

*10TH AWL CONFERENCE (30TH OF OUR
TENDENCY): 8-9 MAY 2004, LONDON*

ALLIANCE FOR WORKERS' LIBERTY

**MOTIONS PASSED, DEFEATED, REMITTED,
AND WITHDRAWN**

- **IRAQ AND US WORLD POLICY**
- **THE HIJAB AND THE LAW**
- **THE LABOUR MOVEMENT**
- **BUILDING THE AWL**

£2.00

ALLIANCE FOR WORKERS' LIBERTY

CONFERENCE 8-9 MAY 2004

MOTIONS CARRIED

STANDING ORDERS REPORT

Proposal from the outgoing EC that the size of the new National Committee be 23 (same as the old one).

Passed nem con.

Proposal from the outgoing EC that we elect a Nominating Commission for the National Committee elections.

Passed nem con.

IRAQ AND US WORLD POLICY

Additional motion to update to 17/04/04

1. We condemn the US military action at Fallujah and elsewhere, which has resulted in many deaths - in Fallujah 600-700, many of them non-combatants.

2. But we reject the idea that what we are seeing is an 'uprising of the Iraqi people'. It is an 'uprising' by specific, reactionary political movements.

3. We oppose both the guerrilla resistance in Fallujah and the Jaish al-Mahdi of Muqtada as-Sadr. These are reactionary, fascist forces.

4. We are for building solidarity with all democratic, working class movements against both the occupation and the fascist resistance. We support workers' organisations taking steps to defend themselves, including the formation of defence councils or workers' militias.

Agreed unanimously

Main text (National Committee)

1. The AWL opposed the US-led war against Iraq in March-April 2003. We did so, fundamentally, because of the record and nature of American and British imperialism. Specifically:

i) we could not trust these forces to destroy Ba'thist despotism without enormous loss of civilian life;

ii) nor could we trust them to bring democracy to Iraq, or not to drag the country, over time, into a quagmire of spiralling reaction;

iii) the war aims of the US were primarily to do with its economic and geopolitical (imperialist) interests, rather than the freedom and wellbeing of the peoples of Iraq.

iv) The world framework for the war is one of the imperialism of free trade, or, in Ellen Wood's phrase, the empire of capital. This is a form of domination of the weak by the strong distinct from the colonial imperialism which reached its height between the 1880s and World War 2. It operates through market mechanisms. The working of those market mechanisms is shaped and regulated by a network of state and interstate institutions dominated by cartels of the most powerful states and keystone by the hyperpower of the USA.

2. The Iraq war was undertaken by a US administration, backed by Blair, which was committed to unilateral action and openly contemptuous of the multilateral structures (the UN, etc) created since World War Two. The dominant sections of the US ruling class see the assertion of unilateral American military power as the essential effective means to shape and police the worldwide "empire of capital" (and in the process to grab many of the juicier fruits for US interests). Other big capitalist states, notably those of the EU, share the strategic framework of the "empire of capital", but would prefer to see it shaped with more negotiation, consultation, diplomatic and economic pressure, etc., allowing them greater input, rather than US military force. Several EU powers (Britain, Spain, Italy, Netherlands) decided nevertheless that the lesser evil, from their point of view, was to ally with the USA. France and Germany opposed the USA's Iraq war (in a limited way: the German government never proposed any restrictions on the USA's ability to use its bases in Germany for the war). That opposition reflected fundamental tensions between US hyperpower and the EU. The tensions will continue. Nevertheless, the US administration is being forced back towards a more multilateralist stance by its difficulties in Iraq; and US hegemony is unchallengeable for the near future. The war was not a proxy conflict between euro and dollar, but an exercise in US hyperpower.

3. The claimed reasons for war were Iraq's possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and links between Iraq and al Qaeda. Neither links to bin Laden nor WMD have been discovered. As a result there is widespread scepticism, internationally, but including in Britain and the USA, about the motives for war. Probably Bush et al, and Blair ('sexing up' notwithstanding) did believe some of their public case about WMD: certainly, if they knew it to be entirely false, and that no WMD at all would be discovered, they were extremely and inexplicably stupid. Nevertheless, WMD and al Qaeda were only ever an 'excuse', not a real reason (a 'bureaucratic reason' as Rumsfeld was to put it) for war.

4. The right wing in the US administration, in particular the group known as 'neo-conservatives' had long been agitating for 'regime change' in Iraq. Ever since the origins of the world oil industry, the world's big powers have kept the Gulf under supervision, first by Britain, then by the USA. In 1980 the USA proclaimed the "Carter Doctrine", stating that the USA would intervene to prevent any other power dominating the Gulf. After Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the USA feared he could establish Iraq as the dominant regional imperialism. Over the 1990s their policy was, by sanctions, to weaken and contain Iraq, and to prepare the conditions for a palace coup by which a pliant general would replace Saddam. Bolder or more reckless types in the US ruling class argued for sending in US troops. The terrorist atrocities on 9/11 created a public consensus in the US which made war possible; the speedy and successful war in Afghanistan boosted this process. US strategists were concerned that the strategy of 'containing' Saddam had failed, and that in time Iraq would re-emerge as a local power in a strategically vital region. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world, after Saudi Arabia - the latter a staunch American ally, but facing internal instability and crisis.

5. Moreover, the more far-sighted (and/or ideological) US strategists believed that the parlous state of the Middle East was a major cause of the Islamist terrorism which had attacked the US. They had resolved to 'sort out' the Middle East, meaning in the first place Iraq, Iran (both placed by George W Bush on the 'axis of evil' along with N Korea), and Syria; but also the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These US strategists - which includes those centred around the neo-conservative Project for a New American Century - see spreading 'American values' globally as the central mission of US foreign policy.

5a. As part of a project to reshape and restabilise the Middle East, the USA proposed a road map for the Israel/Palestine problem. They want to promote political change elsewhere, notably in Syria. Given their difficulties in Iraq, they are likely for the present to avoid risky moves and confine themselves to limited diplomatic and economic pressure elsewhere, of the sort for which they have recently claimed a triumph in Libya. They have left the Israel-Palestine road map to languish, at least for the moment. New US wars against Syria and Iran, predicted by many anti-war activists as following soon after Iraq, are unlikely any time soon. The 2003 Iraq war, if we include its immediate aftermath, as we must, has not gone anywhere near as smoothly for the USA as the previous three (1991 Kuwait, 1999 Kosova, 2001 Afghanistan), which were wars of a type unprecedented in world history, giving it definitive victories with almost no casualties on its own side. The US ruling class will not quickly want another Iraq. It does not follow that they will not return to bombs and missiles at the next stage but one; nor does it follow that they will, or safely can, give up on the whole project of reshaping the Middle East on neo-liberal lines.

6. We were opposed to the Ba'hist dictatorship in Iraq, and for its overthrow - by the working class and peoples of Iraq. The resolution we passed at the AWL AGM 2003 read: 'Whatever about Bush's hypocrisy, Saddam's regime is 'really' as evil and as terrorist as any on earth. This position would not change in the event of a US invasion or conquest. Saddam's resistance to the US would not be motivated by a defence of the Iraqi peoples' rights to self-determination, but by the rationale of the self-preservation of his regime, including its repression of the Kurds and other minorities. We oppose the US war plans, not in the name of support for the Iraqi regime, but in the name of international democracy and working-class solidarity.' We stand by this a year on, after the fall of the regime.

7. In the event, the war cost fewer lives than we feared, or than many aid agencies and others were predicting. (Certainly, the regime was responsible for a great many more deaths). But we were right not to trust the US and the UK in advance. Nor is it our place as British socialists to calculate acceptable numbers of casualties in such a war. The deaths in the full-scale war were relatively small only because of very quick collapse of the elite troops of the Ba'hist regime, and it is now clear that many of those retreated so fast only to conserve their forces for subsequent guerrilla resistance. The USA's war against that guerrilla resistance has killed and will kill further thousands of Iraqi civilians. Many supporters of the war point to Iraqi opposition groups who also advocated war; this was the argument of Labour MP Ann Clwyd, who is a long-standing supporter of the Kurds. But other opposition groups and individuals did not support war. There was no blanket view from the Iraqi opposition; and many of those advocating war were politically bankrupt bourgeois forces.

8. The Ba'hist regime was overthrown by the US/UK invading forces in April 2003. We welcome the fall of that regime, notwithstanding the means of its fall.

9. We oppose the US/UK occupation of Iraq; but there is no simple equivalence between the occupation and the dictatorship. On the level of democratic freedoms, there is no question that things are better now. There are numerous newspapers, political parties, public demonstrations (which are not gunned down) etc. That situation is fragile, and we do not endorse the war or the occupation politically. But crudely, if we had to make a choice for the lesser evil, the lesser evil won the war. Still, it was an evil.

10. Advisers had suggested to the American administration that especially in the mainly Shia south, the population would rise up in support of the invading armies. This did not occur. The mass of the population remained passive during the period of 'official' war, and has largely remained passive since then - although the turn to mass demonstrations launched by Ayatollah Sistani in January 2004 represents a significant shift on the part of the Shia majority. The military resistance was by the armed forces of the Ba'hist state and its paramilitary supplements ('Fedayeen Saddam', etc). These military forces were quickly defeated, and 'dissolved' into the population without formal surrender.

11. The major exception to this pattern was the Kurds, whose peshmergas fought with the US forces.

12. The immediate effect of the fall of the Ba'hist dictatorship was rapid social disintegration - looting, mass unemployment, etc. The basic infrastructure of the country - health services, water, electricity, fuel, etc - had been ravaged by years of war and sanctions and emerged from the war close to collapse. A year on, many of these infrastructural elements are still barely working again.

12a. There has been a breakdown in law and order - a huge number of murders, abductions, rapes, etc, so that ordinary Iraqis repeatedly report that their major concern in the new Iraq is the lack of personal security. Added to this is insecurity caused by the insurgency, bombs which kill civilians, suicide bombs, etc.

13. In the opinion of many of its own advisers and of academic experts close to the Pentagon, the US administration planned well for the war but badly for the 'peace'. Its first 'civilian administrator', a retired general close to the 'neo-conservatives' was sacked; it has gone through several plans for moving towards Iraqi self-rule and democracy which have been abandoned or modified.

