a fight than most of us – not good odds. In the end, we got away without a punch being thrown, we helped defend the demo, but there was no way the Nazis could be directly confronted. On another day, we could have been in big trouble.

What went wrong then? Firstly, having waited so long for UAF to come on board, the call for the demo went out very late. Building a demo in that time-frame and with minimal information is much harder. Secondly, very few comrades turned out. Even with the short notice and the national committee meeting at the same time, more comrades should have got out of bed on a Sunday morning and travelled into town. This is not moralism, it is basic good sense – 30 comrades by themselves in a place where Nazis are expected to turn up is our members being put at risk. If the call goes out to go into town and deal with the Nazis, that is what we need to do. But thirdly, a demo called by the party will inevitably be smaller than one called through an established united front – precisely why we don't usually do this.

Now, assuming that in the short-term UAF will not always call counter-demos, we have 3 options, each of which should be considered for each time this comes up, as I'm not advocating Nazi-chasing for the sake of it. The first is not to mobilise. The second is to call demos as the SWP. The third will doubtless prove more controversial...

We need our lollipops back

That is to say, I think we need to be able to call demonstrations and actions through the Anti-Nazi League. There is still a significant level of brand recognition, for want of a better term, associated with the ANL. It still carries a level of political clout, and there's a lot of people still around who've been involved with it in the past. This means potentially much larger

mobilisations than we can pull off under the banner of the SWP. And if the Nazis are taking to the streets, we need a force that can kick them off the streets.

I'm aware that this is not without its problems. I fully expect Socialist Action to attempt to carve us out of UAF at the simplest suggestion of this. However, we should fight against this, and point out that Socialist Action still keeps its own front, NAAR, active and organising independently, as well as within, UAF.

The best way to do this is to remain the best activists in building UAF, as well as pushing to rebuild the ANL as an independent faction within it.

I don't think we should throw the baby out with the bath water – we still need UAF, but we also need something harder and sharper. And there is the space to do this; there's a lot of people out there itching to have a go at the Nazis if given the chance – it's our role to give organisational and political shape to this.

I would add to this that I think UAF is our most important united front at present. Our anti-fascist work has bubbled away quietly for the last few years; now it is the time to put it at the centre of our activity. Nazis, confident through electoral success and a massive increase in racist rhetoric in mainstream politics and the media, have started to take to the streets. Racist attacks have increased sharply since the election of the two Nazi MEPs. And our comrades are getting threatened and attacked.

Our response to this should be to build, and build fast. It needs to be to build a movement that can confront the Nazis physically, that can stop them organising. And I think the best way to do this is the same way the ANL was built. It would not be that difficult in the current context to build industrial anti-fascist groups – civil servants against the Nazis, postal workers against the Nazis etc. We even have the badges made up already!

In my experience, when I put out a circular to my union branch on anti-fascism, it gets as good a response as when I put out an industrial relations bulletin – interestingly it's also other union members who respond to it (notwithstanding the fact I've been threatened with disciplinary action over it). So not only can this give us a stronger and more militant base against the Nazis, it also helps us to build politically at work. It should also be our main strategy when it comes to elections at present.

The open letter was a positive move, but any political realignment will need to come out of real political and industrial struggle. In the meantime, while it would doubtless be better if Caroline Lucas and George Galloway are elected next year than not, our main job at the general election needs to be stopping the Nazis.

There is a further consideration in all of this – other anti-fascist forces. Searchlight (an organisation that panders to racism amongst other crimes) does receive the bulk of union funding on anti-fascism. In Codnor,

UAF was counter-posed by 'Notts Stop the BNP', an organisation led by the SP and the AWL. While UAF correctly focuses on the question of the BNP being Nazis, and that the racism they feed off is generated by the mainstream parties and the media, this organisation ignores the racism of BNP voters, adopting the slogan 'jobs and homes not racism'. For all the relevance this has, it might as well be 'fish and chips not racism'; the point being that your average BNP voter would be perfectly happy with 'jobs and homes AND racism. We can add to this the assorted squaddist groups such as Antifa – a political dead end, as history has shown us.

This means there is a political fight going on inside of this. And to win this argument, we do have to be the best and most committed activists, both in terms of winning people to our strategy, and the more practical point that we need to be able to secure more funds for UAF, LMHR, and potentially the ANL. We do need the radical wing of the movement that the ANL has been, and can be, if we are to break people from squaddism. And that's why anti-fascism needs to be a major focus of our activity.

Andy (South London)

SCALE OF MOBILISATION

Times right now are nothing if not unpredictable, there are difficult questions for us in terms of strategy and no easy answers to them. One feature of this period is that there have been some genuinely exciting examples of working class resistance – but no one struggle that has been the kind of political detonator that the anti-CPE movement was in France or that the welfare cuts have been in Ireland. At the same time there are big threats – none more obvious than the BNP's recent advances.

Our strategy and tactics have to reflect the complexity of what's going on. During the summer for instance, I was not alone in finding that the scale of mobilisation for the Vestas struggle came to be a problem in building for the anti-fascist demonstration in Codnor.

The Codnor demo, we should not forget, had been planned well in advance and was declared at Marxism as being a key priority for responding the BNP's electoral gains. Of course, none of us knew at that time that the only wind turbine factory in Britain would be the scene of an occupation that would make headlines across the world. It was a struggle that did a lot to spread the idea of occupations and unofficial action, but it was still a single occupation with very limited scope to spread to other sites.

Comrades were pushed hard to get down to Vestas as much as possible and the party organisers and centre put a lot of work into it. This was so much so that building for Codnor got pushed aside: personnel for stalls, meetings, ring rounds and fund-raising just weren't available week after week (to say nothing of the loss of Socialist Worker sale routines). The focus became disproportionate, certainly in London, as almost all other activity slid to a stop. Things became really confused in the week running up to the Codnor demo as a "national day of action" was called a day or so before – at point in when the occupation per se was over and that very little genuine action happened on.

Codnor was big success in the event – causing humiliation to the BNP and bringing significant forces closer to our vision of anti-fascism – but we should not forget the major boost that we received from the triumphant efforts of comrades in the Birmingham protest the week before.

Without this sudden advantage, we might not have had the same scale of mobilisation. The day could have been much harder and Unite Against Fascism could have suffered a severe blow to its credibility if a demonstration that it had been describing as a national priority had failed.

The desire for there to be a breakthrough in class struggle in Britain should not lead us to prioritise any one campaign over absolutely everything else. We used to say, when we embarked on the Respect project, that we needed both a sword and a shield.

I think that that's still true and we should not risk losing either element. For the time being, we do not have a single, simple way forward and limited resources – making planning critical. Sometimes it is right to focus a bit more on united front work, sometimes it's important to focus on the industrial, but dropping one or the other will be a mistake.

Vestas did do a huge amount to promote militant resistance to the recession and I wouldn't ever say we weren't right to get involved. One of the important things that it made clear is that socialists made a big difference to the confidence and organisation of the workforce by engaging with them before the action began – the Vestas workers themselves have all confirmed that meeting activists and reading their leaflets was crucial to them carrying out the occupation. I am all for trying reproduce this where we can: thinking tactically about workplaces where we could make difference to the debates among the workers. I would be interested to know what the plan is, for example, around Vauxhall motors. What sort of impact might getting Visteon workers, Vestas workers and – now, of course – Tower Hamlets lecturers to talk to Vauxhall workers facing the sack? We won't always be successful, but well judged interventions could take us forward.

Kieran (Central London)

BUILDING A DCH CAMPAIGN FROM SCRATCH

I'm writing this to encourage all comrades to start a DCH group if their local council housing is under threat. Don't worry if you don't have a bloody clue where to start – neither did I.

I'm not a council tenant, and I knew very little about the issues involved. So when I heard in July 2008 that my council were going for a ballot the following spring to privatise their entire housing stock my first reaction was to try and find existing groups in the area that were campaigning against it.

I assumed there must be some. I knew that in the previous ballot in 2002 the Unison branch at the council had been the key force in winning a narrow majority against privatisation.

So I pursued them and any other likely candidate I could think of for several months, but got nowhere. Finally, with just four months to go, I realised that if I didn't start a campaign, there wouldn't be one.¹

The first leaflet I produced went into a public meeting on housing organised by the Battersea & Wandsworth trades council and the local Labour party. I thought this was an ideal opportunity for us. About twenty people came, including four comrades. But while several of those present paid lip service to DCH, they showed a perverse determination to ignore the privatisation going on under their noses – and focus instead on another little campaign that came to nothing. (The platform speaker from the Labour Party actually justified the privatisation, claiming it was the least worst option.)

In retrospect I think the meeting was

I There were three main approaches I had made - to trade unions at the council, to councillors, and to the readers of the local paper. Regarding the first, the trade union reps at the council, of GMB and Unison, simply didn't reply to my messages.

Later on I heard that the council had put a lot of effort into winning them over - promising them that working conditions wouldn't worsen with the transfer etc. I also heard that the Unison branch was moribund.

Regarding councillors, we were faced with a bit of a challenge as the proposed privatisation had cross-party backing. I believe every single councillor had voted for it. The last attempt to privatise the housing had come in 2002 when Labour was in charge. Now the Tories rule.

Rather than send out a blanket email to all councillors (which perhaps I should have done) I asked around to try and find out which councillor, if any, was in the slightest bit sympathetic to our cause. I came up with nothing. I was told all the decent ones had left.

As for the local paper, I took ages to write a carefully researched letter on the issue, appealing for people to get in touch. And it wasn't printed. Instead they had letters about dog shit, bus lanes and high-school reunions. I took this as a sign, wrongly, that the paper was backing transfer and intended to exclude dissenting voices.

a marriage of two things, neither of them favourable to us – Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate looking for a stick to beat the Tories with, and the BWTUC's tendency to favour PR stunts over grass roots campaigning.

Breaking through

The breakthrough came a fortnight later, when two contacts came out of an interview the local paper had done with Alan Walter. One, Sue, was the secretary of a local tenants association. The other was a housing activist. His name was also, it turned out, on the leaked membership list of the BNP.

I arranged with Sue to leaflet her estate, and she invited an ex-councillor along as well. (He was kicked out of the Labour Party group when he refused to vote through cuts to libraries).

It felt like we had the beginnings of a proper well-rooted DCH group. They were both enthusiastic, glad that someone was taking a lead, keen to leaflet other estates, and get a debate going in the local paper.

The two-page leaflets we put out had a lot of information on them, gleaned primarily from the DCH website and the local paper. The trade publication *Inside Housing* is also very useful for this purpose. We included a request for residents to contact us and get involved. This was our best method of recruitment to the campaign.

Several people said "I'm glad you're doing this, I thought I was the only one against it." They had been worn down by a torrent of council propaganda. For months the council had been telling everyone "there is no alternative" – if you don't vote for transfer your homes will be left to rot. These tenants had thought the vote was a foregone conclusion, and the council was happy to encourage this belief.

Local paper

At this point I decided to have another go at the letters page of the local paper. The interview with Alan Walter had provoked some defensive replies from the council, and Sue and I waded into the debate. This time they did print our letters.

The paper became the key forum for the debate over the stock transfer.

I know a lot of comrades aren't in the habit of reading the local papers, never mind writing letters to them. I only got into the habit when we were campaigning for Respect. But for DCH it is crucial. Your opponents think so too.

We had two key ways of reaching people – through leafleting estates and through the local paper. Those estates are scattered all over the borough, with more than 6,000 homes to reach. Despite our best efforts, we didn't get to every home. So for some the local paper was the only place they heard our arguments.

I was struck by some of the people I met

in the campaign who showed me files of information they'd gathered on the transfer – including letters to the paper we'd written months before. They knew the council was telling them lies, they weren't quite sure where the truth lay, and when they saw our material they seized upon it.

After a few weeks, it was clear the council was getting worried about us. They'd spent a fortune trying to ram through this privatisation after the previous failed attempt in 2002, and they didn't want to leave anything to chance. They took the threat from us more seriously than we did.

Although the council's head of housing replied to our arguments in the newspaper in measured terms, some of the council's stooges started smearing DCH in general, and me in particular. Their primary line of attack was: this lot are outsiders, they're not tenants, and they're ideologically driven. One letter even accused DCH of being the British section of the Fourth International!

Their panic reached its height during the ballot period itself when the council sent a letter to every tenant instructing them to ignore our leaflets – but neglected to name DCH unless the tenants googled us and made up their own minds.

We had a discussion in our little core group about strategy. Although national DCH were advising us to go for a public meeting, the feeling in the group was that the election was imminent and our time was better spent leafleting estates.

(I made a brief attempt to set up a meeting – asking the council's cabinet member for housing to debate with us, and asking the local paper to sponsor the debate. They both declined.)

Who got involved

The kind of people who get involved in DCH campaigns can come as a bit of a shock, and for someone like me who's main united front work has been with Stop the War, a bit disorientating.

Whereas in StW you often have a broad area of common politics with those around you (anti-imperialist, anti-racist, leftist) in DCH you are dealing with people from a broader range of political backgrounds, and the common ground can be much narrower.

You can find yourself in a group besides working class Tories and even UKIP supporters. There is a lot of soft racism, and a lot of other prejudices that can undermine the campaign – especially against those on housing benefit (often a large proportion of tenants), plus mutual suspicions between tenants and leaseholders.

The trickiest case for me was the housing activist whose name was on the BNP membership list². I knew before I started

² *It pays to google everyone who approaches you in these campaigns. If I hadn't found out about his membership until later, it could've become a damaging issue for the DCH group.*

that the BNP might come sniffing around as they have a base in the borough, especially on one of the biggest estates.