14. For most of the previous decade, US policy was to secure 'regime change' via the bourgeois opposition, in one way or another; this policy failed disastrously. Much of the US administration, by 2003, had grown hostile, in fact, to the main opposition forces. Various oppositionists, moreover, provided the US with entirely faulty intelligence - most importantly on levels of likely popular support for invasion and occupation, and on the existence and whereabouts of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

15. For the US occupying forces, creating a credible Iraqi government became an urgent and difficult task. The Interim Governing Council, which was assembled in June by Bremer, in fact managed to unite most of the main opposition groups. Specifically, it included: the Iraqi National Congress of Ahmed Chalabi, the group which had been most favoured by the Pentagon and the neo-cons in the '90s; the Iraq National Accord of Ayad Alawi, a former Ba'hist; the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an Iranian-backed group with a large militia; the Communist Party; Hizbullah, an Islamist movement based on the 'marsh Arabs' who had been heavily persecuted by Saddam; and the two Kurdish nationalist parties, the KDP and PUK. Its 25 members included a number of other important individuals.

16. The IGC - an unelected body - was set up by the American occupying forces (the CPA) to reflect the ethnic and religious divisions in Iraq, its members intended to represent these different constituents (Shia, Kurd, Turkoman, Assyrian, Sunni) rather than political ones (eg, the CP's representative is officially there as a Shia). It thereby enshrined those divisions.

17. Many of its components had no real base in Iraq at all; most of its members were former exiles. The IGC has proved largely ineffective. Its meetings have been poorly attended, and its members criticised for lining their own pockets. Many of its members oppose free elections because they know few people will vote for them.

18. The two main Kurdish parties (KDP and PUK), which are both represented in the IGC, are notably distinct. They are genuine mass parties - although with strong tribal elements, and with records of forming alliances with reactionary forces (the Iranian government - the Shah, and the Islamic Republic; and indeed Saddam). They supported the war partly out of a desire to get rid of Saddam, who was responsible for vast numbers of Kurdish deaths, and partly to be included in the inevitable pax Americana. They have been involved in the IGC for the same reason. While we give the Kurdish nationalist parties no general political support, we do not denounce them for this participation.

19. Many of the elements in the IGC - especially SCIRI and the INA - are plainly and flatly reactionary. More recently, under Islamist pressure, the IGC has abolished some secular laws and introduced the Shari'a.

20. Important political forces remained outside the IGC. Aside from the Ba'athists and other elements in the armed 'resistance' (see below), these were: the movement associated with Muqtada al-Sadr, a militant cleric with a base especially among the Shia poor of Baghdad and other cities; and the highest Shia authority in Iraq, Ayatollah Sistani. Al-Sadr remained opposed to the US, though was not calling for armed resistance (he later even toned down the calls for non-violent resistance for fear of arrest). But his movement is a militant Islamist group which has carried out violent assaults and murders on religious rivals. Sistani is a more liberal Islamist who favours elections. He wants a constitution based on the Shari'a, but on a traditionalist, rather than jihadi basis. Sistani comes from a quietist Shia tradition; but his recent decision to enter politics, through mass mobilisations demanding elections is very significant: it demonstrates the power of the religious leadership of the Shia, anxious to exert what they see as their entitlement given that the Shia are a majority (at least 60% of the population).

21. While the Kurds have remained allies of the US, and the Shias - even the most radical - have either joined the IGC or opposed the occupation on a 'political' basis, the armed 'resistance' is based in the 'Sunni triangle' in central Iraq. As the occupation has become more unpopular - and as efforts to defeat the insurgency have led the occupying armies to be more repressive - broader forces have probably joined up with the 'resistance'. But there seems little doubt that its core, its best organised components, are those who are loyal to the old regime (much of the resistance must be those Republican Guard, Special Republican Guard, Fedayeen Saddam and Ba'ath Party militia who 'dissolved' and disappeared in April 2003), or who are fighting to preserve the historical privileges of Sunnis in the face of a Shia majority taking power (which it would be likely to do in an election, or as the result of armed sectarian conflict).

22. In addition there seem to be some foreign Islamists aiming to turn Iraq into the new 'jihad' on the model of Afghan resistance to the USSR. These forces, most likely, are responsible for the suicide bombings. It is hard to judge their size and influence (some experts argue it is very little).

23. The 'resistance', consequently, does not constitute a national liberation movement. Our 2003 AGM resolution stated:

"Out of this US/Iraq war could develop a political quagmire which would open up a whole new chapter in the history of imperialism. After an initial success against Saddam Hussein, the USA could get drawn into trying to impose effective (if not formal) colonial rule on Iraq, by way of heavy involvement by the US military to suppress mass popular resistance to a replacement regime which lacks a domestic political base and becomes in effect just a puppet government. In that possible future situation, we would give support to genuine popular resistance in the name of self-determination." While we do not rule out the possibility that events might yet evolve according to that picture, so far they have not.

24. The 'resistance' to US/UK occupation - meaning the armed insurgency, as opposed to mass demonstrations, etc - is reactionary. As things stand, the occupation cannot accurately be called 'colonial'. The conflict is more one between the globocop of the empire of capital and local mafias and gangs. That might change (see below.)

25. Post-Saddam Iraq, as a result, is in danger of being consumed by reactionary forces - various kinds of Islamist on the one hand, sectarian Sunni nationalists and Ba'athists on the other, and the US and British armies becoming increasingly repressive as the security situation spirals out of their control. There is also a large element of organised crime. The growth of democratic, secular, and working class forces is therefore an urgent need for Iraqi society.

26. If one 'American value' is democracy (of a limited and bourgeois sort), another is 'free trade' and the 'free market'. Globalisation has meant the twin penetration of most of the world of these 'values'. The Middle East as a whole remains, by the standards of this process of globalisation, backward: there are few bourgeois democracies. Regimes across the region have been in power for decades. The reshaping of Iraq, and the establishment of some sort of limited democracy there, is seen as the first stage of a process which will sweep the region. This is the neo-con project. Bush has more and more openly identified with it.

27. The USA's objective in Iraq is to reshape it on neo-liberal lines, with a stable regime well integrated into the global market, open to the multinationals, and having the elasticity given to it by at least some limited form of parliamentary democracy. In fact, freedom in the market established since the fall of Saddam is the freedom for the best-placed big US corporations to grab profits. Contracts for the reconstruction of the country have been awarded to major US corporations (often without competitive bidding); some of those corporations, notably the giant oil servicing firm Halliburton, have close links with the personnel of the Bush administration. Laws were passed by the occupying authorities in September 2003 to allow the privatisation of Iraqi industry (though not oil), and the repatriation of profits by foreign companies.

28. The prospect then at best, under occupation, is of economic reconstruction along the pattern of globalisation everywhere - a widening gap between rich and poor (in the worst case scenario, this merges with the Sunni/Shia divide, exacerbating sectarian conflict) with multinational corporations making superprofits if they can stabilise the country sufficiently.

29. The US (Coalition Provisional Authority) has kept in place Ba'athist legislation outlawing independent unions precisely to keep weapons against resistance to this privatisation/'free' market/globalisation drive.

30. The US has not, in any case, brought democracy to Iraq. Aside from the undemocratic nature of the Interim Governing

Council, the US' 'exit' plans - by which sovereignty would be handed over to Iraqis - have run into serious difficulties. The most recent version of such plans involved establishing a 'parliament' via local assemblies of tribal leaders, etc, which would then draft a constitution. Ayatollah Sistani has declared this unacceptable, and insisted there must be direct elections. In January 2004, there were the largest demonstrations to date, in Basra, in support of Sistani's demands.

31. The US would certainly like to find some way to hand over authority to Iraqis, and (gradually) withdraw its military forces. This looks harder in practice. The possibility remains that the US and its UK allies could get bogged down in Iraq for a long time; or they might look to some other, non-democratic way to hand over 'authority' (e.g. covertly sponsoring a coup of some kind through which a general takes power who is able to appear as not simply US-imposed but can be guaranteed to work within rules acceptable to the USA).

32. Or perhaps they will manage the transition successfully. There are historical precedents for American-dominated military occupation leading to the creation of functioning, prosperous bourgeois democracies - Europe and Japan after the Second World War. In Taiwan and South Korea, US occupation led first to military-dominated authoritarian regimes - standing on the social base provided by extremely radical land reforms - and then, after decades, to an evolution towards bourgeois democracy. The parallels are limited: there was nothing comparable to the Iraqi 'resistance' in the post-war period; the scale of the devastation - and of the economies which had suffered it - was far greater. But Marxists in the late forties believed that the victors in 1945 were incapable of anything except further dictatorship, and they were wrong. We should not make the same mistake. The US Congress has agreed a vast amount of money already to reconstruct Iraq (\$87b), which will certainly prove inadequate. There are attendant political problems with attempting an Iraqi version of the post-1945 Marshall Plan; but it is in US interests to stabilise - from their point of view - the Middle East.

32A. Whichever option is chosen by the US, struggles for democratic demands (e.g. Constituent Assembly, rights to assembly, free press, political and trade union organisation, women's rights) will play an important role in creating a space for left, democratic and workers' organisations to exist and in building support for them. In the factories, immediate issues of workers' control have also already risen in the aftermath of the war. Left and democratic organisations are therefore right to place demands on the occupation authorities, rather than just calling for them to 'get out'.

33. Even if US imperialism successfully brings bourgeois democracy to Iraq, or elsewhere, we do not give it our political support. Even if they fulfil their promise (as, e.g., in Bush's speech on his British visit) to oppose tyrannies, including those tyrannies they have previously supported, we do not - and advocate that the working class does not - give them any political support. In any case, without an available and tractable alternative, the US will not simply turn on such allies as the Saudi ruling family or the Egyptian government. But we do not mindlessly insist that no democratic change, no progress of this sort, is possible at all under US hegemony. Rather we look to rally and politically arm the working class of the region, and the world, in whatever changing circumstances arise.

34. As noted above, in the past few months there has been a major turn towards active political engagement by the Shia religious leadership around Sistani, demanding elections. Sistani does not favour clerical rule on the Iranian model; nor is he a militant Islamist like Muqtada al-Sadr. Still, he is a religious

leader, and a government of Sistani's followers would not constitute a democratic alternative to occupation.