This tenant had emailed Alan, expressing his enthusiasm for DCH and how rooted he was in the area (which is true). I called to sound him out, and to find if he really was a member of the BNP.

He talked about all the activity he'd done over the years and the dirt he had on the council. When I popped the question he was candid with me. He said he had been a member previously, and agreed with them on everything except the racism.

I told him that he couldn't join DCH because we had a strict policy on excluding supporters of fascist organisations. He took it badly, and I was concerned he'd cause us trouble.

But a week later he texted me a conciliatory message which said we were both working for the same aim, but could do it separately.³

In total we had about a dozen people involved at one time or another in the DCH group. The core was two comrades, an ex-comrade, the ex-councillor, the TA secretary, an ex-TGWU branch secretary and another tenant who was completely new to campaigning of any kind.

None of the latter four were particularly close to the SWP politically, although they all bought Socialist Worker at least once (mostly through politeness or curiosity). And because the campaign was of short duration, I didn't succeed in drawing them much closer.

Councillors

As the ballot period approached (it took place over the course of a month) our momentum picked up.

For the first time, we were making contact with sitting councillors. I met two from Labour at a UaF organising meeting. One told me he hoped we'd win but couldn't say so publicly. The other said she'd voted for privatisation in the council chamber because she was told to, but had never heard the counter-argument and was interested to read our leaflet.

Having opened this crack, I decided to approach my own ward councillors (all Labour) who proved rather elusive. One replied to my email to say "like u I'mm against, but the council is now Tory control and it's there policy." [sic] When I asked if we could meet up to discuss this he never got back to me.

The ex-TGWU branch sec approached one of his ward councillors, who also said she was privately against the transfer! This was during the week after the wipe-out of Labour at the Euro Elections, and we felt some of these councillors were scared for their seats and could be won over out of

their own self interest.

We suggested they should put their names to a public statement opposing the privatisation, but they were so spineless and slow-moving it didn't happen. I believe that if we'd got to work on them earlier in the campaign they may well have crumbled.

Other issues

One very positive thing to come out of the campaign was my first ever visit to a meeting of Merton trades council. I've lived in the area for most of my life, but had never been, and had never taken it seriously.

Although it was small (four people) I was impressed by how eager they were to help, and how outward-looking in their perspective.

They agreed to affiliate to DCH, and look for other ways they could help out. Nothing much came of it - because those present were very busy with other campaigns, and I attended only a month before the ballot. But the intention was there, and it bodes well for future collaborations.

The final vote

When we started our campaign in February, I thought we'd lose but we had to put up some kind of resistance anyway.

An experienced DCH activist told me that on average, before a privatisation campaign starts, a third of tenants will be in favour, a third against and a third undecided. The council's campaign (and our counter-campaign) are the decisive factors.

In the event, we came tantalisingly close to victory.

The final result among tenants was 53.2% in favour of transfer with 46.8% voting no, on a 60.5% turnout.

Leaseholders and freeholders also had a vote, but it didn't count for anything - it was merely a "consultation". They voted against transfer by 57.6% to 42.4% on a 29.1% turnout.

The council had spent hundreds of thousands of pounds (possibly millions - we're still waiting for the Freedom of Information request on the total sum) to win the ballot. It had campaigned for almost a year, set up "show homes" to let tenants know what wonderful new kitchens and bathrooms they'd get if they voted the right way, employed dozens of workers to push it all through, and tried to smear us out of the way.

In contrast, our campaign was run on a shoestring, entirely by volunteers in their spare time, where no previous network of activists had existed. And we almost beat them.

I feel sure that if we'd been more confident earlier on - and started our DCH campaign as soon as the ballot was proposed rather than hesitate for seven months - we could have won.

Things we didn't do and should have:

- As soon as a ballot is announced, you should put in a freedom of information request for the addresses of which homes in the area are still council housing.

We didn't do this, because we assumed by the time we got a reply the ballot would be over.⁴ This meant we leafleted entire estates when perhaps only 30% of them were still council tenants.

- Also, we may have completely missed some of the smaller estates because we didn't know where they were.

- Set up a local DCH website to display your latest leaflets and letters, and to get feedback. This can be done quite simply with wordpress. (Set up your site through <http://wordpress.org>)

- Push the argument about why those on housing benefit should vote. I think a lot of them didn't vote at all, as they felt transfer wouldn't effect them.

- Organise a public meeting as soon as you can to launch the campaign. Make use of posters to raise the public profile of the campaign. Use a speaker car to tour the big estates.

Conclusion

Even if you are completely alone and have no SWP branch to work through, when you put together a DCH leaflet and distribute it across a couple of estates, you will find some people who want to campaign with you.

My previous experience of leafleting door to door has been with Socialist Alliance/Respect/Left List election campaigns. We normally gained a handful of votes at the end of it, and I wondered if my time could've been better spent.

But DCH is different. Because they can see their material interests are directly effected, you will find many people are deadly serious about the ballot. A large number will be eager to hear our arguments, and a smaller number of those will join the campaign and help spread them.

That is the nucleus of your campaign, and if you move quickly and get organised there is every chance you can win.

Postscript: What about the revolution?

So that's all very nice, but as it stands this piece doesn't say much about revolutionary politics - its just about a reformist united front. What else came out of the campaign?

In truth, not a great deal that was tangible. Because we lost the ballot and the

³ Three months later he was elected chair of his TA group, against an incumbent who was seen as being to close to the council.

⁴ As it happened, the ballot took place two months later than initially promised, so we were wrong. These delayed ballots are quite common, with councils waiting for the perfect moment to get the "right" result.

housing was privatised, our DCH group has lost its purpose, at least for the moment. It's possible that some issue with the new landlord (a Housing Association) will blow up, and we can again make use of the network of activists we formed. But that's not guaranteed.

Of those activists, I didn't get any along to meetings or demos, and although they respect the role the party played in the campaign, they remain fairly distant from us politically.

But we did achieve some things to warm the cockles of a revolutionary's heart, beyond the immediate aims of the campaign itself:

- We helped those activists rediscover the fire in their bellies, and the belief that they could make a difference.

- We opened up the terms of the debate on housing in the area, and put a clear case for the benefits of public over private.

- We made links with Merton trade council which will pay off in the future.

- I like to think we eroded a little bit of the fascist's support by putting forward collective solutions to the estate's problems.

- We discovered we do have some half-decent Labour councillors. Even if they are unwilling to put their heads above the parapet, it's useful to know who they are.

- We made the SWP a little more rooted in the borough. (Our branch has traditionally focussed far more on the neighbouring borough of Wandsworth, so this was a useful corrective)

Ben (South London)

A TURN TO THE WORKING CLASS

To quote Charlie Kimber "The occupation at the Vestas wind turbine plant, the support it has generated, and the global publicity it gained confirm that we are in a new period of class struggle. A series of high profile disputes, each ending with workers better off than when they began, has given everyone concrete examples to follow and build upon. The experiences of Waterford Glass and Prisme and Visteon and Linamar and Lindsey Oil Refinery and Vestas have changed the atmosphere of the class struggle. They have defied the anti-union laws, challenged the hesitations of union leaders – and won."

As Colin Barker said in last years pre-conference bulletin what we do makes a difference, today as historically, the question of leadership on the shop floor and in the trade unions will be decisive. He quoted how Socialist leadership led to victories in major disputes during an eco-

nomics crisis in the United States back in 1934 for Longshoremen, Teamsters and rubber workers.

We have seen echoes of this in the recent Tower Hamlets College victory against redundancies. The strike was won with daily rank and file action – an all out strike along with an unofficial walk-out. Organised Socialists played a decisive part in this victory.

Rank and file

Under this background I think it would be wrong to continue the policy of Comrades taking up full time Union positions. Of course taking executive positions can sometimes help push for strike action, but it can not be a substitute for relating to and being part of the rank and file militants who are prepared to fight to stop worker's paying for the economic crisis. Of course we have to work with the left Trade Union bureaucrats at times, but all the major recent advances have come through action from below, from the rank and file.

I found it worrying to go to a number of Marxism meetings this year on worker's struggle where debate was dominated by Comrades who were full time officials. The meetings I attended had very little to say about linking the struggle in the workplace to the economic crisis. This is not mentioned to deride Comrades in full time positions, only to stress that our main orientation has to be on the rank and file. As Colin Barker said, some of our leading comrades get elected to senior positions in the Unions, are we sure we're maintaining an organic link between them and the rest of the Party, to counter act the pull of the bureaucracy?

Training for the coming battles

Colin Barker also asked, "How well prepared are we? Do we devote sufficient Party resources to arming our members in the workplace with the politics and experience to be able to give a decisive lead?"

I can only remember one school oriented on Trade Union struggle in a year, and this a considerable time ago. As Pete Gillard wrote in last years bulletin "CC documents have failed to put the working class at the centre of our politics. There needs to be a concrete analysis of the balance of class forces. The economic crisis has opened the door for us ideologically and politically, we have to translate that into an industrial strategy."

This is not to counter pose workplace activity with intervening in the movements. A fighting class with a revived shop stewards movement will feed into building the fight against the Nazi's and creating a left electoral project. A qualitative shift in the class needs a turn in how the Party operates.

Steve (South East London)

ENCOURAGING NEW SPEAKERS

I would like to make some brief suggestions about how we should be encouraging new speakers, and getting a new layer of comrades giving meetings.

We have roughly 7,000 members nationally and this should translate into 7,000 potential speakers, however too often we rely on established speakers and specialists.

Although it is perfectly reasonable that we have national speakers and specialists for important branch meetings and rallies, we should be encouraging all active members to give meetings. Therefore a branch of six active members should have speakers for six meetings. This could be extended by areas organising local speaker swaps. This would also make it easier for less established speakers to give meetings outside their own branch.

Equally important is encouraging students to give branch and SWSS meetings. This would not only provide a speaker for a meeting, but also educate the speaker in whatever subject and cadreise them. Leading members of SWSS groups should certainly be giving meetings to other SWSS groups and local branches.

Personally I was encouraged to give meetings after about 6 months and this not only sharpened my arguments, but also boosted my confidence.

Therefore I suggest that all members are encouraged or booked in to do a local branch meeting after having been a member for about 6 months. This needn't be a 30 minute speech for their first meeting, but could possibly be a 10 minute introduction of the subject to start a discussion, or even an introduction to a subject by two comrades.

Emma (East Anglia & Norwich)

NURTURING THE ROOTS IN KING'S LYNN

Background

This time last year we were a branch of two and had one industrial sale outside the Council offices, a small StW group, a couple on full spectrum and one regular paper buyer plus the odd occasional buyer. We had recruited in March 2008, but this comrade had moved to Cambridge in September.

Meetings

We had been distributing 20 or so leaflets at the paper sale, and had just started to write our own leaflets whenever there was not one sent out (see table). We were also building contacts, and so with the breaking of the financial crisis, we decided to organise our first public SWP meeting and get a speaker from London, with the help of the Centre. Nine people turned up, including another comrade in the area we had not known about.

Since then we have organised five further SWP meetings, including two with speakers from the branch and one with a speaker from Norwich. Jonathan Neale (on global warming) attracted an audience of 24, including a number of people from the local Transition Town groups (see below). Chris Bambery (on fascism) attracted 12 people.

Audiences have a very good balance of sex, of age (from students to pensioners), and of backgrounds, including members of StW and UAF, environmentalists, a Green Party organiser and council candidates, a Labour Party council candidate, unemployed workers, pensioners and workers in health and education.

Recruitment

Having found a member in the area, we asked the Centre if there were any others and this led to recruiting a new member in November. He is an experienced activist, and disabled. Both members were immediately involved fully in discussions leading up to Party Conference.

Comrades from another branch also gave us details of a new student member, who got involved in branch activity while back home in the summer, including going to the post workers' picket line, and leafleting around UAF (see below).

Sales

An additional member meant that we could start another industrial sale at the college in January, and though this member then decided that that activity

Table of King's Lynn Sales

Papers	Sales Channels									Leaflets used * = own	Reviews	Pamphlet Sales (£)	Book & JSU Sales (£)	Notes				
	Council	College (started on 26/1/09)	Post (started on 10/8/09)	Contacts	Other	1	2	3	4						5	6	7	8
17/10/08	█																	
24/10/08	█	█	█	█	█						3	3.00	9.00				Meeting: <i>Economy</i> (30/10)	
31/10/08	█	█	█	█	█							3.00						
7/11/08	█	█	█	█	█							1.50						
14/11/08	█	█	█	█	█						3	1.50						
21/11/08	█	█	█	█	█								2.50					
28/11/08	█	█	█	█	█							1.50						
5/12/08	█	█	█	█	█							1.50	2.00					
12/12/08	█	█	█	█	█						1						Meeting: <i>Fight back</i> (11/12)	
19/12/08	█	█	█	█	█													
10/1/09	█	█	█	█	█							3.00	32.39					
17/1/09	█	█	█	█	█							5.50	7.00				Gaza demo	
24/1/09	█	█	█	█	█						3	7.00	15.00					
31/1/09	█	█	█	█	█							1.50						
7/2/09	█	█	█	█	█							2.50	3.50					
14/2/09	█	█	█	█	█							4.20	15.98					
21/2/09	█	█	█	█	█						2	2.00	18.49				Meeting: <i>Students</i> (19/2)	
28/2/09	█	█	█	█	█													
7/3/09	█	█	█	█	█													
14/3/09	█	█	█	█	█							6.00						
21/3/09	█	█	█	█	█						3						KLStW meeting: <i>Gaza</i> (18/3)	
28/3/09	█	█	█	█	█							2.50					Put People First demo	
4/4/09	█	█	█	█	█													
11/4/09	█	█	█	█	█													
18/4/09	█	█	█	█	█						3	1.00					Meeting: <i>Revolution</i> (16/4)	
25/4/09	█	█	█	█	█													
2/5/09	█	█	█	█	█							3.50						
9/5/09	█	█	█	█	█							6.50						
16/5/09	█	█	█	█	█						4	12.00					Gaza demo	
23/5/09	█	█	█	█	█							3.00	50.00				Meeting: <i>Environment</i> (28/5) – 24	
30/5/09	█	█	█	█	█							5.00						
6/6/09	█	█	█	█	█							5.00	37.99					
13/6/09	█	█	█	█	█							6.00	7.99					
20/6/09	█	█	█	█	█						4							
27/6/09	█	█	█	█	█							7.00	1.25				Meeting of UAF group	
4/7/09	█	█	█	█	█												Trades Council (7/7)	
11/7/09	█	█	█	█	█													
18/7/09	█	█	█	█	█													
25/7/09	█	█	█	█	█													
1/8/09	█	█	█	█	█						4							
8/8/09	█	█	█	█	█												KL post strike (10/8 & 21/8)	
15/8/09	█	█	█	█	█												KLStW Meeting: <i>Afghanistan</i> (12/8)	
22/8/09	█	█	█	█	█												No papers received	
29/8/09	█	█	█	█	█													
5/9/09	█	█	█	█	█												Trades Council 9/9/09	
12/9/09	█	█	█	█	█													
19/9/09	█	█	█	█	█						4						Meeting: <i>Fascism</i> (17/9) - 12	

was not for him, the sale has been continued. One consequence was that a history teacher asked us in to talk about revolution to her students!