35. We support the call for free elections; socialists and working class organisations will need rigorously to contest the territory currently being claimed by the Shia leadership as champions of direct democracy on a national level.

36. We support free elections, and warn the working class to prepare to resist a government in which Sistani or his followers constituted a majority element. We do not oppose elections on the grounds that such a government might result.

37. The working class in Iraq was a major force in the 1950s, politically dominated by the Communist Party. The CP was crushed in the 1963 coup that overthrew Qassem and briefly brought the Ba'ath, effectively, to power. The Ba'ath seized power once more, and this time by itself, in 1968. Independent working class activity was crushed in 1963, and never revived. The CP survived, and - to its shame - joined a 'coalition' government with the Ba'ath in the early seventies. Then the Ba'ath turned on them and drove them into exile. (Until the fall of Saddam it was widely believed that the CP was terminally discredited; this seems not to have been true). The Ba'ath dictatorship savagely repressed the working class, arresting, torturing and murdering trade union and political activists.

38. The fall of the dictatorship in 2003 posed immediate questions for the Iraqi working class, on political and economic levels: mass unemployment, non-payment of wages, health care, etc, along with questions of democracy, women's rights, and so on. After 40 years of repression, it is not surprising that working class activity in the form of trade unions, etc, took a while to revive.

39. There has been some (underreported) working class action in the form of strikes, sit-ins, etc - in Basra, in some of the oil fields, in Baghdad, etc. There have been a number of trade union initiatives.

i) the most significant seems to be the Iraq Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), with its offices in Baghdad - which were raided and closed by the military authorities in December 2003. This seems to be an initiative of the CP - which has a representative in the IGC, and which therefore is pushing for the IFTU to have official recognition in some form.

ii) But there are a number of independent unions, most significantly those connected to the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq. The Union of Unemployed in Iraq (UII) claims some tens of thousands of members. The Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq is a federation of unions some of which appear to be independent of the WCPI.

40. This workers' movement is only just emerging from decades of dictatorship - and faces many difficulties, not least that a lot of Iraqi workers identify 'trade unions' with the regime, which foisted 'yellow unions' on them. (It must also be a problem that the regime, and its ruling party, called itself socialist).

41. Our main task is to build solidarity with this workers' movement. We have launched some activity in this regard, but we need to do more of it and coordinate it on a national level.

42. The Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI) has emerged as the major - indeed, the only - force recognisably of the 'far left' in Iraq. Linked to a 'sister party' in Iran, the WCPI is a group at a tangent from most of the revolutionary left internationally, neither emerging from Stalinism in some form,

nor really from Trotskyism. (Mansour Hekmat, the late 'leader' of the WCP Iran, and the WCP Iraq, was involved in the Yaffeite RCG in the 1970s. But 'Worker-communism' sees Trotskyism as in effect only a variant of Stalinism). Their initiatives such as the UUI are positive, and for sure they must be drawing some of the best militants in Iraq around them. Yet they seem to have quite rigid and sectarian conceptions; and the Iranian group is regarded with deep suspicion by other Iranian socialists (at one point it shared a TV station with a pro-Shah group). We should continue discussions with them. But we should certainly not allow our solidarity to work to be tied to them or their initiatives exclusively.

43. Our 2003 AGM resolution stated: 'We would express our opposition to a colonial policy or puppet government by making slogans such as 'self-determination', 'no imposed regime in Iraq' and 'democratic rights for the Iraqi peoples' prominent in our agitation, in addition to our previous slogans such as 'no to war', 'stop the war'. Given that this war certainly involves, one way or another, a US conquest of Iraq, we are for troops out of Iraq in pretty much any likely immediate situation; "troops out" would become a prominent slogan in the event of mass popular resistance.' In fact, because of the more complex situation described in 23-25 above, this framework was inadequate. We are for the troops getting out, but 'Troops out', as a sloganistic summary of policy, carries a clear implication of 'victory to the resistance', which is reactionary, or a lack of concern about the likelihood of civil war.

44. We do not call for the troops to stay, or in any sense politically endorse the occupation. We say: end the occupation. But we focus on building solidarity with the democratic, secular, and working class forces which must replace the occupation.

45. We will continue to reassess this in light of developments in Iraq.

46. We argue against those on the Left who want to build a movement exclusively around the slogans 'end the occupation', 'troops out now' - or (worse) on the explicit basis of supporting the reactionary 'resistance' as if it were an anti-imperialist struggle.

47. We argue for solidarity campaigns with the emerging workers' movement to be open to those who broadly supported the war and support the occupation. We argue against 'end the occupation' being a precondition for a solidarity campaign. The workers' movement needs practical help, in the first place, from working class activists abroad. In fact both the IFTU and the UUI/WCUI opposed the war (in line with the positions of the ICP and the WCPI; the IFTU's position on the occupation is more ambivalent).

48. The AWL is for self-determination for the peoples of Iraq - that is for the independence of Iraq, for the rule of Iraq by the Iraqi people themselves. We are for free elections to a constituent assembly, and for a democratic, secular constitution.

49. The Kurdish people have the right to self-determination; we are for the democratic rights of other national minorities (Turkomans, Assyrians); and for religious freedom - but for the complete separation of religion from the law and from education. We are for the complete equality and freedom of women; and for other democratic demands

50. We are against the dismemberment of Iraq into Sunni or Shia cantons, and against any and all political institutionalisations of Sunni or Shia (or other religious) identities.

51. We are against plans such as those being floated in the US and in Iraq, to divide the country into Sunni, Shia and Kurdish cantons. Our commitment to Kurdish self-determination (including autonomy if that is what they want), is distinct from any such plan.

52. The drive to war produced a powerful anti-war movement internationally, with mass demonstrations in New York, Rome, Barcelona, London and elsewhere in February 2003. This was a disparate and incoherent movement, which included bourgeois liberals, Islamists, pacifists, etc. A significant component of it, however, was linked to the global justice movement which has emerged in recent years. (For example, the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 culminated in a mass anti-war demonstration within which Rifondazione was prominent; the World Social Forum expressed its opposition to war and occupation). Many radical trade unionists, from US Labour Against the War to independent unions in Indonesia, were opposed to the war. However, in Britain and the USA, leftist groups of Yankophobe politics which reproduce some of traits of Stalinism by supporting anti-American tyrants (Saddam, Taliban, Milosevic) where the old Stalinists used to support Moscow were able to dominate the central organisation of the anti-war movement and shape its choice of allies, platform speakers, etc. (SWP in Britain, Workers World Party/ANSWER in the USA). In Britain, the Stop the War Coalition constructed an alliance with the Muslim Association of Britain, a front for the Muslim Brotherhood.

53. Despite these forces, the fundamental thrust of the anti-war movement - a desire of people, including many young people radicalising for the first time, to protest at the way the world is run and the right-wing leaders of the world's most powerful states - was positive. The anti-war movement must be understood in the context of previous defeats, the isolation of socialists, the downturn in the class struggle. The mass demonstrations represented one aspect of a certain revival of grass-roots militancy and radical protest. It was confused. But it would have been grossly sectarian to have stood apart from it and criticised it from the sidelines. The AWL rightly participated in and built the anti-war movement. We were excluded from the committee of the Stop the War Coalition, but it was right to participate in local anti-war groups; in fact, we were sometimes and in some areas at fault by standoffishness towards such groups, allowing distaste for the SWP to deter us from engaging with rawer activists maybe influenced by the SWP.

54. There is widespread cynicism and hostility towards the Blair government over the question of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which seem almost certainly not to have existed since the late 1990s at least. There is a simple question of democracy at the heart of this: the government took the country to war mainly over claims that WMD existed and posed a real threat; at the very least, the intelligence behind these claims was clearly false. It is also widely understood that Blair is only allowing an inquiry into this false intelligence because Bush has been forced to do the same. On grounds of democracy, we demand that our elected leaders be held accountable.

55. We intervened in this movement around the slogan 'no to war, no to Saddam', and the perspective of a 'third camp', attempting to organise forces internationally opposed both to war and to dictatorship. Our leaflets and banners were well received on the demonstrations. The speaking tour we organised round the war drew large or reasonably-sized meetings. The number of contacts and recruits we drew from the movement was tiny when measured against the size the big demonstrations. That was partly for the same structural reasons as meant that other left groups, including the SWP with their advantages as

central organisers of ‘Stop The War’, also recruited meagrely. In circumstances where industrial action on a scale sufficient to hint at the power of the working class to change society has been absent for almost 20 years, and where it is difficult to disinter the vocabulary of socialism from under the ruins of the Stalinist states which abused it, not many of the new activists on the anti-war demonstrations were immediately ready to join socialist groups of any sort. We also had avoidable faults: a degree of peevishness ingrained from many conflicts with the dominant pseudo-left culture, and a slowness in coming to terms with the fact that developing contacts and periphery in these times requires different methods from those appropriate when a pool to find such contacts and periphery was neatly and compactly provided by LPYS, student Labour Clubs, and similar groups.

56. This anti-war movement declined sharply after US/UK victory in the war, with much less flow-over into continuing activity than might have been hoped. Partly this will have been because of the defensive character of the movement: many people will have demonstrated simply because they felt they must make some gesture of opposition to the steamroller of US hyperpower and global-market neo-liberalism, and without any confidence in any sort of continuing political activity to change the world for the better, whereas in the movements against the Vietnam war the sentiment was widespread of being part of a burgeoning mass revolt which had already won some victories (the colonial revolutions) and would win more. Thinking participants must have been disoriented, to some degree or another, when despite the claims of the Stop the War Coalition that everything vindicated it, many the assumptions and subtexts in its argument were refuted by events. Baghdad was not Stalingrad; the war was over quickly; Iraqis plainly welcomed the fall of Saddam, etc. The demonstrations against Bush in November did, however, show the continuing existence of a large if diffuse milieu of people, many of them young, standing in left-wing opposition to neo-liberalism, war, and the destruction of the environment for the sake of capitalist profit.