Another teacher has become a regular buyer of the paper and *Review*, and this has led to her being a rep to the newly formed Trades Council (see Industrial and UAF below). Some other teachers and some of the students are starting to buy the paper sporadically.

In August, King's Lynn postal workers took action locally for the first time in 20 years in a series of one day strikes. We went to the picket lines, and we have started a third industrial sale there.

There have been problems with getting the papers, since even before the postal strikes they were unlikely to turn up before 10 a.m. on Friday. This meant that the sales had had to be moved to Monday and Tuesday. When the papers

recently failed to turn up even on Saturday, it was vital that a different arrangement be made.

We now collect our papers from Cambridge, which is an hour away. This imposes a severe burden on a tiny branch with only one member able to collect the papers. However it does mean that we get them much earlier, and the post and council sales have been moved back onto the Friday (at 5.30 to 6.05am and 8.00 to 8.45am respectively). The college sale will move to from Tuesday to Thursday (8.15 to 8.45am) after half-term.

As can be seen from the table paper sales average at 4 per week, but they appear to have been much less affected by major events. The exception to this is April, when council workers said that they were not allowed to take leaflets etc. in the run-up to the elections. In the last few weeks there seems to be a significant

growth in paper sales at the college and the council.

Industrial

Collections for other workers on the paper sales and at meetings have raised £2.20 for PCS workers (Nov. '08), £2.20 for Gaza (Jan. '09), £13.20 for Waterford workers (Mar. '09), and £15.00 for Vestas workers (Sept. '09).

Our new member's experience of the Communist Party, the Labour Party and Trades Councils opened up the possibility of us getting a representative on the new Trades Council.

When our only trade union member stopped being politically active, it was fortunate that UAF work led to our UAF organiser receiving a standing invitation as a guest to the Trades Council.

This is leading to closer contact with reps in the area and to a constructively critical engagement with local Labour Party candidates.

King's Lynn Stop the War (KLSW)

In addition to SWP meetings we have organised two StW meetings with Lindsey German (on Gaza) speaking to 22 people in March, and John Rees (on Afghanistan) to 15 people in August.

In January we organised a fund-raiser for Gaza, including food, poetry and music all provided by members. We collected £70 for Medical Aid for Palestinians, renewed contact with members, and increased our membership by 8, many of whom have come to SWP meetings and been integral to forming a UAF group. Members (including new ones) went on the 10 January, 28 March and 16 May demos, and to demos in Norwich (twice). We are currently organising our largest bout of petitioning for many years in the build-up to the 24 October demo.

Transition Towns (TT)

We found that many StW members were also active in local TT groups, so we have actively engaged in these groups. Our experience is that they can at times be inward-looking and disorganised, but they can also be very dynamic and open to our politics.

The SWP meeting with Jonathan Neale made a huge impression on the TT members who came, and then left agreeing with everything he had said! The bookstall sold £53 of books and pamphlets. We are helping with plans to book a coach for 5 December demo in London, and are pushing for a campaign to counter the anti-wind turbine lobby. We have made good contacts at the TT events, and they have come to our meetings, come on StW demos and leafleted for StW and against the BNP.

UAF

We have been at the centre of launching UAF work in the area. There are 184 BNP members less than 45 minutes away by car, and the BNP stood 5 candidates in the council elections. They had also put up two candidates in a small local town, but these were withdrawn after we wrote and our own leaflet and organised SWP, KLSW and TT members to hand 300 copies out at the St George's Day celebrations.

We found that shopkeepers and stall holders took leaflets and thanked us for being there, and other people came up to us to thank us or left messages on our phone. The Wisbech Quakers have offered us their Meeting House free for UAF meetings.

We joined a Hope Not Hate (HNH) leafleting in King's Lynn in the spirit of non-sectarian support. The core of that leafleting was a group from Norwich, but we organised two groups of local contacts, including school students, to leaflet door to door in the most crucial wards.

In one of these the BNP had been only eight votes short of winning a seat in 2007. The UAF leafleting cut the BNP local organiser's share of the vote from 34.9% (in 2007) to 20.8%, and further leafleting in a by-election reduced it to 12.7%. The HNH organiser was so impressed that she was the first to join UAF, and in her capacity as Secretary of the new Trades Council, has invited us to its meetings.

The organiser of KLARS (a local group supporting asylum seekers and refugees) specifically thanked us for keeping the BNP out. Both Cambridge and Norwich branches helped us by passing on surplus leaflets, and the local Green Party organiser worked closely with us.

Conclusion

Whatever it may look like, the purpose of this report is not to blow our own trumpet, but to show what can be achieved by minimal numbers (four, of whom two have health problems, and one is politically inactive) through patience, political commitment and a clear understanding of work in united front activity.

Without understanding the role of StW we would not have engaged with TT. Without engaging with TT we would not have been able to launch a UAF group.

Without UAF we would not have been able to take part in the Trades Council. In less than a year we have gone from being entirely outside the local working class to forming strong roots within it and its organisations in this area.

We have recruited two people so far, but we are creating the conditions for building a much larger local branch in the future. We are doing this by consciously establishing a reputation for being the party which connects issues together, which offers practical leadership, and which allows people with different ideas to debate freely and constructively the merits and problems of

different approaches.

Of course we would like to sell more papers, recruit more members, and be more closely involved in local disputes, but we are aware that success depends on recognising when to be patient and when impatient. We hope that we are getting the balance right.

**Jacqueline & William
(East Anglia & Norwich)**

AT THE CROSSROADS

The decision to allocate someone to the centre who is solely responsible for branches is very welcome. Our party is simply not organised properly on the ground and therefore too thin on the ground to cover all the activity we know we need to do now, let alone that which the times will demand of us in the near future.

We need many more active branches, to assess, prioritise and act, and around which members and other forces can coalesce. For example, in West London there are 220 members on paper, of which only twelve have organised themselves properly, in branch and district. It should come as no surprise then that all the party's work, everything important, goes through these twelve organised comrades.

They cover all the united front work, the UAF, the StWC, strikes, workplace visiting, public meetings, sales, picket lines and so on. It is clear that this is the most effective way to operate. And yet there is only one other such branch within a ten mile radius of us, and worse, to the north, south and west there is nothing for 30 miles. These twelve organised members therefore constitute a beacon of hope in a desert of neglect.

In fifteen years or so of political upturn the party has mostly failed to build on the ground. It is weaker now than in the depths of the downturn in the 1980s. We simply cannot go on like this. It is vital that everywhere we put things right and urgently. History deals very harshly with parties like ours who fail to adjust to the times.

We are certainly not in any sort of condition to take on the tumultuous battles which lie ahead. In the majority of towns there is no SWP presence at all. We have comrades in unions, which is how it should be, but struggle now is as probable in non-unionised places and anywhere in the country. We need the flexibility branches offer. If we don't build these we are likely to be completely wrong-footed or be absolutely overwhelmed by events.

The first thing we have to do is to reject

the dangerous idea that there is little we can do now to improve our strength and organisation and that we just have to wait for better times. What times are we waiting for? For war? For an economic crash? For Labour to implode? For millions of workers to move to the left towards us? We have all of these things, now. It is not the objective conditions that explain our inability to grow. It may have been the case in the past that these put a ceiling on what was do-able, but it is certainly not the case at the moment. Active branches can be built in most sizeable towns, now.

Unfortunately we have lulled ourselves to sleep with this “do nothing” analysis which belongs more to the second international tradition than our own. It tells us we don’t have to do anything which requires effort, that good times will inevitably come, and then, without us having to do very much at all, everything will drop into our lap.

The truth is, nothing about building the revolutionary party is automatic, or indeed easy. Everything depends on the members’ political will, determination and level of activity. We have to be as strong as we possibly can be at all times. And this requires effort at all times. Even in the most favourable political conditions considerable unsung work has to be done and done continuously in order to keep even a single branch going. And if that effort falters, the branch dies.

We have to break with the culture which says ordinary members can’t do anything but follow. We must all use our own initiative and act. If organisation is weak where you live, or if there is no branch at all, whatever your standing in the party, it has to be your duty to get together with others and to build it. Who else? Non-members? The centre? They’re run ragged enough already and anyway, not in a position to help. If any comrade is unconnected with this struggle for the organisation in their town, there is something politically wrong. Perhaps they feel the work is beneath them. Or they have not seen the urgent necessity of building the party on the ground. Or they have seen the necessity but haven’t the ability to help. Or, most depressingly of all, they have seen the need and they have the ability but simply don’t care.

This in itself is good enough reason why these many new cooperative branches that we need now must be built from the bottom up. Trying to build from the top down is like trying to build a house in mid air, starting with the roof. The former national organiser tried to start a branch in his area by sacrificing surrounding branches and parachuting-in comrades from elsewhere. Party Notes reported combined public super-sales and abundant recruitment every week. And yet when the hiatus subsided, there was pretty well nothing left, including in those areas that had been sacrificed.

Surely the lesson then has to be that organisation must be built and sustained

by the people on the ground, and that they have to be supported in doing so. Not only must branches be built from the bottom up, they must also be allowed to be run that way. Branch committee decisions, unless utterly disastrous and against our principles, must be allowed to stand. We don’t want pawns. Branch members have to feel that their decisions matter and that the project of building branch and district is theirs. They know best.

If then, say three new young members find themselves in an area, surely it is obvious that they should come together, assess the area with the district organiser, prioritise and then build the organisation as best they can. But our party’s current practice encourages that while they wait for supposedly better times, each spends as short a period as is polite in a branch, then separates, rises in the union, rises in the party, maybe writes something, and then patronises the other two for not having done the same. Their reward is flattery, a soaring reputation and no pressure from anyone for them to get out and organise locally.

What utter madness, when the party is in the state that is and the times for growth still with us. Of course, what our two or three should be encouraged to do, first and foremost, is to get together, use their talents to build a branch, stay with it and help it grow.

Hopefully, the new centre appointment will facilitate widespread branch building and gather at the centre a body of relevant experience upon which active local members can draw. Hopefully, it can also help deal a severe blow to that deep culture in which the individual is valued over and above the cooperative. And hopefully, the very fact that the role exists will challenge the mechanical determinism, the complacency, the top-downism and the whole package of ideas which holds us back.

We are at a crossroads. We can either go on as we are, uneasy, languishing, firmly mired in an old culture which says that only a minority of us are any good at all and that their reputations are most important. Or we can start thinking politically about what needs to be done and then go all out and do it, however difficult, to the best of our ability. The measure of success of an intervention in any struggle is the degree to which revolutionary organisation is strengthened. The measure of success of any individual comrade is the same: the degree to which revolutionary organisation is strengthened. Every single one of us has to seriously reassess our practice.

Martin and Anne (West London)

PROPOSED CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The out going CC would like to propose the following CC for election at this year’s SWP annual conference.

Alex Callinicos
Charlie Kimber
Chris Bambery
Chris Harman
Colin Smith
Hannah Dee
Judith Orr
Martin Smith
Michael Bradley
Weyman Bennett

Amy Leather *
Dan Mayer *
Joseph Choonara *

*The following comrades are presently not members of the CC.

SWP CONSTITUTION

(1) Introduction

The Socialist Workers Party is an organisation of revolutionary socialists dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism internationally and the construction of a world socialist system.

We belong to and develop the revolutionary communist tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky. Central to this tradition is the conception of socialism from below. As Marx put it, “the working class must emancipate itself, and in so doing emancipate the whole of society”. Socialism cannot be achieved by acts of parliament or any kind of dictatorship or minority action but only through the struggles of working people throughout the world.

Since capitalism is a global system, socialism can only succeed through a process of world revolution. We are internationalists who support struggles around the world against capitalism, imperialism and oppression. Accordingly we strive to build international forms of organisation and solidarity. The SWP participates in the International Socialist Tendency, which seeks to bring together revolutionary socialists worldwide.

The SWP is an organisation of committed fighters for socialism who believe that the working class is the only force capable of building socialism in the world. We strive to construct a revolutionary party whose overwhelming majority are workers. We actively support all struggles against exploitation and oppression. Within those struggles we always seek to involve the widest numbers in joint activity, and to advance socialist ideas.