57. We have a difficult task in relation to this broad milieu. On the one hand, in so far as it reflects a genuine radicalisation, especially of youth, it is extremely positive, and something within which we want and need to win influence. On the other hand, some of our ‘sensibilities’ are radically at odds with the majority of the organising cadres of the anti-war movement, not just the SWPers but also wider circles educated by such literature as the books of Michael Moore, John Pilger, and Tariq Ali. We reject the incoherent anti-imperialism - meaning anti-Americanism and anti-Israelism of much of this milieu. But our task is to win activists to consistent working class activity. One vehicle for achieving that is No Sweat. Another is patient and sustained argument about the basic issues: the centrality of class politics, the nature of imperialism, the nature of Islamism, etc.

58. Much of what we have to say is much less at odds with broader layers of activists than it is with the claustrophobic circles of the left groups. In building solidarity with the emerging workers’ movement in Iraq, we need to reach out to the widest possible layers of labour movement, global justice movement, etc, activists. Building such solidarity is also a way of explaining a working class and class-struggle approach to socialist politics, in contrast to the empty Yankophobia, populism, and opportunism of the SWP, etc.

THE HIJAB AND THE LAW

NATIONAL COMMITTEE MOTION

1. We oppose the hijab as a social mechanism of female subordination, and we oppose pressure on girls wear the hijab. Our priority is to help and support secularists and leftists in the mainly-Muslim communities who fight that pressure.

2. We are for universal secular education. We should seek to launch a counter-campaign in Britain against faith schools, the intrusion of religion in ordinary state schools, and the toleration, in the name of multi-culturalism, of Muslim girls being excluded by parental pressure from parts of education.

3. We do not support the new French law. It will probably be counter-productive. It fails to allow the necessary space for dealing sensitively and respectfully with teenagers’ desires to experiment in dealing with the world around them.

ADDITIONS

1. The AWL should campaign for equal comprehensive and mixed secular education for all. This will include; Opposition to all religious and private schools and an end to all state funding and charity status for schools that are not secular state schools.

This state education system would be compulsory as would be the full curriculum ending the right of parents to withdraw children from any parts of the syllabus including sex education, sport science.

2. We should defend minorities against racism, standing shoulder to shoulder with ‘communities’ against racists but politically we aim to split ‘communities’ along class lines breaking workers and youth away from religious authority and reactionary tradition.

ADDITION

The debate surrounding the French law on the hijab has exposed the unwillingness of the broad ‘far left’ to stand up for democratic and socialist values in general, and secularism in particular. Combating this political degeneration is an essential part of regenerating an authentically socialist culture in the labour movement. Propaganda and agitation for secularism in both state institutions and the education system are a vital component of the socialist fight for democracy. We therefore reaffirm our support for

- Complete separation of religion and the state.
Disestablishment of the Church of England; abolition of the Monarchy and the House of Lords

- The abolition of blasphemy laws, not their extension to religions other than Christianity.

- A secular education system. Abolition of private schools; all state schools to be fully secular and comprehensive.

Over the coming year, the paper should carry articles on the question of secularism; the teachers’, student, UNISON and other relevant fractions should investigate the possibilities for campaigns supporting secularism in education.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT:

CLASS, UNION, AND PARTY

(National Committee)

1. The Labour Party is still what Lenin called it in 1920, a bourgeois workers' party. In the last decade, there has been an enormous shift within this contradictory phenomenon towards its bourgeois pole.

2. New Labour differs from Old Labour in these respects.

The trade union share of the vote at Party conference and of direct and indirect representation on the National Executive has been substantially cut.

The role of both Annual Conference and the National Executive in the affairs of the Labour Party has been changed qualitatively. Essentially, they no longer control Labour Party policy, or what happens in the party, even in theory.

Through a series of procedural checks and controls, it has become the norm for New Labour that regional and even national conferences no longer discuss political issues. With these new structures, the Labour Party 'in the country' cannot counterpose itself politically to the Government.

Thus, the forums in which and through which the political life of the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) expressed itself have been cemented up.

The leader of the party, elected by the plebiscitary pseudo-democracy of one person one (postal) vote, has been raised above the party and its affiliated trade unions into a Bonaparte figure with enormous political power. The leader's "office" — lieutenants, advisers, spin-liars, etc. — financed by big capitalist donations and state funds, is the real centre of the party. All key policy and other decisions are taken there, outside all possible control by the party or the unions. When the leader is also Prime Minister, his power vis-à-vis the party is vastly increased.

Central control over and vetting of Labour candidacies at parliamentary and local government level has been greatly increased. The possibility of rank-and-file control through selection and deselection of candidates has been greatly reduced.

3. The New Labour Party in government has openly repudiated any working-class allegiance in explicit and brutal words and in such deeds as keeping the Tory anti-union laws on the statute books.

3a. There has been a considerable erosion in traditional working class support for Labour, particularly amongst young people. Symptoms include the increase in electoral abstention, particularly in inner-city areas, and the growth of the BNP.

4. For these reasons we have advocated independent working-class electoral challenges to New Labour. We never saw such things as ruled out on principle. We rejected them previously only because of the practicalities, chief of which was the open nature of the Party and what socialists could do in it.

5. A mass revolt by the CLPs and the trade unions — crucially, by the mass of the unions — could, of course, quickly re-open, cleanse and democratise the New Labour structures.

The most important fact for now, and calculably, is that nothing short of a large-scale general revolt can break the hold of the New Labour machine. New Labour can see off partial revolts, even large and important ones. Only a large, determined and simultaneous revolt could swamp the breakwaters.

Constitutional formulas, legalities, and rule changes are never all-decisive, in the Labour Party or in the class struggle at large. Some struggles can break through undemocratic rules; or entrenched leaderships can find ways to suppress the rank and file even if the formal rules are democratic. But rules matter.

To say that the rule changes in the Labour Party do not signify much would be as wrong as saying that the anti-union laws do not matter much for the industrial struggle, or that the different Labour Party rule changes of the early 1980s, in favour of democracy, were a diversion.

6. The transforming changes affect precisely those areas where the political life of the old Labour Party, that is of the old labour movement, expressed itself, and into which socialists could intervene as we did.

If there is some political life in a local CLP it cannot now — short of a very large-scale simultaneous revolt in other parties and the unions — go beyond local opposition. Nor can it feed into the old national forums like National Executive and Conference, and thus stimulate and coalesce with other local groups. The pockets of local life bear the same relationship to the old national Labour Party life that rock pools bear to the receded sea.

7. The political life of the CLPs is at a low ebb.

8. The trade unions should oppose Blair within the Labour structures, push things to a break with New Labour as in 1931 they broke with James Ramsey MacDonald, and refound a trade-union-based Labour Party.

9. It can be calculated that only a not-very-big minority of the Parliamentary Labour Party — which has no working-class roots worth recording — would split from Blair in those circumstances.

10. Disappointment with Blairite control of the Labour Party and the trade unions has taken the form of the election of a wide range of new trade union leaderships committed at one level or another to defending their members' immediate interests — that is, of a drive to recreate real trade unionism.

Without the support or tolerance of the trade union establishment, the Blair-Brown-Mandelson New Labour coup in the political wing of the British labour movement could not have been made, or not without a major 1931-style split in the Labour Party.

Many of the leaderships that supported Blair in his coup are now gone or going. To the new trade union leaders we say: counterpose the unions to New Labour immediately, and take the fight if necessary (as we think it will be necessary) to an open break and a refounding of labour representation.

11. We are, however, nowhere near the possibility of controlling what happens. The new leaderships are not doing what we think the situation indicates.

The absence of a coherent, co-ordinated union response is a result of our weakness as a force in the labour movement; but we are where we are.

Centrally, we advocate that the unions fight within the Labour Party against New Labour, and fight —if necessary, as we think it will be —all the way to a break and the refounding of a real Labour Party. But that is not all we do. In the actual situation of flux, we break down that central idea into immediate tactics. And we relate to inchoate responses as militants, not as “inspectors-general” of history or of the labour movement.

12. Our central political “demand” on the unions —that they fight Blairism within the Labour structures, right through to a break, and found a new working-class trade-union-based party —does not oblige us to oppose everything short of that. It does not oblige us to oppose any “tactical” fragmentation of the union political funds.

Advocacy of our “epochal” concern —the mass trade union break with Blair and move to a new workers’ party —should not shade into a conservative defence of and support for the Blair-serving status quo against immediate limited initiatives for genuine left-wing or labour-movement electoral challenges to the New Labour party; things which, on their merits, we should support here and now.

13. The situation is further complicated by the activities of sectarians like the SWP and the Socialist Party. The SWP has no strategic overview and uses elections in a catchpenny, opportunist “build the SWP” spirit. The SP have a wrong assessment of the situation, believing that the entire process of destruction of the old Labour Party has been completed.

14. The phrase, “democratise the political funds” was initially used to express the correct broad idea of the FBU May 2001 decision —that the union, nationally and regionally, should critically examine election candidates seeking its support, and consider backing independent working-class candidates against New Labour. That broad idea always involved accepting the risk that a drive to reassert independent working-class representation will, in the given circumstances, involve, or open the door to, some fragmentation and false starts. But the SWP, in particular, has cumulatively reinterpreted “democratisation of the political funds” as positive advocacy of fragmentation and “diversification” of the political funds. They have proposed having money allotted branch-by-branch or in proportion to different parties’ support in the membership. We are against fragmenting the funds in such a manner, which will end up (i) providing a safety-valve for the bureaucrats, freeing them to back Blair with the bulk of the political funds as long as they allow a few branches to give money elsewhere; (ii) drifting towards business-unionism, i.e. giving money to whatever mainstream party candidate seems friendliest or most susceptible to lobbying.

15. However, a policy of no changes in the distribution of trade union political funds until either the Labour Party has been won back from the Blairites, or a new workers’ party is launched by the trade unions, would for socialists be a policy of long-term inertia. It would be a de facto acceptance of Blairism as working-class politics for the foreseeable future, and, by way of that, a long-term policy of de facto abstention from electoral politics. Under the guise of strategic thinking we would adopt a policy of passive waiting for “something big” to happen. Such an approach is not a conceivable option for us. It would destroy the AWL as an interventionist political force.

16. Against ideas such as the RMT backing Plaid Cymru, we counterpose the principle of independent working-class representation, not the idea that the union must stick to exclusive support for New Labour candidates.

17. We should advocate local labour movement political action committees, and where possible treat Trades Councils as potentially such committees. We support any solidly-based moves by trade unions to counterpose themselves electorally to New Labour.

We are in favour of winning support from Labour-affiliated unions, or (the more realistic option now) from local or regional union bodies, for authentic independent working-class electoral challenges to New Labour. Obviously how and when this is done is a tactical question, but in general we favour it.

18. We are against disaffiliation, which in practical terms could only mean the Labour-affiliated unions ducking out of the fight-to-a-break against the New Labour machine which we advocate.

19. But we must fight for working-class politics in the labour movement. We do not fight in the most advantageous, still less ideal, conditions. We cannot let fear of damage that will be done during that struggle stifle the will of the rank and file to fight. We cannot fetishise the existing links and relations between the New Labour Party and the trade unions. We must advocate a fight on every level, and now.

We cannot let ourselves be blackmailed into passive acceptance of the political dominance of the Blairites. We must fight our way out of the political impasse of the labour movement.

20. We should propose in each union a national policy which would establish a framework for the union’s political activities and use of its political fund set by union policies and the principle of independent working-class representation in politics.

In pursuit of this national approach, we should argue against automatic support for New Labour and its candidates, and for the possibility of supporting independent working-class candidates. We explain openly that we want the unions to consider support only for working-class and socialist independent candidates, not for any independent candidates sympathetic to the policies of the union, and that our aim is not “diversification” but the recreation of a trade-union-based workers’ party. We argue for decisions about such alternatives to be taken, where appropriate, at regional and local level in the unions, subject to the fullest democratic control (e.g. workplace and membership ballots).

We are also for: Reducing union contributions to the Labour Party to the flat affiliation fee, ending extra donations, as the CWU has done. (We are not for reducing the level of affiliation).

Making union representatives in New Labour structures fight for union policy.

Withdrawing union sponsorship to MPs who flout or oppose union policies (as the RMT did with Prescott).

Challenging, expressing no confidence in, and where possible de-selecting councillors, MPs and leaders who refuse accountability to the labour movement and oppose working-class interests. No confidence in Blair as Labour leader!

Using union funds for independent working-class political campaigning —e.g. for referenda on privatisation, for a European workers’ charter rather than supporting bourgeois yes or no campaigns on the euro.

Where we come across motions in the unions expressing some of these ideas, but in an inadequate framework, we should seek to amend them so as to set them clearly within the framework of the fight for independent working-class representation.

Where our amendments fall, or circumstances prevent us from proposing them, the way we vote on such motions must be judged tactically in each case, in the light of both their wording and the meaning given to those words by the conditions and balance of forces in each union. Such tactical judgements should be made by our union fractions in consultation with the Industrial Committee and the EC.

21. The fight on the different fronts —to get the trade union leaders to fight Blairism within the Labour structures, and to get the trade unions to back working-class and socialist candidates against New Labour —is inseparable from the work of building a cross-union rank and file movement. The trade union leaders who will not fight for working-class and trade-union interests now, within the structures of the Labour Party, are not likely to support the formation of an anti-Blairite working-class party to replace New Labour. Here too, on the question of backing anti-Blairite working-class election candidates, the old watchword offers guidance: if the leaders won't lead, then the rank and file must.

22. We should pay more attention to the Labour Party. We should improve our efforts in pushing affiliated unions to fight the Blairites —that is, get our trade-union work better organised and fight systematically to get our own resolutions on political funds to the union conferences. Socialists should reorganise and reactivate our Labour Party fraction, but not, unless there is a major change in the condition and levels of life of the CLPs, significantly increase the number of comrades assigned to such work.

23. The central conclusion from the reality of the fragmented responses to the Blairite coup is that only a coherent Marxist organisation can in itself act to co-ordinate in any thoroughgoing way the different responses evoked in the labour movement. We, as a living organisation, have to respond to the "fragments". AWL has to co-ordinate our different fields of work —trade union, youth, students, No Sweat, SSP, Labour Party —integrating them both politically and organisationally.

LABOUR REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE

1. New Labour is progressively depriving the working class of any independent political representation.

2. The working class needs to re-establish its own independent political representation. We reject the idea (held in practice by both the SWP and the SP) that "independent working-class political representation" means primarily electoral opposition to New Labour. For us, working-class independence means class independence from the bourgeoisie (which is an ideological fight, and one to be had throughout the labour movement) - not exclusively formal organisational independence from the Labour Party.

3. No self-selected group can substitute for the working class in this. However, activists - the organised sections of the working class, in the trade unions, and in the first place the socialist activists - must play a leading role. We will fight for the trade unions to reassert themselves politically.

4. We fight for the socialists to unite in a new socialist party, with ample rights of tendency, which can become the leading political force in the fight for a re-born mass workers' party, and within that re-born mass workers' party once formed.

5. In the fight for independent working-class political representation, a central task is to make the trade unions assert themselves politically against the Blair government.

6. The last couple of years have seen a revival of real trade-unionism in Britain, by way of the election of new trade-union leaders who (with all their political deficiencies) stand for collective working-class action to improve conditions rather than for unions making their way by offering "services" to individual members or "added value" to employers.

7. In the last few months this has found political reflection in the concerted action by the big trade unions at Labour Party conference and in the talk of founding a new Labour Representation Committee.

8. This is an important and welcome move, which we should strive to make the most of. One of our comrades has already taken the lead to secure the support of a major union for the LRC.

9. The actual moves by the trade union leaders, especially the leaders of the big trade unions, are, however, extremely limited. Their stand against the Blair leadership at Labour Party conference deliberately sidestepped key questions, the Iraq war and trade-union rights.

10. We should be at the planned Labour Representation Committee conference in July, supporting and urging forward all those trade unionists and Labour activists who want a more definite fight. We should go to it with coherent and concrete proposals around which activists in the Labour Party and trade unions can organise. On any reasonable assessment, however, it will be a limited affair.

12. On general principle, because of the very nature of the trade unions as catch-all organisations, and because of the limited politics of the new union leaders, we could never regard just urging on the unions and their bureaucracies as politically adequate. The best hope of real progress was and is by forming rank-and-file LRC groups in localities and LRC caucuses in unions. These, by way of the animating activity of socialists within them, could build on the union leaders' timid moves to start to create an autonomous new working-class political force. Local LRCs will also provide a vehicle for involving non-Labour Party affiliated unions.

13. For the foreseeable future, LRC work will be limited work, primarily fraction work. As far as we can foresee - though we should be ever on the alert and ready to respond - its development into something larger lies the other side of a major revival of trade-union life at rank-and-file level, something which we cannot engineer at will. (Once it does develop, however, it can in its turn be a major lever in extending and deepening such a revival of rank-and-file trade-union life).

Nonetheless, promoting the idea of an LRC should be part of the big political discussions that all our comrades engage in with their contacts, and all branches and trade union fractions should be discussing the implications of this project for their work and seeking out ways to promote the LRC within their broader activities.

19. Our strategy as working-class socialists ultimately depends on transforming, reviving and revolutionising the whole

labour movement. However, we cannot and must not limit our tempo to that of the broad movement. In a period like the present, when the broad movement is developing only very slowly and hesitantly, our job is to combine patient work in the movement with boldness and energy in recruiting radical youth and building a cadre.

20. Important as the LRC work could be, we do not believe the process of unions reacting against the Blairite hijacking of the Labour Party will be neat, clear-cut, or as we would want. We cannot adopt one sweeping, generalised 'line' for all the permutations we face in the flux around us. The signs are that there will be much fragmentation of what exists now before the movement can gather itself together coherently. We cannot respond as 'inspectors-general of history', saying that nothing should move unless it accord to our strategic conception of the speedy replacement of Blairism by a trade-union-based working-class party. We should respond as militants fighting within the movement to shape and reshape it, and fighting to group enough revolutionary socialists to do this.

20. Considerable possibilities exist. There is a large milieu of radical youth, reflected in, for example, the anti-war demonstrations and the 'new anti-capitalist' mobilisations. It is amorphous, diffuse, and cannot quickly by any tactics, however deft, be condensed into a new mass working-class socialist force. Many of the young people involved are dubious of the idea of 'socialism' or sceptical about 'politics'. Nevertheless, experience already with No Sweat shows that many of them can be drawn into working-class oriented campaigns. If we do our work right, and develop ways of relating to this new sort of milieu and new sort of radical culture, then we can recruit numbers large compared to our size. The young people we recruit or draw round us will in time, as we educate them, become central to the revival of the mass labour movement. Often in history it has happened before that the growth of a radical political movement among young people, and then the process of those radicals entering and becoming established in workplaces, has been essential to a rise or revival of trade unionism.

No Sweat provides a means to demonstrate to young people the importance of trade unionism and the practical meaning of solidarity and to begin to involve them in the labour movement (e.g. through unionisation campaigns). We recognise that the union organisations may be unappealing to young people and argue for them to adopt methods and structures that enable young people to participate.

THE "RESPECT" COALITION

(National Committee)

1. We fight for independent working-class political organisation and representation, and within any formally and organisationally independent working-class initiative for the Marxist politics without which that initiative's independence can only be partial and unstable.

2. a. New Labour is progressively depriving the working class of any independent political representation.

b. The working class needs to re-establish its own independent political representation.

c. No self-selected group can substitute for the working class in this. However, activists - the organised sections of the working class, in the trade unions, and in the first place the socialist activists - must play a leading role.

d. We fight for the socialists to unite in a new socialist party, with ample rights of tendency, which can become the leading political force in the fight for a re-born mass workers' party, and within that re-born mass workers' party once formed.

e. In the fight for independent working-class political representation, a central task is to make the trade unions assert themselves politically against the Blair government, including within the New Labour structures, and to start a fight within those structures which rallies working-class forces.

f. We favour serious and solidly-based independent socialist or labour-movement candidates against New Labour, as ways to raise the banner of independent working-class representation in the electoral arena and regroup the forces to turn round the trade unions.

3. a. There is a fairly wide but diffuse mood among workers and youth of generally left-wing alienation from New Labour (pro-public-services, pro-union, pro-democracy, pro-peace, sometimes anti-capitalist). This is evidenced in such things as the demonstrations against the Iraq war and against Bush and the various 'new anti-capitalist' manifestations, and, to a certain degree, in the victories for the 'real trade unionists' of the 'awkward squad' in trade-union elections against the advocates of 'partnership' and 'adding value'.