Democracy is at the heart of socialism and is central to the workings of the SWP. The SWP is a democratic centralist organisation that decides its policies through full discussion and debate among its members and then implements these policies in a united and disciplined way.

The conditions of the class struggle change all the time, and effective socialist intervention requires members’ involvement in constant democratic review of party activity and organisation. In order to be effective in both carrying out the party’s democratic decisions and testing them in practice, we need to act in a unified way. Once decisions have been taken, all members are expected to carry out party policies.

Decisions by the Conference of the SWP are binding on all party members and bodies. Subject to the sovereignty of Conference, decisions taken by the Central Committee (CC), National Committee (NC) and Party Council are binding

on caucuses, districts and branches, and individual party members.

(2) Membership

A member is someone who agrees with the politics of the SWP (as outlined in “Where We Stand”, which is printed in each issue of *Socialist Worker*), accepts its constitution, and works within and under the direction of the appropriate party bodies.

All members are expected to pay suitable subscriptions, depending upon their means, to take and sell *Socialist Worker*, and where possible to be members of an appropriate trade union and stand for the position of shop steward or its equivalent.

Any member over three months in arrears may be excluded from membership.

(3) Branches and districts

The basic unit of party organisation is the branch. Branches may be organised on geographical or industrial bases.

Branch members meet regularly to determine the branch’s work, within the framework of national policy.

Branch members may decide in a meeting to establish some kind of responsible branch structure to direct the branch’s work. Such structures can, when so empowered, make binding decisions, subject to review and possible alteration by a full members meeting or higher body. General guidance about these matters may be given from time to time by Conference, the Central Committee or the National Committee.

Where appropriate, branches may be grouped together in a district. As with a branch, district members meeting together may elect a district committee to coordinate party activity across a district.

Establishing a new branch or district, or altering boundaries between them, is subject to the agreement of the Central Committee.

(4) Conference

National Conference is the supreme policy making body and is held annually.

Branches and/or districts elect delegates to Conference on a basis proportional to their membership, as determined by the Central Committee. Only members of the organisation may participate in the election of delegates. Only delegates may vote at Conference and participate in electing leading committees.

Three months before each Conference the Central Committee opens a special pre-conference discussion in the organisation. Members are invited to contribute written discussion documents for internal circulation during this period. During the pre-conference period, district aggregates are held where CC members present members with a review of the previous year and an outline of party perspectives. These open meetings give all members the chance to discuss party work, raise questions and points of

disagreement and collectively assess the party’s development.

The Central Committee nominates a Conference Arrangements Committee of up to seven members, to be ratified or amended by a majority of delegates at the start of conference.

The CAC makes regulations and standing orders for the preparation and conduct of conference, subject to delegates agreement.

The CAC is responsible for the conduct of elections at the conference.

Members of the Central Committee, Conference Arrangements Committee, National Committee, Party Disputes Committee and full-time workers may attend Conference with speaking rights. The Central Committee may invite observers to attend conference, and these may be invited to speak.

A Special Conference may be called by the Central Committee or at the request of 20 percent of the branches. The decisions of a Special Conference are as binding as those of Annual Conference.

(5) Central Committee

The CC consists of members elected by the Conference according to the following procedure:

The outgoing Central Committee selects and circulates a provisional slate for the new CC at the beginning of the period for pre-Conference discussion. This is then discussed at the district aggregates where comrades can propose alternative slates.

At the Conference the outgoing CC proposes a final slate (which may have changed as a result of the pre-Conference discussion). This slate, along with any other that is supported by a minimum of five delegates, is discussed and voted on by Conference.

Between Conferences the CC is entrusted with the political leadership of the organisation and is responsible for the national direction of all political and organisational work, subject to the decision-making powers of Conference.

The CC appoints all full-time organisers. District organisers represent and are responsible to the CC. They work together with the party members in their district to ensure the effective implementation of party policies.

(6) National Committee

The National Committee consists of 50 members elected at Annual Conference.

The National Committee assists the Central Committee in providing political leadership for the party and reviews the party’s political and organisational work between Conferences. Its decisions are binding on the Central Committee.

In the event of a major disagreement between the Central Committee and the National Committee, the NC has the right

to call a Special Conference.

The NC normally meets every two months between Annual Conferences.

(7) Party discipline and the Disputes Committee

Occasionally disputes between members and breaches of normal party discipline may occur. The party has a Disputes Committee to investigate and handle these matters in a principled fashion.

The Disputes Committee's functions are to maintain and strengthen party unity and principle and to investigate complaints relating to disciplinary matters by its members or units.

The Disputes Committee consists of not more than 12 members. Conference elects up to ten of these, and the incoming CC nominates two.

The Disputes Committee is brought in where local structures prove unable to resolve disputes. Where appropriate, the Disputes Committee may arbitrate between members or party units.

Cases are normally referred to the Disputes Committee by the Central Committee. If a member has a complaint against a member of the CC or a party full-time worker, this is referred directly to the DC.

The DC has the right to refuse to pursue complaints if it deems any of the following to be the case:

1. The complaint is frivolous;
2. Based on the evidence presented, there is no case to answer;
3. The comrade concerned is trying to use the DC to win battles already lost in the democratic processes of the party.

In cases of serious breaches, disciplinary measures such as censure, suspension or expulsion may be taken by the Central Committee, or by a district or branch committee, subject to confirmation by the Central Committee.

Anyone who is disciplined and is unhappy about their treatment may appeal to the Disputes Committee, who will review the decision and can change or reverse it if they agree. The Disputes Committee may also take such disciplinary measures as it deems necessary on its own initiative.

Unless the Disputes Committee rules that exceptional circumstances prevail, comrades receive in advance a written statement of the case against them and are present when evidence is given to the DC. They receive a written statement of the DC's decision.

The Disputes Committee may co-opt members to serve for particular investigations. The Disputes Committee reports to Conference, where its activities are subject to endorsement or otherwise.

(8) Party Council

The Party Council is constituted of representatives of branches decided on a

numerical basis determined by the CC. It normally meets once a year. Additional meetings may be called in case of need by the CC. Every branch shall have at least one delegate.

The Party Council reviews the political and organisational work of the SWP (or such aspects of it as it deems necessary) between Conferences, pools the experiences of the members in implementing the line of the organisation and advises the CC. It has power to take decisions on matters of general policy binding on the CC.

When appropriate, the CC may call national meetings of party members to discuss any aspect of party work and organisation.

(9) National Caucus

Members in a particular industry, union or area of political work are constituted, where desirable, into a national caucus. The establishment of a caucus requires the agreement of the CC.

Caucus aggregates are held from time to time, either on a delegate basis or otherwise.

Elected caucus executives direct the party's work in the appropriate area within the framework of national policy.

(10) Factions

If a group of party members disagrees with a specific party policy, or a decision taken by a leading committee of the party, they may form a faction by producing a joint statement signed by at least 30 members of the party.

A faction will be given reasonable facilities to argue its point of view and distribute its documents. These must be circulated through the National Office, to ensure that all members have the chance to consider them.

Debate continues until the party at a Special or Annual Conference reaches a decision on the disputed question. Permanent or secret factions are not allowed.

Constitutional changes

This Constitution (along with "Where We Stand") is agreed by conference 2003, and amended by the special Democracy Conference of 2009.

(a) Either document may be amended by a majority of delegates at any future Conference.

This is the final version of the DC report as amended and passed by the DC Conference.

Commission on Party Democracy

STATEMENT OF GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Democracy Commission was charged by Party Conference with reviewing the totality of the SWP's structures and processes of debate and decision making and producing proposals, to be submitted to a Special Conference, for improving and enhancing the party's overall culture of democracy and accountability.

The establishment of the DC 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 DC has undertaken a substantial survey of grassroots opinion in the party, receiving many written submissions from comrades and visiting every district (where possible with two of its members) to listen to members' opinions.

Democracy Commission meetings have been held in these areas: Aberdeen, Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Cambridge, Cornwall and Devon, Dundee, Edinburgh, East London, Glasgow, Hackney, Harlow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, North London, North West London, Portsmouth, Preston, Sheffield, South London, South East London, Southampton, St. Albans, Swansea, Walthamstow, West London, Whitstable

This report is written on the basis of this survey and our own quite extensive deliberations. The DC has conducted this review within the framework of the political perspectives and policies determined by Party Conference, the party's sovereign body, and the revolutionary Marxist tradition, including the fundamental strategic aim of building a mass revolutionary workers party on Leninist lines (ultimately on a world scale).

We therefore reaffirm the principle of democratic centralism i.e. the ongoing

effort to combine democratic decision making with unity in action. Both these elements are essential not just for effective party organisation but because they correspond to the basic needs of the working class struggle.

Party democracy is essential because the working class, our class, is the democratic class, the principle bearer of democratic values and norms in society, and the overwhelming majority of its organisations (parties, unions, associations, campaigns etc) are conceived and constructed (at least initially) on democratic lines.

Democracy is essential because the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself – an inherently democratic process. We stand for revolution and socialism from below. Democracy is essential because without democratic training party members will not be able to work, argue and lead successfully in the wider working class movement.

It is essential also for correct leadership: only on basis of democratic debate and input from the party rank and file can the party leadership or the party as a whole hope to estimate correctly the mood of the class, and the best way forward in the concrete situation.

Unity in action in implementing decisions is equally necessary. In its struggle against the bourgeoisie and its state the working class faces an enemy that is economically, politically and militarily highly centralised. To wage this struggle the working class must always strive to achieve the highest possible unity in its ranks: at the level of the workplace, the union, the industry, the nation and ultimately the globe. Likewise the party requires unity in action in order to maximise the effectiveness of its influence within the class and its struggle for the leadership of the class, especially against political opponents within the workers' movement, such as the reformists and Labourites who, ultimately, are agents of bourgeois influence within the class.

Unity in action i.e. an element of party discipline, is also an essential democratic principle in that it ensures that the will of the party majority is actually implemented. The Labour Party used to have reasonably democratic debates at its conferences but it was not a democratic party because conference decisions were routinely ignored by the party leadership. Democratic centralism means that democratic party decisions are binding on all, especially the CC and comrades playing leading roles in the struggle (unions, united fronts etc).

The essence of the principle of democratic centralism can be illustrated by means of the basic form of the class struggle, the strike. The workers concerned take a democratic decision to take industrial action and then the decision is binding – anyone who violates it is a scab.

But party democratic centralism operates not only at the level of the economic struggle but also in terms of political and

ideological struggle. If for example, the party decides, as it has done, to oppose the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers', it is not then permissible for any member, especially a leading member, to support this slogan in a union branch, conference, student union, or other public forum.

The DC recognises the need for leadership, in the class and the party. The very project of building a revolutionary party is premised on the need for leadership, due to uneven levels of consciousness, confidence and organisation in the working class.

Obviously that unevenness does not end at the gates of the party. 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. Anarchist or libertarian rejection of leadership and authority as such leads only to unelected, undemocratic leadership and authority.

Leadership in the SWP contains elements of geographical and functional representation (the editor of *Socialist Worker* needs to be on the CC, the National Committee needs broadly to cover the country and major union fractions etc.) but fundamentally it is *political* not administrative or federal.

Just as Lenin led the Bolsheviks because of his politics not his location, so the likes of Tony Cliff, Mike Kidron and Duncan Hallas played leadership roles despite all living in North London and their lack of office management skills. Election of our leading bodies should, in the final analysis, be on a general political basis.

Also the class struggle creates many situations in which the party leadership has to respond very quickly, sometimes more or less instantly, and certainly before it is possible to organise a proper democratic debate, for example in the middle of a demonstration.

But 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.

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. This should not surprise us and is not fundamentally the fault of individuals, on the CC or otherwise.

Capitalist society does its best to breed lack of confidence, deference and passivity in working people (just as it breeds confidence and arrogance in the children of the ruling class). This conditioning does not all evaporate on filling in a party membership form. Indeed the many pressures of daily life plus the pressures of the struggle (against the boss, the state, the media, the union leaders and so on)

can easily leave little time and energy for controlling the leaders of the SWP.

Moreover we have lived through a long period in which the main objective counterweight to these pressures, the confidence members get from leading their fellow workers and students in struggle, has been in short supply because those struggles have been in short supply. This is why the situation calls for a conscious effort to redress the balance.

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. This cannot be overcome by words alone and therefore this report will contain proposals for procedural change aimed to facilitate debate, but it seems appropriate to conclude this preamble with a clear statement of the democratic culture we want the SWP to achieve.

We therefore state unequivocally that within the boundaries of socialist principle and the party's basic 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. All party meetings – branch, district, national, CC, conference – should be conducted and chaired with this in mind. Nor should there be a 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, 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.

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.

Hand in hand with this should go the encouragement at every level – local, fractional

and national – of the practice of voting, for or against resolutions, delegates and candidates with the understanding that revolutionaries, in the party as in the wider movement, must expect to be in the majority on some questions and the small minority on others, without shame or bitterness.

The Democracy Commission attaches some importance to the question of timescale in all of this. On the one hand the intensive focus and debate on the party's structures and procedures should conclude at the 7 June conference which needs to take a series of decisions settling for the time being (at the least the next year) the main structural/procedural/constitutional matters. On the other hand the achievement of a genuine culture of debate by its nature takes time and this has to be regarded as requiring a sustained and continuing effort by the party as a whole.

What follows in this report are a series of specific proposals designed to achieve these general aims. The Democracy Commission reserves the right to make additional proposals in the light of the party discussion of its initial report.