In Scotland and in France the SSP and LO/LCR have been able to win sizeable votes (7%; 10%) with forthright working-class socialist platforms. That success rests on strengths acquired by long years of patient grass-roots work, not on some slick instant tactic; but there is no reason to believe that the broader mood it captures does not exist in England and Wales too.

b. The mood is however not matched by any comparable revival of working-class self-organisation. It remains atomised, molecular, diffuse.

c. The decades-long erosion of socialist political culture in the working class by Stalinism, and then the collapse of the hollowed-shell after 1989-91, still weighs heavy. There is an epochal task to be accomplished in the working class, of the rebuilding of socialist political culture, the renewal of collective working-class self-confidence, and the revival of working-class self-organisation.

d. The activist left which should be tackling that task is seriously disabled by the after-effects on its culture of Stalinist seepage. It knows what it is against, but not what it is for. It is 'negativist' and narrow-minded, taking militancy against the powers-that-be immediately to hand as its highest value, and therefore preaching credulous applause of forces such as Islamic fundamentalism. It fails to promote a positive working-class socialist political culture.

4. In this political situation it is more or less inevitable that new upsurges of working-class politics will not happen tidily and neatly, with political clarity from the start. There will be a range of initiatives of a more or less populist character, some with positive possibilities, some simply blind alleys.

5. Our first, basic, irreplaceable job within this process is to agitate, educate and organise for class-struggle politics, for consistent democracy, and for authentic socialism. There is no substitute for this. All socialist tactics must be built up on this base. If they exclude or contradict it, then whatever their apparent advantages they do not serve their supposed aim. Within those limits, *tactically we should seek the closest

possible relations with workers and youth moving confusedly towards independent working-class political assertion, build on what is positive, avoid sectarianism and doctrinarism.

6. The "Respect" coalition launched on 9 December 2003 reflects not only the general "populist" limitations of existing broad-left consciousness but a calculated political operation by a specific pseudo-Marxist current, the SWP.

They have calibrated the coalition to use George Galloway as its figurehead and to maximise their chances of drawing in the more modernising Islamists (the MAB) and mosque hierarchies.

Their aim is to maximise flow-over from the anti-war movement - where, in turn, the status of Galloway and the MAB (which they hope to take advantage of) was in large part manufactured by the SWP's deliberate choices in their role as demonstration organisers.

7. For ten years George Galloway was the "MP for Baghdad Central". He was an unofficial envoy for Iraq's Ba'hist regime, a regime which in the totalitarianism of its repression and its aggression against minorities within its own borders and neighbouring peoples exceeded pre-World-War 2 Nazism. On his account he visited Baghdad almost monthly to meet with top officials of the regime; acted as a go-between for the regime to business people and journalists, and proposed to the British government that he act as a go-between for it. He denies that his activity was funded by the Iraqi government, but says it was funded, to the tune of some £900,000, by the governments of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, and by a businessman well-connected to Baghdad. On his own account he was on close friendly terms with Saddam's deputy Tariq Aziz.

All this is much more than a matter of "having illusions" or "having a false political position". It is a matter of personal and financial connections with extreme reaction.

Nor is it incidental and secondary to Galloway as a political figure. It is central and defining.

It is not a matter of past errors now regretted and disavowed. Galloway has disavowed nothing. In all probability he continues extensive links with ruling-class circles in the Middle East (for example around the Cairo conference).

Galloway's only live claim to be considered as left-wing is the Iraq question. But precisely on that question he is closely connected to some of the most "right-wing" forces imaginable.

From 1994 we called for Labour Party members and the trade unions affiliated to his constituency to deselect Galloway as a candidate. No internationalist or democrat can support an electoral coalition organised around Galloway as figurehead.

Fundamentally it does not matter what the formal political platform of such a left coalition is. If it is more left-wing on paper, that means only that the political operation is more mendacious.

8. Socialists should reach out to Muslim workers and youth as workers and youth in a way that is sensitive and avoids unnecessary affront to their religious ideas. Support for socialist ventures from individual radical imams is welcome. Attempts to make formal alliances with mosque hierarchies, or to woo "the Muslim vote" on a communalist basis, are unprincipled.

9. The MAB is a British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest, oldest and richest Islamic

fundamentalist movement in the Arab world. It represents a flexible, "reformist", soft-soap, modernising variant of Islamism, but a variant of Islamism nonetheless.

To accredit such a grouping as "the Muslim wing" of the anti-war movement - let alone of a left-wing electoral coalition - is a betrayal of atheists, secularists, feminists and democrats of Muslim background.

MAB has not joined the "Respect" coalition or promoted "Respect" to its supporters in any energetic way; but it has given private support to it, and public support in Yorkshire and Humberside, where the former president of MAB is no.1 on the Respect Euro-list.

We should denounce the Respect/ MAB alliance.

10. In its politics (various left demands, but no reference or allegiance to the working class); in its structure (personality-based); and in the figures and representatives it puts to the fore (Galloway!), the "Respect" coalition represents middle-class stunt politics. It is a device to rally some left activists by offering them political vent through a vote for "left" demagogues, not a step (even an imperfect, uncertain, wobbly one) towards independent working-class political self-assertion. If we continue to tell the truth about Galloway, the MAB, etc., we cannot vote for it. We cannot recommend trade unions back it.

11. Our objection to Galloway here is not a phobia, or a stance of saying we won't take part in any movement if Galloway is also there. We joined the anti-war demonstrations even though Galloway was given top billing as speaker at the end. There that was secondary. Here he is, as SA chair and SWP co-thinker Nick Wrack puts it, "the key figure", the coalition's no.1 election candidate. To vote coalition is to vote Galloway.

12. The "Respect" coalition must be unstable and cannot build a long-term movement. However, it can and probably will attract many thousands in the short term. There is an objective basis for that in the diffuse nature of the current radicalisation and its weakness in self-organisation. It is not plausible to denounce it simply on the basis that "it won't get support" or "it's going nowhere".

13. The tactical problem is complicated by the fact that the Labour Representation Committee movement proceeds at a snail's pace and we cannot at will create a large independent working-class alternative.

14. We should say that we want a coalition of the left but on a working-class basis. We should fight for three demands.

a. A working-class stance. A coalition's platform, policy and programme must be firmly set within the framework of independent working-class representation. That is, independence from other classes, representing the interests and struggles of the working class. It must advocate public ownership and workers' control of productive wealth. It must stand for workers' MPs on a worker's wage. It must promote and advocate moves within the trade unions to free their political voice from the influence of the bourgeoisie. It must insist on trade union membership for its representatives and candidates.

b. Democracy. The policies and programme of the coalition must be decided through a democratic debate among its rank-and-file activists and supporting organisations, with the possibility of amendments and alternatives. The coalition must be pluralist. Its leaders must be accountable.

c. Accountable and trustworthy leadership. No political platform on paper can have credibility unless its public figures represent it credibly. No coalition can have a credible working-class stance if its figurehead is George Galloway. Galloway's sole claim to be considered left-wing, aside from long-ago tankie Stalinism, is the Iraq issue. But precisely on that issue, despite his opposition to the US/UK war, his record is right-wing (close links with the Saddam regime; personal links with Tariq Aziz; activity financed - on Galloway's own story - by the governments of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates and by a businessman well connected to the Baghdad dictatorship).

15. We can and should use Galloway's statements about "needing £150,000 a year to function as a leading figure", and his poor Parliamentary voting record, to gain the ear of leftists who, weak on internationalism, regard the Iraq issue as remote.

Some socialists oppose the "Respect" coalition from a fundamentally sectarian mindset, or out of SWP-ophobia. We may ally with them on this or that issue, but should be distinct from them.

We should minimise the use of jargon like "popular front" and "cross-class". The SWP is politically popular-frontist, but we do not want to base our arguments here on debatable analogies between the "Respect" venture and the popular fronts of the 1930s.

In fact, it is not that the SWP has definitely subordinated itself to Galloway, in the way that the 1930s CPs had definitely (at least for the duration of that phase of USSR foreign policy) subordinated themselves to French, British and Spanish bourgeois democracy. It is using Galloway. In any sharp conflict between it and Galloway, the SWP calculates (and rightly) that it will win.

16. In the euro-elections, it looks like coming down to it that we have no better option than to vote Labour, which may at least facilitate activity in the LRC movement as, when and if it develops.

New Labour's remaining ties to the trade unions would not normally be sufficient to mandate voting Labour where there was an independent socialist or working-class alternative. In this case, as against this "Respect" coalition, with its political corruptness and charlatanism, the residual trade-union link does indicate a Labour vote. We should tie it with vehement criticism of the Labour government.

In June we should say something like: keep out the BNP and the Tories. Vote socialist or Labour. Fight Blair - build the LRC.

We should not, however, let recoil from the SWP's stupidities push us into thinking that New Labour is an alternative, or "Vote Labour and demand working-class measures" has again become a policy with real grip. The facts about the near-extinction of political life in the CLPs remain as they are. They may change, but not immediately, not predictably, and not at our will.

We should certainly not appear as champions of New Labour against left coalition-making. We say we want a left coalition, but one based on an independent working-class stance.

We should not present New Labour as the "working-class" alternative to the "popular front" Respect coalition. To do so would be to intoxicate ourselves with formulas.

We are not with Galloway. But we are not with the Blairites against Galloway, either. With the Labour left and the unions

beginning (very slowly, very mildly) to assert themselves? Yes, against Blair. But against Galloway? Actually many of those Labour leftists and left unions are as credulous about Galloway as the SWP pretends to be.

18A. In selected areas - necessarily a few, because of limited resources - we should stand or work for independent socialist candidates in local council elections in 2004, under the Workers' Liberty or Socialist Alliance or similar banner. We should look to working with the Socialist Party on some of their council candidacies, too. This will not only be useful work in itself (spreading socialist ideas, building local profile, making contacts, etc.) but also make the political point that our rejection of the "Respect" coalition does not signify a collapse back into leaving the electoral field uncontested to New Labour.

19. The SA Democracy Platform is essentially a "residual" body - a gathering of the residue who object to the SWP's course but have stuck it out rather than decamping. It includes some good people, and we should keep in touch with it. But its basis - democracy in the SA - is rapidly becoming obsolete. And on other issues it is a congeries of micro-groups and recycled ex-members of larger groups. It cannot achieve much.

With the launch of the "Respect" coalition the SA has been wound up, not (at least for a while) formally, but de facto. We should support and work with local SAs and SA groups, like Erdington SA, who will continue on an independent socialist basis, and support and encourage any possibilities of linking them in a national network or federation. The forces involved, however, will be small.

20. Our main emphasis should be on promoting the AWL, as a force for rebuilding grass-roots working-class politics (workplace bulletins, trade-union work); for fighting within the trade unions for independent working-class political representation; for organising and orienting "anti-capitalist" militants, especially youth, to working-class politics (No Sweat); and for serious political education. Do that properly, and we can recruit from the activists at first attracted by the "Respect" coalition but then gradually disabused.

BUILDING THE AWL

AN INDEPENDENT WORKERS' FOCUS

(from National Committee)

1. A new radical generation is emerging - piecemeal, fragmented and diffuse. The evidence is:

a. *The continuing "new anti-capitalist" mobilisations. Most lately:*

- i. The G8 Evian protest in June 2003 drew up to 100,000 people;
- ii. The European Social Forum in November 2003 drew over 50,000 people;
- iii. The No Sweat campaign has built up thousands of contacts.

b. *The big anti-war demonstrations of early 2003, and their sequels, not in a big continuing organised campaign, but in a large diffuse milieu, manifested at the 20 November 2003 anti-Bush demonstration of up to 200,000 people on a weekday.*

c. *New ferment among students against tuition fees: witness the 26 October 2003 anti-fees demonstration.*

d. *A continuing revival of assertiveness in the trade unions at the level of real trade-unionism as against "partnership", "adding value", and a concept of unions as service agencies. Most lately:*

- i. The left winning the majority of the TGWU Executive;

- ii. The left winning 23 out of 48 places on the Amicus Executive;
 - iii. The left candidate winning the FBU National Officer election;
 - iv. The left winning a majority on the PCS Executive;
 - v. 497,000 striker-days in 2003. This is lower than the 1,323,000 in 2002, and much lower than the 1970s or 80s; but on a level with the 525,000 for the whole year 2001, and well above the 200-odd thousand typical of the 1990s other than 1996 with its postal strikes.
 - vi. Union membership bottoming out since 2001, though it still remains dangerously concentrated in declining areas, among older workers and in public services.
- e. The rows over foundation hospitals, student top-up fees, and testing in schools should remind us that the welfare state and public services remain a major axis of revolt.*

2. Our strategic task is to organise within this diffuse ferment for an independent workers' pole.

a. Most fundamentally, and constantly, to regroup activists around consistent and Marxist independent working-class politics, to create a pioneering force for the revolutionary party the working class needs as its agency for revolutionising the broad labour movement.

b. Wherever possible, to organise, help organise, or promote partial and united-front initiatives towards independent working-class action, international working-class solidarity, and independent working-class political representation.

3. We have the political ideas, the practical campaigning stratagems, the activist/ educational materials, and the core of politically-educated activists to do it.

a. The political ideas:

- i. Workers' solidarity on an independent class basis (the "Third Camp") internationally;
- ii. Independent working-class representation as the axis for politics in Britain;
- iii. Building rank and file movements on a class-struggle basis in the trade unions;
- iv. Fighting to transform the labour movement rather than create a sect beside it;
- v. Consistent democracy, both internationally and in British politics;
- vi. The need for a revolutionary party as a living political force interacting with class struggle, rather than just an organisational machine.

b. The practical campaigning stratagems:

- i. Our work in and around No Sweat;
- ii. Our work in the Campaign for Free Education;
- iii. Our workplace bulletins;
- iv. Our work in the trade unions;
- v. And others we will develop.

c. The activist/ educational materials:

- i. Our paper;
- ii. The pamphlets, leaflets, petitions and briefing papers of No Sweat;
- iii. Our workplace bulletins;
- iv. Our magazine and pamphlets, and the large stock of basic material in past magazines, pamphlets, books;
- v. Our website;
- vi. The No Sweat website.

d. The core of politically-educated activists:

- i. We have a solid body of activists whose experience goes back to the 1980s, who have been through many discussions, schools, and study courses, and who know our basic ideas.

4. We have to go out and find the forces for this independent workers' pole, at both levels, both rounded politics and partial campaigns.

a. An active and alert presence on campuses, on the streets, on doorsteps, and in demonstrations and protests is necessary to find them.

b. They are not ready-assembled, to be found in some set of routine meetings.

c. Their political starting points will be varied.

i. Some of the young people whom we should be interested in, and who may be interested in us, will not straight off think of themselves as "socialists", or have any clear idea of what "socialism" means.

ii. Some of them, having no direct experience of large-scale working-class struggle, will not straight off see the labour movement as central.

iii. Some of them will have no clear idea what "Marxism" means.

iv. Our job is to find the point of common interest which brings them into our orbit and build on that through discussion and activity.

d. Our best staple way of integrating ourselves into the new, diffuse political ferment, winning contacts, and grouping them round us in fruitful activities is through No Sweat campaigns, starting from young radicals' anger against global-capitalist exploitation and environmental destruction and linking into to a working-class perspective.

5. We have to gear ourselves to the realities of the present period, not conduct our activity as if this decade is a "bad 1980s".

a. In the 1980s, the early 1980s at least, there was an accessible left meeting-going public, in trade union branches, Labour Parties, Labour youth branches, student Labour Clubs, student unions, etc. A sizeable proportion of it was young. One-off campaigns were generally based in that public. Marxists could and did operate by attending the relevant meetings regularly, arguing ideas, proposing activities, selling literature, and thus grouping contacts and recruits.

b. The left meeting-going public today is much smaller and older, more demoralised, more averse to risk and conflict. If Marxists adopt the same mode of operation today as in the 1980s, geared around attending the usual meetings, we will find our activity dwindling down into a dim, slow routine with little hope of achieving new things or winning new contacts.

c. The arena in which we must find new contacts and generate new activities is, as noted above, more diffuse and fragmented.

d. This doesn't mean that we do not attend meetings. It means that we actively resist the sluggishness and demoralisation in those meetings.

e. Our 2002 conference voted to work to throw off accumulated inertia from the 1990s by setting clear minimum standards of activity and "re-registering" our membership.

f. Our 2003 conference voted to raise ourselves to a "new tempo" and turn outwards to recruit.

g. Those decisions have not been carried through adequately.

h. The core practical detail of the 2003 decisions was what we needed to do. It was not off-beam or beyond our means.

i. Help and train every member to find new people with an interest in our ideas in their workplace, college, trade union, social circle, and everywhere they go... become an articulate advocate for our ideas....

ii. Efficient branch meetings which organise and check on activity... regular public or open meetings... a bedrock routine of purposeful but simple AWL collective public activity [i.e., typically, stalls, paper sales, bulletin distributions] into which almost any new recruit or contact can integrate quickly and easily.

iii. Help in setting up a local No Sweat group (or a No Sweat caucus in some broader group)...

i. To carry through such decisions 50% does not bring 50% results. A "critical mass" of focused activity is necessary to bring any systematic results at all.

j. The key political reason for our lack of adequate follow-through was that we have not broken from a "1980s" model of activity. Efforts to implement our conference decisions tended to become "add-ons" to a bedrock of activity based on a reduced version of 1980s norms: attendance at a (dwindling) regular cycle of routine meetings. We must turn our culture upside-down, and make the effort to reach out primary, not an add-on.

k. To make the necessary turn in each area requires only a determined and consistent effort by one or two comrades. Given a lead, most of the rest will follow on later. We cannot afford to move at the pace of the slowest.

6. In addition to the three points above, this year's experience indicates two other priorities to gear ourselves to the reality of the present period.

a. Every branch, fraction and committee meeting should start with a "political report" discussion which covers key current events and draws conclusions for what the branch, fraction or committee will do, even if those are as modest as a motion in a trade union branch, a petition or poster on a street stall, or a decision to contact a local campaign. Without this, the branch, fraction or committee ceases to be an alert body responding militantly and collectively to the world around it. It succumbs to the pressures of inertia around it, and becomes at best a collective concerned with intelligent commentary and criticism.

b. We should help No Sweat groups and caucuses to gear their activity round definite campaign plans which:

i. Have definite and at least in part realisable aims;

ii. Are planned over a considerable period (some months at least) to go through a purposeful sequence of activities leading up to the achievement of those aims;

iii. Include canvassing for support from a wide variety of groups: student societies, student unions, trade union bodies, community and campaign groups.

7. Educationals, study classes and day schools must continue to be an integral part of our activity, using the materials now available from our website.

a. Self-education is central to Marxist politics.

b. Done properly local discussion groups can be a very valuable way to draw in contacts.

i. In a number of localities over the last several years, Capital study groups run by us have drawn in more contacts than public meetings on current events.

c. Educational activity must not become an excuse for not turning outwards, something that:

i. encourages comrades to wait for an ever-receding perfection of formal political education before they turn out to discuss with new people or:

ii. encourages a branch to settle into being fundamentally a private discussion group on general political theory with little dimension of collective public activity

8. We must focus on recruiting more young people.

a. Young people are almost always the chief source of new life for the revolutionary movement.

b. Older radicals today are inescapably scarred by the years since 1985. We must strive to recycle the best of them. But we need help from the vitality of youth to do that.

c. Every comrade, however old, can help in turning us out to recruit more young people, for example through activity in No Sweat campaigns.

d. Student activism is reviving. To pick up on this we need to do four main things.

i. Develop systematic activity in student Third World/environmentalist groups, as a way of working with a wide milieu of students potentially sympathetic to our concerns.

ii. Develop the Campaign for Free Education.

iii. Gear up our student comrades to become "political centres" on campus, widely visible as sources of ideas and literature, and our branches to back them up in that.

iv. Get branches to use their participation in No Sweat campaigns as a means to reach out to campuses and colleges where we have no members or contacts at present.

e. Our tempo must not be tied down to that of the broad labour movement.

i. In politics, not everything moves in lockstep. It is very unlikely that the revival of left politics will take the form of running the film of the defeats since 1985 in reverse, evenly winding all areas of activity back to what they were in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

ii. Possibly we will go through several chapters in the rallying, regrouping, and re-regrouping of a new generation of young political activists before they consolidate into a force able to reflate the trade-union movement.

iii. It is possible, as in France in the last decade, that a substantial revival of the radical left can develop in parallel to the trade union movement losing numbers and drifting to the right despite the best efforts of the leftists.

iv. We must agitate amongst, educate, and organise the keenest young radicals without waiting until the broad labour movement generates large-scale developments they can gear into directly.

v. A rising tide lifts many boats. But in politics the tide rises in different places from where it fell, and it submerges or wrecks many boats instead of raising them. Those who want to sail their boats have to patch them and haul them over by hand to meet the tide, not just keep the boats on the sandbanks where falling tides stranded them.