Maxine Bowler, Alex Callinicos, Estelle Cooch, Neil Davidson, Hannah Dee, Michael Lavalette, Sheila McGregor, John Molyneux, Jonathan Neale, Martin Smith, Viv Smith, Pat Stack, Candy Udwin and Julie Waterson

SECTION 1: LEADING PARTY BODIES

(i) The National Committee

The National Committee is one of the most important elected bodies in the SWP.

When it works it both reinforces the party's work and strengthens our intervention in the class struggle and the various movements we are involved in. Before comrades debate the role it plays it is important to establish its relationship with the other elected bodies of the party.

1) SWP Annual Conference and Party Council

The SWP's Annual Conference is the party's sovereign body. At present, districts elect their delegates to the conference at district wide meetings called aggregates. Every registered member of the SWP is entitled to attend the aggregate and vote. These aggregates are advertised as widely as possible. This meeting elects the del-

egates to annual conference on the ratio of one delegate per ten registered members

The Annual Conference debates party's perspectives and discusses how we as a party are going to implement them. The conference also elects the organisation's two leading bodies, the SWP Central Committee (CC) and the National Committee (NC).

Three or four times a year the SWP hold Party Councils. Made up of two members per branch (these comrades are elected at branch meetings by the members), these meetings give the party a chance to look at the changing political situation, assess how we are doing and further develop our perspectives.

Both the SWP's Annual Conference and Party Councils enable a large number of members to debate the general perspectives and allows the party to drive this through a wide section of the party.

2) The Central Committee

The Central Committee is elected once a year at the SWP's Annual Conference. In recent years it has been made up of between 10 and 14 comrades. It is a small body which, as a collective, implements and develops the party's political perspectives and organises the day-to-day running of the party.

3) The SWP National Committee

Just like the CC, the National Committee is elected at the SWP Annual Conference. The NC is not a static body and should always be reviewed in light of political developments. Democracy is not an abstract question for a revolutionary socialist party. In this political period our democratic structures have to be based around maximum participation and debate combined with the need to be the most effective.

The NC has varied in size from 50 members to 100 and is made up of comrades who either lead in the party or play key roles in their trade unions, the student movement or inside various united fronts. Comrades elect the NC at the annual conference, so ultimately the conference decides who is elected and the political shape of the body.

Broadly speaking the NC's responsibilities are threefold:

a) Raise, debate and clarify key issues facing the party.

b) Hold the Central Committee to account and raise with the leadership in a constructive way the problems facing party activists on the ground.

c) Play a leadership role inside the organisation, by both helping the CC implement the perspective and playing a leading role in the comrades' area of work and where possible in the branches and districts.

During the Democracy Commission's tour of the branches and districts a number of comrades complained about the failure of the National Committee members to

report back to their branches and districts and the failure of some comrades in reporting back debates and arguments.

The party has to make sure that NC members take their role seriously. That means every NC member is expected to and should be encouraged to raise their political concerns at NCs. It is part of their responsibility to give full reports of decisions taken and the debates had at the NC to branch/district reportback meetings.

The Democracy Commission believes that the party constitution should be amended make the NC's decisions binding on the CC. The political reality is that the CC could not ignore or defy NC decisions. Formally recognising this would help highlight the importance of the NC's role.

The Democracy Commission also debated what the size of the NC should be. Some comrades felt that it was too small and should be expanded to 100 members. Others opposed, believing that it should remain the same size. Consensus was reached that we should keep the NC the same size and not expand it.

This conclusion was reached because we felt if we want a more robust and dynamic CC, the NC has to be a size that allows comrades on it plenty of time to debate the issues raised and come back on arguments raised. If the body is too large, it limits the amount of time comrades have to debate and clarify the issues raised.

Last year we implemented a new method of electing the NC. In the run-up to Annual Conference nomination papers were published in our Internal Bulletins. Comrades were asked to get ten comrades to nominate them and send in a short political biography. This was published in IB3 and distributed to all delegates at the annual conference.

The NC is an important body, one that needs to represent many aspects of the party's work. It is hard to get a balance of NC members – young, old, student and trade union activist, movement campaigner and party builder – and importantly a geographical spread of delegates.

Rather than reduce the NC elections to a 'beauty contest', the DC would like to encourage the CC, fractions, student committee and districts to put out recommended lists (explaining to delegates why they should vote for 'Joe Blogs' or 'Mary Smith') to conference delegates. Obviously comrades would be free to vote for whom they wanted, but it would help comrades decide which newer members or trade unionists to vote for.

4) Some ideas on how to make the National Committee more effective

These ideas are offered very much in the spirit of Alan Walter's submission (see below), which was written only a few days before his tragic death:

a) At the beginning of the year the National Committee should elect a chair. This comrade would be elected for the year and

would work alongside the Central Committee drawing up the National Committee agenda. The chair would also be the first port of call for NC members to contact if they would like a particular issue raised at the NC.

b) NC members should be entitled to put other issues on the NC's agenda. This should first be raised with the NC chair and the CC. If the CC and NC chair do not believe the NC needs to debate the issue, the comrade on the NC has the right to raise it at the beginning of the NC and members of the NC should vote on whether the issue is debated.

c) The agenda for the National Committee should be sent out at least a week in advance of the body meeting. The Central Committee should also send out short documents outlining the issues the CC will be raising at the NC.

d) NC members should have the right to introduce sessions at the NC.

e) As raised above, fractions and districts should have the right to put out bulletins explaining why they are recommending comrades for the NC.

f) Fractions for our trade union and campaigns should be expected to report on their work to the NC. These should be included within general items for discussion or timetabled in over the year. Where this is not possible, written reports for the NC could be produced.

g) NC members should report back to their branches/districts after every NC. It is the right of every branch and district to have a NC report back. Any district/branch that does not have an NC member should contact the national office and it will provide an NC member to do a report back.

h) The National Secretary will produce a summary of National Committee meetings and send them to all branches. Should it not be possible for an NC member to report back to a branch the summary shall provide an overview of the discussion, issues raised and votes taken at the NC meeting.

i) NC members should be encouraged to play a political role leading and shaping our fraction and district work.

(ii) The Central Committee

The Democracy Commission agreed that the party needs a strong central political leadership but was unable to reach consensus on the best way of electing the Central Committee. Therefore they put two proposals to the vote at the DC conference. Proposal 2 received 88 votes. Proposal 1 received 130 votes and was therefore adopted.

PROPOSAL 1

We support the following proposal for electing the Central Committee, which was originally put forward by Alex Callinicos during the discussions of the Democracy Commission.

Under this proposal, the CC selects and

circulates a provisional slate at the beginning of the preconference discussion. This is then discussed at the aggregates where comrades can propose alternative slates. At the Conference itself the outgoing CC proposes a final slate (which may have changed as a result of the preconference discussion). This slate, along with any other that is supported by a minimum of five delegates, is discussed and voted on by Conference.

Here is a political explanation of why we support this proposal and disagree with the others that have been put forward or discussed. The current constitution of the Socialist Workers Party defines the role of the Central Committee as follows: 'Between Conferences the CC is entrusted with the political leadership of the organisation and is responsible for the national direction of all political and organisational work, subject to the decision-making powers of Conference.' This makes the CC an extremely powerful body – not through any abuse of power, but by conscious constitutional design.

The recent crisis in the party has exposed both serious mistakes by the CC and weaknesses in our broader democratic practices. In seeking to renew party democracy, one crucial strategic decision that we need to make is whether or not we want to do away with the centralised political leadership that the CC provides. In our view it would be very damaging to do so.

What the Respect crisis brought to a head was a tendency on the part of the CC to act on its own, in isolation of the rest of the party – as a vanguard that had lost touch with the rest of the army. What is therefore necessary is a rebalancing of the relationship between the CC and the rest of the party, and, as a crucial part of this, a major strengthening of the role and functioning of the National Committee. This stronger NC should be buttressed by the systematic use of fraction organisation in united fronts as well as trade unions.

But this necessary rebalancing should not be allowed to undermine the importance of the CC as a centralised political leadership that takes the initiative in 'the national direction of all political and organisational work'. For all the many mistakes the party and the CC have made over the years, the many successes we can be proud of derive crucially from having a strong political leadership.

Deciding where we stand on the strategic issue of what kind of leadership we want is critical to the question of how we elect the CC. There are two main criteria that any method of election we choose must meet:

(i) It must give the CC the authority to operate as a interventionist and collective political leadership of the party;

(ii) It must ensure that the CC is democratically accountable to the party as a whole, which means that elections to it can

be and are contested.

The present method of election, where the outgoing CC recommends a slate that Conference votes on, has apparently fallen down on criterion (ii). Two contested elections since the late 1970s is hardly impressive from a democratic point of view. But we doubt whether this is a necessary consequence of this method of election. The first time it was used in our organisation, in 1975, Paul H led a revolt by the organisers that knocked four people off the official slate of ten.

In our view the absence of contested elections is a symptom of other factors – the absence of serious internal disagreements during the height of the downturn in the 1980s and 1990s, the aura of authority that Tony Cliff cast over the entire leadership, and the relative weight of the centre in the party at a time when the level of class struggle was low. It is, as they say, no accident that the party has become more fractious at a time when, even though industrial struggles are still very weak, a wide layer of comrades have acquired authority through their role in leading different united fronts both nationally and locally. It is they who intervened decisively to help resolve the division that had developed in the CC as the result of the Respect crisis.

If this diagnosis is correct, then we should, rather than dismantle the present system, seek to preserve its strengths while improving it democratically. One of the main strengths of the present system is that it elects the CC as a collective. This means that comrades are elected who have a contribution to make but, because of their relative youth and inexperience, wouldn't win a popularity poll. It also means the leadership is elected as a balanced team of comrades who can make different contributions within what is a working body that operates according to a division of labour.

Our proposal aims at strengthening this system rather than partially or wholly dismantling it. It is largely a rationalisation of what happened in the last CC elections. We don't expect it to work miracles. As in the case of the last Conference, fights over the leadership can't be separated from bigger political antagonisms.

Our proposal would institutionalise the expectation that the composition of the leadership is a normal part of the discussion prior to and at Conference. We expect that, given the democratic renewal of the party that is already under way, the pre-conference aggregates and the Conference itself would closely scrutinise the CC slate, creating an atmosphere that would encourage the proposal of amendments and alternatives.

We need democratically to renew the party. But we need to do so without weakening or abandoning what has made us so effective as a revolutionary organisation.

FULL TIME ORGANISERS AND THE PARTY

The job of District Organiser is one of the most important and the most difficult jobs in the Party.

Lacking the collective responsibility and protection of being on the CC, DO's can frequently seem isolated and exposed if things go wrong in the District. At times they can feel the brunt of dissatisfaction within the District, at others the wrath of the CC.

The job is high pressure, and at times can feel thankless.

However it can also be immensely rewarding, and working for the Party, for the things you believe in most, for being a key figure in building the Party carries immense job satisfaction, especially when things are going well, a district is being turned round, the active involvement on the ground is growing.

The recent crisis in the Party though has exposed at all levels of the organisation a problem of accountability.

A number of comrades in written submissions, and in the meetings have expressed concerns about the role of District Organisers, who appoints them, who they are answerable to etc.

There was a time in the history of IS where organisers were local appointments/elections, however for many years the District Organiser has been appointed by the CC.

We believe that this should continue to be the case. The CC has an overview of the Party's needs, and will make judgements on who is best placed to go where. Would the best person in this District be someone recently out of college, does this District need an experienced organiser etc

Secondly electing organisers carries potential problems.

If we accept that the main role of the organiser is to push through the areas of activity prioritised by the CC, then the organiser must surely be, answerable to, and replaceable by, the CC, not the local comrades.

District Organisers must be able to win respect and support in their districts, but that is not the same thing as winning a popularity contest. If a section of the cadre of a district fall into opposition the organiser should ordinarily be fighting for the agreed national position, not that of local dissidents.

Having said that, a district organiser should be alert to the mood of their district, should have respect for the comrades within it, and be able to feel free to bring concerns from the district back to the CC.

If the perspective does not seem to fit, or an initiative does not seem to be working,

then the organiser must feel they have the freedom to say so without automatically facing denunciation or dismissal.

This does not mean they shouldn't fight to implement CC decisions, just that they should feel free to be open and honest about how those decisions are working.

A number of people have raised the question of a job description for a District Organiser. Given how much the role can vary from District to District, and from period to period this would be very difficult.

However CC input, back up and advice (particularly in the beginning) will be vital if an organiser is to survive. Similarly, regular organisers meetings, and day schools for both general political education, and the pooling of experience are essential.

Organisers should not be cut loose to sink or swim, or rather too many may sink, and burn out.

Finally some representations from members have talked about organisers not treating members with respect. It is vital that organisers take seriously Cliff's maxim that every member is gold dust. Members should be treated in a comradesly manner at all times.

This does not mean that people shouldn't be fought politically, argued with, brought to task for not doing things they said they'd do and so on, however they should not be insulted, abused or be intimidated or bullied. Again to quote Cliff the Party functions on 98 per cent commitment, and two per cent discipline.

Having said that, this is a two way process. Comrades in Districts must afford the organiser the same level of respect and comradeship that they would expect to receive. Often the organiser will be young, dedicated, and enthusiastic but will not have the experience of some of the district cadre. However anyone using that experience to patronise, belittle, or undermine the organiser is certainly acting outside the spirit of our tradition.

To sum up, the District organiser should be

1. Appointed by and under the direction of the CC
2. See their role as fighting for the national perspective of the organisation in the locality.
3. Furthermore see their role as developing and building the district, developing cadre, encouraging recruitment, intervention etc.
4. Be a carrier of feedback from the District to the CC
5. Be open and honest about how well or otherwise an initiative is working
6. Be open and honest about how well or otherwise the District in general is performing
7. Treat Comrades with respect at all times, and expect to be treated with respect in return.

Finally a brief word about other full timers in the party and their ability to inter-

vene in the political debates of the Party.

Many very talented comrades work full time in a number of positions within the party- The Journal, Review, the National Office, Journalists, Bookmarks and so on.

If these comrades feel precipitating debates-or even intervening debates is inappropriate, or likely to earn them the sack, then our democracy is hindered.

To take an obvious example, Charlie Kimber was for a number of years a journalist before he was on the CC. Would it have helped or hindered us if Charlie thought something we were doing was profoundly wrong, but didn't feel free to say so? The answer is surely self evident.

There could of course be dangers of one set of workers becoming a factional block, but we have normal party rules to deal with factions, or to deal with those who refuse to carry out instructions-apart from those rules such comrades must be free, and perhaps more importantly feel free to speak out as long as they conduct the arguments in the appropriate places.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Democracy Commission endorses Shaun's 'Some Reflections on Annual Conference', which were published in the previous Internal Bulletin.

We had a discussion at our final meeting about the desirability of replacing the practice of Conference voting on drafting commissions with more traditional motions and amendments. We were attracted by this change, but felt that its pros and cons required more examination than we had time left to undertake. We recommend that the CC and NC take up and discuss this particular question.

SECTION 2: UNITED FRONTS AND PARTY DEMOCRACY

The first half of this section will explain some of the difficulties with democracy and leadership in united fronts. The second half will suggest partial solutions.

We start with a basic contradiction. A revolutionary party will wither if it is not part of the class struggle. But a united front means an alliance with reformist full-timers at the top, and reformist workers at the base. And a revolutionary party that is not part of mass reformist action will never know how to be part of mass revolutionary action. So there are always two dangers for revolutionaries in united fronts – sectarian isolation and reformist accommodation.

The pull to the right bears most strongly on the leaders of united fronts. We know this from trade union work. There CC members try to advise senior union comrades – not an easy process. But in the last few years we have had experience of comrades, and CC members, in leading positions in united fronts. What follows is based on our experiences in Stop the War, Respect, Globalise Resistance, the European Social Forum and the Campaign Against Climate Change. Our problems have been most acute in Respect, but similar difficulties arise in all united fronts.

There is also a pull to the right on leaders of local campaigns. When a comrade chairs or is a speaker at a local Stop the War meeting, they don't sell the paper publicly. They are usually the most radical speaker, but they don't give the same talk as at an SWP meeting. And they spend a lot of energy trying to hold a broad coalition together.

The pressures are much stronger if you are in the national leadership of a campaign. Then you deal directly with the other leaders, usually full-timers in unions, NGOs or political parties. When compromises must be made, you make them. Some of them are a bit dirty, and all of them feel necessary. Some of the full-timers you work with act in deeply undemocratic ways, and the pressure to collude with this is intense.

The pressure is stronger if you also speak as the public face of the campaign. Then you deliver a reformist speech over and over again. What you say begins to limit what you can think. The pressures are still stronger working with NGOs than in unions, because the money does not come from workers. They are strongest of all in electoral politics.

Moreover, an effective leader of a united front needs friendships with other

leaders and a loyalty to the cause beyond your loyalty to the SWP. Without that friendship and loyalty, no one will trust you, especially in a crisis. And you have to be responsible to both the discipline of the SWP and the discipline of the campaign.

But leading comrades in united fronts, if they are any good, will pull the other comrades in the campaign to the right.

These pressures get worse once a CC member becomes a leader in a united front. They are under the same pressure from the right. But now comrades are much more likely to follow their lead in meetings. Where they don't, the CC member is tempted to instruct them. And it is more difficult for the rest of the CC to control them.

These pressures are worse again where two or three CC members are leading in one united front, or one member leads in two campaigns. They are worse yet when the united front is successful, and what it does really matters in the world. Sometimes neither the rest of the CC nor the members can control them.

So it's tempting to say CC members should not take on leading roles in united fronts, just as they do not do so in unions. But this ignores the other half of the contradiction. The party can also be pulled too far left and become isolated.

Think of an organisation led by people who did not want to lead the struggle. What sort of organisation would such pure keepers of the flame build? How would they learn? More important, the dangers and mess of a united front are worst at the top. For revolutionaries the rewards, and the joy, are at the base. Comrades look to leading CC members as models for what a revolutionary should do. If CC members abstain from united fronts, in each town the party will prize intellect and purity over struggle.

So the tension is real, and permanent. We must always try to control that tension. There is no one size fits all formula, but here are suggestions:

We should be careful of having two CC members in one united front, and extra careful when they are both part of the public speakers for the campaign. We should usually split forces, so one CC member is the public face, and the other an organiser. This means pushing 'lay' comrades as leading figures. That means moving beyond the idea that all the real leaders of the party will be on the CC, and that the CC members should necessarily be the speakers in big meetings.

CC members in united fronts should see coordinating the SWP intervention as a central job. They must talk, face to face, each week, to the comrades who work for united fronts. This includes comrades in 'office jobs', which are politically difficult. All comrades need to understand that we don't take on jobs in united fronts without agreement of the CC, just as we

don't take on union jobs without discussion and support.

The most important control, however, is a strong caucus in each united front. Serious tensions between the CC and leading members, or within the CC, cannot be resolved at the top level. For that, you need democracy. A regional caucus cannot provide democratic control of a national leadership. A caucus must be national. This is expensive, and time consuming. But the problems over Respect, for instance, would have surfaced much earlier this way.

Once comrades from different areas got together, their increasing concerns would have echoed each other. Pooled fares and a strong, elected, caucus executive between meetings, with conference calls, can help.

The caucus should also vote routinely, at each meeting. That makes votes more likely when there is real disagreement. But what happens if the CC 'line' loses the vote? That's not a disaster, it's the point. The CC member can decide to bend, or argue more. Sometimes the CC as a whole will decide to overrule the caucus and insist. But that vote is also a warning light for CC and the national committee that maybe something is going wrong here, and should be more widely debated.

Our best industrial fractions (a union caucus) already work in this way. They manage to discipline our national union figures in a way the CC could not do by themselves. We need to dump the idea that a CC member who loses a vote has failed. They have not. They have learned. This needs to be seen as a normal part of discussion and democracy.

Within a united front, at every level, we also need to make sure that we only win votes by persuading people. So party members must be at most a quarter or a third of any united front committee. This means, locally and nationally, that we will sometimes lose important votes in a united front. If this never happens, you are probably moving to the right, or controlling the vote by bureaucratic means, or both.

Losing a few votes, and having a strong caucus, also allows us to put forward a specifically revolutionary alternative within a united front. Too often we find ourselves as the best people at holding together a broad coalition. That is essential, but can't be all we do.

Finally, the most important thing of all is to understand that the mass struggle for reform carries both the pressure to reformism and the possibility of revolution. This tension is both healthy and dangerous. It plays itself out between individuals in any serious revolutionary party. That's not anybody's fault. We cannot deal with it without wide and deep democracy.

TRADE UNION FRACTIONS

Many of our trade union members are already in organised union fractions in the party. What follows is a summary of how we think our union work should be best organised:

1. Union Fractions play a key role in developing and guiding our trade union work.

2. All members of the SWP need to play a leading role in the working class movement and therefore must be a member of the appropriate trade union for their work place.

3. To develop the maximum effectiveness of our work in the unions, party members need to meet regularly both nationally and locally.

4. There should be regular national fraction meetings of union members. Once a year, comrades should elect a national union convenor and a national steering committee who will work with the CC and the National Committee and report to the National Committee to develop our political presence in the union at every level and in workplaces.

5. Locally, trade union members should meet regularly to support and develop our work in the locality.

PROPOSAL FOR A STUDENT FRACTION AND FRACTION COMMITTEE

1) Since the creation of the Democracy Commission, a number of fractions and fraction committees have been established in the SWP to ensure that members can have genuine input, via democratic forums, into various aspects of the SWP's work

2) This is a positive development, and should be extended more broadly throughout the SWP. One such area it could be extended to is student work. At present, students are able to have some input into the direction of their work through national student caucuses, usually held once or twice per term. On a more local level, many students also have weekly caucuses in their university or college.

3) While these are useful forums to share experiences, they are often not suitable places for students to have a serious discussion on the SWP's work at a student level. Thus, the direction of student work up until recently generally tended to be formulated by the student office and was then put to national or

local caucuses for discussion.

4) However, it is vital that a political leadership is created among students and young people in the SWP in order that we can better engage in the very serious battles ahead around free education and proposed cuts, as well as co-ordinate, nationally and locally, our work in various campaigns, and in the National Union of Students.

5) It is therefore proposed here that a 'student fraction' and 'fraction committee' be formally created, as in other areas of the SWP's work. The direction of the SWP's student work should be developed by the SWP annual conference and implemented by the Central Committee and student office.

In this sense, the fraction committee should help implement and politically carry the SWP's perspective, have a general political overview of student work and debate and discuss the problems we face over the year.

6) Student Fraction

● This fraction would meet, say, at least once per term, and whenever necessary. It would be composed of all students in the SWP, and the student office.

● Where necessary, the fraction meetings would be divided into different parts (e.g. NUS, Stop the War, fighting cuts, etc.), so students are able to share experiences, but also have input into the direction of work in these areas.

● An agenda, to which students would be able to have input, would be sent out in advance.

● In order to facilitate student involvement on important issues, fractions may also occasionally take place at a regional level (e.g. South, Scotland, North).

7) Student Fraction Committee:

● This would be composed of, say, 12 students, and the student office. This number is small enough so that concrete proposals can be formulated around student work in general, but large enough so as not to only include a very small number of students.

● Election to this committee would take place annually at the start of the academic year, and would take place on an individual basis, with, say, candidates putting themselves forward for election at the first student fraction meeting of the year.

● It would meet on a regular basis. If it chooses, it may elect a chair, and would also send out an agenda in advance of its meetings.

● Members of this committee would be held to account by the student fraction and the wider party as a whole. The committee meetings would be open to all students in the SWP.

● If it is clear that disagreements on aspects of the SWP's student work have arisen in the committee, then these should be taken to the appropriate internal bodies (e.g. National Committee, Central Committee), as with other fractions in the SWP.

SECTION 3: THE CONDUCT OF DISCUSSION

(i) Use of the Internet

The use of the Internet to circulate documents became an increasingly controversial question in the lead-up to the last Conference. It was widely felt that emailing documents to a limited number of comrades was completely incompatible with the best of our democratic traditions.

The Democracy Commission believes that the following document, which it commissioned from Pete (Birmingham) and Martin (Manchester), provides a good framework for approaching the issue:

This is primarily a political question

There has been a problem for some time now with access to internal bulletins. As the result of an increasingly busy political world, it is no longer possible to personally distribute SW to every member, every week. As a result the distribution of the bulletin has become slow and sporadic. This contrasts with the distribution of Party Notes, which as a result of email becoming available to the majority of SWP members, is probably now more readily available than previously.

The leadership debate this year led to increased interest in the bulletins, but many comrades found the hard to get. Access to the IBs and the ability to discuss and contribute to them is a fundamental part of our Party's democracy.

The availability of some documents by email further skewed the problem. 'Contentious' articles were easy to come by for some of us, but the less contentious, and the CC bulletins, did not circulate. Some comrades openly complained about only receiving selected articles.

This was far from democratic and even further from being inclusive.

At conference and in the pre-conference IBs there has been some discussion about possible solutions to these problems using new technology, either through the increased distribution of the IBs and other internal documents via email, or by making such documents available online in some sort of protected way. In this contribution to the debate, we want to look at some of the problems with these ideas and some possible further ideas.

Problems with electronic distribution

However, this discussion precludes a wider debate. Historically, we have always seen the centre of our party's internal debate being our political structures – as our branches, our fraction organisation, national meetings and district aggregates.

Conference recently recognized that discussion in these arenas had become weaker than was needed in our party. We need to make sure that any discussion around using technology to improve access to information doesn't end up undermining the more important work of strengthening and building the party's basic structures.

There is a question, beyond the point of this contribution, about whether the bulletin should be selectively mailed to comrades. Comrades unable to attend their branches regularly, or engaged on work that means they are remote from a district might be prioritised for receiving internal documents through email/Internet. Though again, we must seek to improve and strengthen other sections of our organization (such as fraction meetings) to enable these comrades to take full part in discussions.

Much of the discussion about the role and the use of the Internet focus on technical features – secure sites, members only emails, discussion sites.

However the key to understanding the use of email and the Internet for the circulation of SWP documents is to consider the political angle. Any comrade who is given access to documents by email can forward them. Any access to secure Internet sites only works if you can trust everyone not to pass on access to others, or the documents they access.

For us, this is the largest problem with using new technology to improve access to the SWP's internal debates.

There are a number of obvious ways in which a leak could happen:

A disaffected existing member with a grudge. A new member who doesn't understand why we keep our debates to ourselves. A split in the organisation that leads to one side opening the debate to the wider movement. Someone deliberately entering the SWP to gain access to our documents and debate. A deliberate hack by someone hostile to the SWP.

The coverage given to SWP Internal Bulletins over the last couple of years shows that there is no longer any privacy for the SWP. Two years ago our documents were on the so called Socialist Unity site – they were scanned from a printed original. This year they were digital copies that had been leaked. However, while we cannot necessarily prevent this, we can do what we can to minimise the threat of material being leaked.

However we do have to accept that our internal discussions will be accessible to anybody, and we will not find a technical solution to this. This raises problems for democratic discussion.

Given the public availability of our documents this puts a number of comrades in difficulty. Contributing to them now raises the prospect of being googled by employers, union officials, workmates, Nazis. Some comrades may now fear their name appearing in a bulletin, in case their employer sees it. This all curtails our democracy.

Equally difficult will be our discussion about the role of other left wingers. An honest appraisal of the role of left wingers in a trade union or other campaign may lead to complications in our relationship with them.

Any references to comrade's names in articles could raise potential problems for that comrade. A comrade submitting an article should be made clear about this. There should be consideration given to a comrade's position before naming them in a document. The comrades compiling the IB should also be responsible for considering the sensitivities of having comrades named in articles.

Occasionally comrades need to write under pseudonyms – mostly where they travel to countries where they could be in danger, or put others in danger, sometimes because of their employment. Perhaps this should be considered under certain circumstances.

In summary the Internet has changed the political conditions within which our democracy operates, and we cannot go back. The public availability of our discussion documents is a fact. We have to limit the damage, and seize what opportunities there are.

Security and access

Almost everybody has email in the SWP. Many of us have several email addresses. Comrades are on Facebook and many other social networking sites. The potential for wide distribution of party literature, far wider than we have recently been able to achieve with printed literature, now exists. The question becomes: Which is the best option? And what would it be used for?

If we agree to electronic distribution of documents, certain questions occur. There would need to be rules on who could gain access to our documents. The biggest danger with this is creating a tiered membership structure. Do we give every new member access to our email/internet documents? Do we wait till they've paid one months subs, three months? On the other hand, do we want to exclude the keenest new members from the party's discussions?

Ordinarily any member who joins the party has equal rights in the party. So either upon joining you should be invited to register for electronic access to our documents, with all the security risks this entails, or you would have to have been vetted (by whom?), or have been a member for a certain amount of time, or paid subs... in which case there is some tiered membership being introduced.

We have raised these problems because we think these are real issues to be considered and debated. We do not necessarily think there is an easy solution to this.

Secure site?

We could build a password protected secure site where private documents could be available.

● When it was initially set up comrades could be invited to register.

● You would assume that at least a couple of thousand comrades would reg-

ister, which would be a significant task to administer on setup.

- There would then need to be maintenance of the site as new users came along.

- It would need to be necessary to remove people who left the party.

What would be done about those whose subs stopped? If they were cut off, would there be exceptions?

In all these cases there would be a price to pay – the financial cost of the comrade maintaining the website as well as the cost of operating it.

We raise this not to muddy the waters, but to explore how it would be maintained, and who would make the political decisions about its maintenance. Our personal experience of maintaining the SWP's databases makes us acutely aware of the time consuming nature of this activity.

If this was used to circulate IBs then how would comrades not on the system receive the bulletins?

The point of a secure site solution is to attempt to secure our IBs. It would take one breach to have made this fail. Clearly Weekly Worker have access to our Party Notes. If they have someone passing it on, this person could as easily pass on our documents, or their password.

It can be slow and time consuming to track down a breach of security, if indeed it can be done at all.

Email list

Comrades are already grouped in the membership database, by district and branch and union. If you are a paper organiser or branch secretary you can be emailed directly. Comrades can currently opt to get party notes by email.

As with the secure site solution we could ask comrades to register if they wanted to get IBs by email. The program can be written to exclude anybody who is unregistered. It could have rules built in about subs payment, if required. Once the program had been written then there would be the same necessary maintenance as above.

This system accepts that our bulletins are not secure. It concentrates on making sure that they get to as many comrades as want them. Though we again recognise that any such database carries with it an implicit cost, in time and money.

SWP rules of engagement

As already mentioned the distribution of documents by email became a free-for-all. The more contentious the comments, the more people passed it to their friends.

If we introduce a system of distribution of bulletins electronically then the rules governing bulletins should be extended. No comrade should be allowed to circulate documents during the conference discussion period except through the central procedure. There should be no exceptions to this.

There would need to be some definition of this. Where does a discussion amongst

like-minded comrades with similar ideas end and a discussion document begin?

Obviously it would be wrong to prevent comrades discussing pre-conference issues by email. But emailing documents to the wider membership should be seen as undermining our agreed procedures, with the implicit problems with accountability, accessibility and inclusivity, previously mentioned.

Regular bulletin

This is not specifically an IT item of discussion, more one about broader party discussion. Any decision on it could be completed by printed bulletins or electronic distribution.

Web based discussion

Many comrades have followed the blogs. Some run them.

There are some concerns about participation in blogs. Any member speaking in a public forum, meetings, demos etc, is accountable for their words and their actions. However when comrades participate in blog discussions there can be a loss of accountability, especially where the sites allow apparently anonymous contributors. Perhaps there should be some guidance to comrades about how they conduct themselves if they participate in these sites.

There are sites run by SWP members. Lenin's Tomb is well respected. Others are personal hobbies. Yet the question of accountability remains. Had an SWP member been running a site that became the focus of a discussion about the recent CC split, or had the site actively encouraged such a discussion, it could have had serious implications for the party – apparently legitimising a side in the split. How are comrades who run Internet sites or blogs to be held accountable to the wider party?

It is technically feasible to have an SWP members only discussion site. How it would be used, and by who, we would have to wait and see.

However the existing participation in blogs gives us some indication of participation. It tends to be by a smallish group of people with the time and the inclination. Regular access to the Internet is common in some jobs and not others, making participation uneven. Often the most active of SWP members are those least able or willing to wade through hundreds of emails or blog postings.

Additionally, such discussion sites often remove the debate from its context. In a branch or district meeting comrades can thrash out how a perspective applies to them. On the Internet, it can be harder to take account of differing situations.

This option would also only be as secure as the solutions discussed above. Anybody with a password could pass it on granting access to other people.

We think it would be a lot more trouble than it is worth. In times of crisis it may become a place where confusion could be

cleared up, or made worse. Surely at such times meetings are the place to deal with arguments.

However if we were to try a discussion site, it should be for a limited period, and its worth should be reviewed.

In summary

The Internet has changed the way in which we communicate. It is no longer possible for us to hold private discussions, if those discussions are written down. We have to decide how we are to deal with this.

Technical security is not really an option for an open organisation such as the SWP. Therefore we have to decide how to manage our use of the Internet.

(ii) Electronic Communication in the Party

Internal bulletins

1. Internal bulletins will continue to appear only during the Pre-conference period except in exceptional cases to be decided by the CC or NC.

2. Internal bulletins are the sole vehicle for general party discussions on perspectives. They are produced and circulated by the SWP National Office to ensure full accessibility to all party members.

3. The National Office will only ask for contributions to be edited for security, security of identity and libel.

4. Comrades are expected to maintain the conventions of fraternal debate, however polemical.

5. The IB will be sent out to email addresses (and in an electronic version for blind people) where the Centre has email addresses. Paper copies will be sent out on request.

6. Districts can make paper copies available to members as necessary.

SWP Web site

After Marxism a new SWP web site will be set up and maintained as an organising and information tool, and will include the following:

Party notes, Speakers' Notes, Socialist Review, ISJ, Marxism, Yearly Diary

(The centre will aim to produce a yearly diary so that comrades can plan ahead.)

(iii) Chairing meetings

The party organises a wide variety of meetings which range from small local fraction/caucus meetings to large rallies at Marxism, so chairing needs to be adapted to suit the needs of the meetings. Chairs should set the tone of meetings so that they are conducive to good discussion and debate. To quote from the preamble:

We debate in order to decide and act – and (this) 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: erring, i.e. minority, comrades should not in general be crushed to the point of humiliation. All party meetings – branch, district, national, CC, conference – should be conducted and chaired with this in mind.

Introduction

1. Introducing self, setting the framework of the meeting, explaining the agenda and how it is proposed the meeting will run.
2. If there are to be speakers slips, explain how this will work and that this is to ensure a balanced debate with all views being represented. The person responsible for organising the speakers slips should be introduced and visible to everyone.

Branch meetings

Everyone should be made to feel welcome and every attempt should be made to encourage new members and non-members to speak. This could mean allowing a little silence and not taking experienced speakers who should wait until discussion and discussions develop.

Time limits

These apply equally to all comrades. A speaker has the right to ask the chair for an extension and this can be put to a vote of the meeting.

Polemics without insults

If a speaker does start to rant about a comrade, they should be reminded that this is inappropriate and the chair should allow the comrade a right of reply.

Debates in the party

These need to be conducted according to the constitution and standing orders of conference.

(iv) Speaker slips

The speaker slip system has attracted a number of criticisms in the submissions made to the Democracy Commission. It may therefore be worth reiterating why the party started to use the system back in the late 1970s. There were two main reasons:

- To ensure a more balanced debate than if the selection of speakers were left up to the hit-or-miss process of the chair selecting those whom she or he noticed first among the comrades who stuck up their hands;

- To correct for the tendency of many chairs to pick people they know, which often introduces a bias in favour of older and male comrades.

The system has had the additional advantage at Marxism of avoiding the three members of the International Spartacist Tendency who stick their hands up immediately after the speaker being called one after another. (No system is perfect, though: once, despite the use of speaker's slips, three Sparts in a row were called in a big meeting in the

Logan Hall).

These are all good reasons, but there are still weaknesses in the system:

(1) It can look bad, appearing as if the debate is being manipulated by whoever is doing the slips;

(2) It can actually be bad: the debate actually is being manipulated;

(3) The spontaneity of a to-and-fro debate can be lost because comrades put in a slip early in a meeting to make sure they will be called and it's often hard to respond to points that come up in the discussion.

The Commission does not believe any of these reasons count decisively against the speaker slip system. Particularly at Marxism and at party Conferences and Councils a big effort is made to ensure that a broad range of views is expressed: indeed, a comrade who puts in a critical slip at any stage of the debate has a very good chance of being called.

But the problem of looking unfair is a real one. We suggest that this is addressed by getting the person doing the slips to sit at the front next to the chair and main speaker.

Then the selection of speakers is visible to all, and those who feel that they have a pressing point to make can identify the person whom they can talk to about getting called. This won't guarantee that everyone who wants to speak will be called (this is impossible in large meetings), but it will make the selection of slips less seem less furtive and hole-in-the-corner.

The Commission also believes that it's important to recognize that the speaker's slip system works best in specific contexts – that of big Marxism meetings and party delegate meetings. These are cases where selection of some kind is unavoidable and where achieving a balance among the speakers is important. In other cases the system can indeed be counter-productive.

In practice the party recognizes this – speaker slips aren't for used in smaller Marxism meetings – but we need to state the principles behind our practice more explicitly and make it more transparent.

MEMBERSHIP

Action

1. The Central Committee should continue to publish the Party's national membership figures in the Internal Bulletin (IB). From now on we should also publish the percentage of members who pay subs to the SWP.

2. The Central Committee should also continue to publish every month in Party Notes the number of people who joined the Party in the previous month, and continue to produce a table which breaks down recruitment figures by district, by

union (or if they are a student), the amount of subs they have agreed to pay and the percentage of members who pay by Direct Debit.

3. Every SWP branch and district should have a membership secretary.

If the SWP is going to grow and deepen its roots, every member has to take recruitment and retention seriously.

To help all of us assess how well the party is doing, it is important that comrades know the level of our membership, who is joining (students, trade unionists etc) and what financial commitment they are making to the SWP.

Over the past two years we have published the SWP's membership figures in the IB. We also publish every month in Party Notes the number of people who have joined the Party that month. We produce and publish a table breaking down the recruitment figures by district, by union, the amount of subs they have agreed to pay and the percentage of members who pay by Direct Debit.

Members have welcomed this. It enables branches, districts and fractions to assess how recruitment is going and identify problem areas. Never before has this level of detailed information about the party's membership been available to every member.

At present there are 5,800 registered members of the SWP. A registered member is a comrade who states that they wish to be a member of the organisation. Anyone who fails to pay subs or does make contact to indicate they wish to continue to be a member after two years is removed from our registered members list and placed on our unregistered list of members.

We now have a system whereby unregistered members are removed from our lists after they have been there for two years. We keep them on our records for this length of time in order to maximise the chances of pulling individuals back into activity. Branch lists are now a far more accurate reflection of our real membership.

Over the last few months we have seen a number of unregistered members return back to the organisation. There have been several examples of people who have been dismissed as merely "names on a list" until something happens in their area, a strike, occupation or protest, and suddenly these individuals reappear and throw themselves into activity and party work. We should never be in a hurry to write people off.

Last autumn, the membership department reintroduced the party membership card. This has gone down well with new members and a number of older comrades have asked for their own cards. On the card we have printed: "A member of the SWP is expected to pay regular subs and sell Socialist Worker". This is what we have to strive to achieve, but we don't want to turn away people or exclude from the organisation individuals who for what-

ever reason are unable to fulfil this.

At the moment 2,900 people, or 49 percent of SWP members, pay regular subs. This is too low and is something the membership office has worked hard at to improve (two years ago it was 41 percent). This figure is by no means the whole story. At any one time, a further 300 to 400 members subs are cancelled by their banks. The vast majority of these are for personal reasons - lack of funds being the most common.

If we are going to further increase the percentage of members who regularly pay subs, branches and districts are going to have to take this seriously. That means every branch should have a membership secretary. Their job is to promote recruitment, to help with retention of new members and last, but by no means least, to encourage members to pay regular subs.

Recruitment

Districts and branches have got to take recruitment seriously. That means once a month there should be a discussion on how recruitment is going, who are the key people we want to target to join us, and how to create a climate in the branch where recruitment becomes a major priority.

Over the last two years our rallies, public meetings and branch meetings have been an important arena for recruiting people to the party. We want to continue to organise such rallies and public meetings regularly in every district.

Our work among students remains central. As we have said time and time, again students and young people are the lifeblood of any revolutionary organisation.

We have to also re-learn to recruit on sales and demonstrations. There can be a danger that this can create a "revolving door" membership. But that does not have to be the case. The easiest way to make sure this doesn't happen is to ask people to fill out a Direct Debit and to get them involved in activity straight away.

The democracy commission has agreed that after conference, a new members' pamphlet will be produced.

It will explain, for example, how the party works, what the party's publications are, the party's structures and how to contact its various departments.

The pamphlet will be posted to new members along with the existing welcome pack.

Retention

Recruitment is only the first step. SWP branches have to fight to integrate every new member into the party. That means as soon as someone has joined they should be encouraged to (get involved in the day-to-day activities of the SWP. That means new members should be encouraged to sell Socialist Worker, attend and help organise

branch meetings and be encouraged to get involved in our united front work.

Our SWP branches are the key to retaining members, old or new. Without regular, dynamic and political meetings we will not hold members and we will not develop a layer of revolutionary cadre that can lead and shape the struggles of the future. Marxism, our day schools and educationals also play a vital role in educating members in the Marxist tradition and its application in the real world.

Branch meetings and the development of comrades

We should encourage more members to introduce branch meetings. As a rule of thumb, comrades should begin to prepare a meeting after they have been in the party for a year. This would lead members to read and so develop politically. More experienced members in their branch and district should give them help and support with this.

Districts - particularly those with organisers - should create speakers' lists, indicating what topics a comrade can speak on, and how experienced a speaker they are. Districts should swap these with neighbouring districts, and London organisers should collaborate on a Greater London list.

LGBT work

Fighting oppression is at the centre of our political tradition.

The last few years have seen renewed interest in our work on LGBT issues. We have increased coverage in our publications, organised stalls at Prides, held a members' school and initiated a mailing list. This work has developed a new layer of LGBT comrades.

We continue to intervene in trade union and NUS LGBT conferences, where we face sometimes complex debates, for example at NUS around queer politics.

Central to the success of our work has been the rejection of the identity politics that dominates much of the left. We don't accept that only those who experience and oppression can fight it, or that oppressed groups should be organised through special structures in the party. All members can fight sexism, racism and homophobia, and they have a duty to do so.

This approach will inform further work on LGBT issues. Among students we will prepare in more detail for NUS LGBT conference, and consider organising a college speaking tour about queer politics. We will publish a Rebels' Guide to sexual liberation. We will continue our work around trade union conferences, and will consider organising a second LGBT members' school.

Our goal in this is to promote our politics as the most effective way of fighting oppression, and develop a layer of confident LGBT members who can argue those politics in the movement.

3. General elections

General Election manifestoes of any electoral front in which we are involved must be discussed at draft stage by the NC, and agreed at final draft stage by the CC. If a General Election is called so suddenly that it's impossible or inappropriate to organise an NC, the final draft must at least be approved by the CC.

Why paying money matters

It is a fact that members who pay subs stick with the organisation. Two years ago we analysed the retention rates of those who joined the SWP. The results were startling. Around 90 percent of members who paid subs on a regular basis stayed in the organisation for more than a year. Conversely over 90 percent of those who did not agree to pay any subs left the organisation within their first year. Money matters - paying subs is a sign of new members' commitment to the organisation.

DISPUTES COMMITTEE

The Disputes Committee's is the body elected at National conference whose role is to oversee the discipline and general well being of the Party.

It will be made up of elected members and up to two CC nominees.

The cases heard by the Disputes Committee tend to fall loosely into two quite different categories.

One is breaking the rules of the Party by factionalising, disrupting, speaking in public against an agreed line, voting counter to party instructions at union meetings, taking posts against Party instructions etc.

The other is personal conflict, physical or verbal violence, domestic conflicts, sexual assaults etc.

These differences require somewhat different procedures.

At the moment there is no formal Disputes Committee procedure written down, and the body seems to have operated on a custom and practice basis. Some of this practice needs to be clarified or changed.

The areas looked at here are

1. Referral - who can do it
2. Can the chair/committee rule cases out.
3. Evidence presented in advance
4. Should the person who the case is against be able to hear the whole case
5. Non-party witnesses
6. Written report-summary
7. Should the committee meet and if so how often
8. Ratification
9. some general rules or guidelines

Referral

The CC should still remain the main point of referral. Problems in districts/branches or with individuals should first be examined by the CC and then referred to the Disputes Committee if they deem it necessary.

The exception to this would be if someone wished to take a CC member/full timer before the disputes committee where they could do this directly.

Ruling cases out:

The committee may rule cases out if it deems any of the following to be the case

1. The complaint is Frivolous
2. That based on the evidence presented in the case there is no case to answer
3. That the comrade concerned is trying to use the committee to win battles already lost in the democratic processes of the party.

Evidence in advance

There should be a written case presented in advance to the comrade being charged.

The exceptions to this being where there are very sensitive personal issues involved, or there could be wider legal implications for the comrade being charged. In these circumstances, the case should be presented orally to the comrade in advance of the hearing.

Should the person who the case is against be able to hear the whole case?

Whilst direct confrontation between a comrade being charged and a witness will not be permissible the comrade charged should be in the room when evidence is being given. The comrade being charged can request the right to ask questions of a witness. The Disputes Committee will then rule whether the right should be granted.

A witness could have the right to ask to give a particular piece of evidence in private and the Disputes Committee will give a ruling as to whether that is appropriate.

Again there could be cases of a highly sensitive or personal nature where the Disputes Committee could rule that it be necessary the parties don't meet.

Non-party witnesses

The Disputes Committee can in exceptional circumstances and where they deem it necessary agree to hear non party witnesses.

Written report-summary

The Comrade charged and the comrade/s making the charge should be given a written report on the Disputes Committee findings – it can also act as the basis for the conference report of the case.

Should the committee meet and if so how often?

The Committee should formerly meet at least once a year just before or at the beginning of conference, or shortly after when

the new committee is elected. This would allow the Committee to ensure procedures were reviewed and that the whole committee was up to speed with its activities.

Ratification and appeal

The CC provisionally ratifies decisions of the Disputes Committee. Findings can be appealed or finally ratified at National Conference

Some general rules or guidelines

Disputes Committee members should not become involved in debates about any individual's membership/behaviour if they believe it is likely that that individual will shortly be appearing before them, unless they are doing so in their role as member of the Disputes Committee.

Any member appearing before the disputes committee may state why they think an individual member of the committee should not be part of their hearing. The Disputes Committee will then rule whether that member be excused from being part of the hearing or remain part of it.

TWO MOTIONS ON "NO PLATFORM"

The first motion (BNP and No Platform) was passed by the NC and at October's Party Council overwhelmingly.

The second motion (In defence of No Platform for Nazis) was submitted to Party Council and was overwhelmingly defeated, with 11 votes in favour.

BNP and No Platform

1. The national committee notes the shock and anger when the BNP won two seats in the European elections earlier this year.

2. Since then UAF has been building up the pressure on the BNP with protests from the egging of Nick Griffin outside parliament to the kettling of the Red white and Blue festival in Codnor. There have also been two successful counter protests against the English Defence League in Birmingham.

3. The decision of the BBC to invite Nick Griffin to appear on Questiontime has led to a groundswell of anger.

4. The Labour Party will now drop its opposition to sitting on panels with BNP members—they will put a representative up on the Question Time panel.

5. The BBC has indicated that UAF may be invited on the panel.

6. SWP members in UAF will refuse to appear on a panel with Nick Griffin.

7. We will redouble our efforts to win the case for no platform for the BNP in the media and build the UAF campaign of protests and pickets to challenge the BBC's decision – "Pull the plugs on the BNP thugs".

In defence of No Platform for Nazis

Party Council notes:

1. The SWP is currently engaged in an important campaign to deny the BNP a public platform in the media and elsewhere. We are campaigning against Nick Griffin being invited onto the BBC's Question Time.

2. But at the last two National Committee meetings of the SWP a majority of the CC who spoke argued that the SWP should be prepared in the future to debate with members of the BNP in the media after Nick Griffin appears on Question Time on October 22nd, thus abandoning the No Platform position.

3. A majority of NC members who spoke supported this position, despite the fact that the last NC reaffirmed No Platform for the moment.

4. The only public reference to this change of position has been a letter from John Molyneux in Socialist Worker (13th June) arguing that we should abandon the No Platform position.

5. The justification for this reversal of the SWP's traditional stance is that the election of two BNP MEPs and the change in the policy of the BBC means that we have to change our tactics and debate with the BNP. John Molyneux argues that Gramsci had to debate with Fascists in the Italian parliament in the 1920s and that we should adopt the same tactic.

6. The BBC has never operated a No Platform policy for the BNP. The BNP have already appeared on the BBC main news, Newsnight, the Today programme, the Moral Maze and so on. The only change is to extend this policy to Question Time.

7. A large majority of people in the Metro newspaper poll supported the No Platform position. There have been letters and articles in the press from a range of people defending No Platform, including right wing Labour MP Denis McShane.

Party Council believes:

1. That the election of two BNP MEPs and the change in policy by the BBC does not mark a significant enough shift in the balance of forces between the left and the BNP to justify abandoning No Platform.

2. The return of the BNP to the streets in the guise of the English Defence League actually marks an opportunity to defend No Platform on the grounds that the BNP are really the street thugs that we always said they were.

3. The analogy with Gramsci's situation is inaccurate. The Italian working class had seen a general strike smashed by the Fascists, left wing organisations attacked by over 2,000 fascist squads, their offices burnt out and 35 fascist MPs elected to the Italian parliament. Nothing resembling this situation exists in Britain today.

4. Labour and other mainstream parties are going along with this development for their own opportunist reasons. This will aid the BNP. If we do not defend No Platform in the media this will weaken the resistance, not strengthen it.

5. The BNP will not be beaten by 'clever' debates. What they want is legitimacy. If we appear with them, even if we win the argument, we lose the real battle because we add to their legitimacy. The principle at stake here is that the BNP should not be regarded as a legitimate bourgeois party.

6. If we abandon No Platform in the media it will open up the space for an attack on No Platform in the colleges and NUS, in the unions, the civil service and other public bodies. It will be much harder to ban Nazis from various professions and expel them from unions. Everyone from the BNP themselves to the liberals will say 'if you debate them on TV, why not here?'

7. Revolutionaries will not be the main people debating the BNP. The media will choose cabinet ministers and MPs (Jack Straw is going on Question Time) and they will continue to do so whether or not we put ourselves forward to debate the BNP.

8. Maintaining the No Platform policy does not mean that we are excluded from the media. Most of the media accept that we will be interviewed, often directly after a BNP spokesperson, and do not require that we share a platform with the Nazis.

Party Council resolves:

1. That we should maintain our full No Platform for Nazis policy.

2. That we should campaign in the movement against the Nazis and in the unions to sustain this policy.

**William Alderson, Richard Allday
Elly Badcock, Sian Barrett,
Alex Brooke, Andy Brown,
Jane Claveley, Kate Connelly,
Margie Corcoran, Adam Cornell,
Adrian Cousins, Kevin Deane,
Anita de Klerk, Tracy Dodds,
Noel Douglas, Tony Dowling,
Gary Duncan, Sam Fairbairn,
Neil Faulkner, Des Freedman,
Lindsey German, Dave Goodfield,
Jo Gough, Elaine Graham-Leigh,
Louise Harrison, Madeline
Heneghan, Joe Henry, Penny Hicks,
Dave Holes, David Hughes, Feyzi
Ismail, Gerry Jones, Spencer
Jordan, Rachel Kendall, David
Lowden, Naz Massoumi, Narzanin
Massoumi, David McAllister,
Jack McGlen, Caron McKenna,
Brendan Montague**

**Viva Msimang, Jackie Mulhallen,
Katya Nasim, Chris Newlove,
Chris Nineham, Jesse Oldershaw,
Edmund Quinn, John Rees,
Matthew Richards, Andrew
Robbins, Mark Smith, Alex
Snowdon, Alliya Stennett, Lindy
Syson, Guy Taylor, Vladimir
Unkovski-Korica, Paul Vernell,
Carole Vincent, John Whearty,
Gordon White, Tom Whittaker,
Somaye Zadeh, Andreja Zivkovic**

National Committee elections

EVERY YEAR at SWP annual conference delegates elect a national executive committee of fifty members. This body meets between four and six times a year to discuss key questions the organisation faces and to assess our work.

Those elected to the NC also attend Party Councils and the Party Conference by right.

In the past nominations have been taken at the conference itself. This means the elections can be hurried and give delegates little time to decide who they would like to elect to the NC, and give the districts and branches no time to discuss the overall balance of the NC.

This year we are calling for nominations for the NC in

internal conference bulletins (IBs) 1 and 2. All nominations must be received by 12 noon on Friday 27 November.

A full list of the nominations will be published in IB 3. This will give branches and districts time to decide who they wish to elect.

Below is the nomination form. Each nomination has to be supported by five com-

rades, and the nominee has to agree to be nominated.

To be on the National Committee you have to be a registered member of the SWP and up to date with your subs (this also applies to the comrades nominating the candidate). We are asking each candidate to submit 50 words explaining why they should be on the NC.

Nominee.....

Branch

Nominated by

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Please give a brief outline of why you should be on the NC (no more than 50 words)

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.....
.....
.....

Please return this form to:
Martin Smith, PO Box 42184, London SW8 2WD.
Or email the required information to: martins@swp.org.uk