9. Re-prioritise our trade-union work so as to generate political contacts and make an impact on the creation of rank-and-file trade union organisations

a. Strategically, historically and practically trade-union work is central to our politics.

b. All of our comrades who are in regular paid employment should view trade union work as a basic and integral part of their political activity. This is not to say that all working comrades should have trade union work as taking the biggest chunk of their political time and energy, but that because of our political understanding of the historic necessity of working class organisation, finding ways for all our comrades to maximise their influence on the current organisations of the class should be under perpetual review - including as a factor in comrades thinking about possible job changes, promotions etc.

c. It is necessary, to develop detailed links between the day to day work and the broad historical perspective. The link is not automatic. The most important way to develop a real link is to develop a body of AWL recruits, sympathisers and contacts around us in the unions, as a living political force".

d. At present our trade union work is organized very haphazardly. The lack of a central trade union organizer over the past period has resulted in little systematised oversight of how individual comrades are carrying out their union work, and how the separate trade union fractions are relating their work with the work being carried out in other unions, or with our general political projects. There is a serious danger of our union work drifting into a somewhat routinist style - either of some comrades doggedly carrying on with large amounts of union work, to little effect within the union and producing few contacts for the group, or conversely of comrades feeling ill-equipped to start doing union activities or not considering it as an important area of our work to get involved in.

e. It is not enough to restrict our activity to areas where we meet only existing union activists - the vast bulk of whom have been politically trained in disappointment through defeats and the demoralising effects of misleadership over the last twenty years. But there are young trade unionists, there are older trade

unionists who still retain vitality. And the left turn in elections in various trade unions suggests that many of these people are looking for serious alternatives to the collusion and sellout offered by the existing union leaderships. So far, this increased electoral success for "left" candidates in the unions has not translated into a more general upturn in union activism or vitality. A key task for us therefore, is to use our overarching political theses to create coherent, practical proposals for what the trade unions should do, and how trade union organisations can be rebuilt in the workplaces, around which we can draw militant workers (who may or may not be already active trade unionists) into joint activity and discussion with us .

f. One important part of this is for our fractions to develop strategies for laying the basis for the development of genuine rank-and-file organisations in the trade unions rather than the existing "broad-left" movements – often these are not broad, not left and in almost all cases they are not very useful in developing and promoting new activists or in significantly altering the course of trade union disputes. This is, of necessity, a medium to long-term goal, barring a few minor exceptions, rank-and-file activity is not even at an embryonic stage in most unions, but it is an essential prerequisite for the transformation of the unions and it is a goal that we are pursuing in contrast to the current leaderships of the unions generally, and to most of the rest of the left. This does not therefore exclude working within the existing "Broad Lefts".

g. There are some practical steps that we should take immediately:

i. All our trade-union comrades should also be publicly active in broader politics. It is bound to be difficult to draw other trade-unionists beyond trade-union routine if we do not publicly go beyond it ourselves. We should use the artefacts of those broader politics - petitions, fund-raising appeals, No Sweat and other campaign activities - to help us get into conversations and discussions with workmates and trade-union associates

ii. The general approach of finding the point of common interest which brings someone into our orbit and building on that through discussion and activity, applicable with youth, should also be used with trade-union and workplace contacts. We should recalibrate our sights so that we see a lively conversation about politics with an interested fellow-worker who is not yet a trade-union activist, and may not become one until he or she has developed politically much further, as crucial. We should aim to do all our trade union work in a way that furthers and develops a collective approach, that promotes rank-and-file organisation, that encourages an 'organising agenda', and that draws new people into activity and around us. This means we should alter our conceptions of trade union work so in that every job we do – from a personal case, to attendance at a committee meeting , to a pay negotiation, to attendance at a union conference - we should consider how to do it in a way that furthers and develops a collective approach, and we should consider how to avoid or prevent as much as possible, work that doesn't help us in achieving these goals.

iii. Every comrade who is in regular paid employment should have a good working knowledge of the trade union set up in their workplace and have had some discussion with their fraction and branch about the work they should be doing to fit in with our broader perspectives within the relevant fraction and how their trade union work can tie in with the broader political work of the branch. It may be, in particular circumstances, that the branch and fraction agree that it is not appropriate for certain comrades to be doing a great deal of trade union work - either because of the nature of their workplace, their other political priorities from within the organisation (e.g. work at the office, or leading roles in our other political priorities), but this decision should be a collective one, rather than a decision for individual comrades to make by themselves, and should, like all our political assignments, be subject to regular review.

iv. A committee, in liaison with fraction organisers, should ensure that each fraction has an ongoing discussion of how to

our bigger political priorities in to the work done inside the trade unions and should regularly circulate and promote political model motions for use in trade union meetings. Fractions should discuss and organise contact work and should regularly discuss each contact with the relevant local branch to ensure that there is a connection made by the contact between the work we do in each union, and the work we do on a branch basis. Similarly, each branch should seek to inform fraction organisers of contacts they have made through local political work who happen to be in trade unions where we have an organised fraction.

10. Continue to argue for left unity around independent working-class politics and to seek discussion, interaction and where possible collaboration with the rest of the left.

*a. We are much at odds politically with the rest of the would-be Marxist left, fundamentally because they have substituted criteria of opportunism and "negativism" (saying "no", "smash", or "f**k" as loudly as possible when the ruling class immediately before them says yes) for those of working-class autonomy.*

b. So we are for firm and clear argument for our politics as against those of other left groups. But we are equally against any snootiness, standoffishness, or peevishness towards the individual members of those groups.

c. It cannot but be that there are many thousands of young people scattered round the political scene who have been mobilised and radicalised by activities like the anti-war mobilisations; who broadly identify with the left and are interested in the left groups; but who at present find no group convincing enough to join, or have been repelled by the biggest group, the SWP, after a short association with it. We want to reach and convince as many as possible of those thousands.

d. We must train ourselves to present ourselves, our ideas and our activities, positively to inquirers, rather than defining ourselves negatively against the SWP or other left groups. We must also be able to explain - but positively, taking our ideas as the base rather than the SWP's - when they ask us (as they will) how we differ from the SWP.

e. We desire friendly personal relations; collaboration where we agree; comradely if trenchant debate where we disagree.

f. The effective liquidation by the SWP of the Socialist Alliance is a setback, despite all the failings of the Alliance even at its best. It cuts out many of the limited possibilities which used to exist for collaboration where the left agreed, civilised debate where we disagreed.

i. We should support and work with local Socialist Alliance groups who want to continue on old SA lines against the liquidation. Unfortunately they are unlikely to be numerous.

ii. We work for a new, democratic, class-struggle-oriented alliance of socialists. So far as we can see at present, the main thing we can do towards that is advocate, explain and educate. We should keep our eyes open for larger possibilities as and when they arise.

11. Create a new periphery

a. The task before us is nothing less than going into the new but diffuse political ferment, as alert and articulate advocates of independent working-class politics, and from it assembling a new periphery for Solidarity and Workers' Liberty out of which to build a strong revolutionary organisation capable of making a decisive difference in the struggles to come.

ADDITION:

Add a new section 3A to the document: incoming NC should review and discuss our publications.

AWL BRANCH-BUILDING

1) We need to turn the AWL more towards face-to-face political activity.

2) Events like the European Social Forum and the Iraq war protests show the development of a new milieu of radicalised young people.

3) The limited revival of trade unionism is important, not so much because it will let anyone quickly recruit large numbers of established trade unionists to revolutionary Marxist activism, as for the possibilities it gives of expanding our trade union work and for convincing radicals that an orientation to the working class and the labour movement makes sense.

4) Our rate of recruitment since our conference in March has been much slower than the aim we set ourselves. The revolutionary left in general has not recruited enormously. In part this reflects problems built in to the nature of the new radicalisation.

5) Because of the perceived weakness of the workers' movement, and because of the fact that socialist political culture has to be rebuilt from the ground up following the collapse of Stalinism, the radicalisation is notably diffuse, atomised, multifarious. It is not the case, as it would have been in the 1960s or '70s, that any serious young radical wanting to get serious will immediately see the question they face as one of which strand of organised worker-socialist-oriented activism to adhere to. They see a vaster and more bewildering set of questions. They cannot be addressed just by finding this or that set of meetings and intervening to debate other left currents.

6) The Iraq protests were massive. Many young people made political advances during the mobilisations. But relatively few of them were immediately recruitable to the Marxist left. There was no large left-wing youth movement (of the type that the Labour youth movement, or youth CND, once were) in which they could become active on a variety of levels and discuss and learn at their own pace. They grew up in a time of low working-class industrial struggle. They are missing the central lesson that could turn them into Marxists: the potential of working-class struggle. They can learn. But it requires special efforts.

7) Structural problems may make it impossible to quickly condense the new radicalisation into a big worker-socialist party. They do not stop us making a lot more young recruits - so long as we can orient and activate ourselves more appropriately.

8) No Sweat provides an "easy" entry into politics for young people radicalised in the recent protests. The main message that involvement with No Sweat can bring to them is precisely the central role of the working class. No Sweat therefore provides an excellent means by which to draw in young people without too many political preconditions and work and discuss with them.

9) Branches should build No Sweat groups as usually their main collective, public activity. All comrades can and should be actively involved in this at one level or another. It should involve not only discussion meetings and motions to trade-union branches, but regular public campaigning and protest activity of a sort accessible to young radicals without any great political preconditions.

10) To consolidate some of the most serious young people attracted to such No Sweat groups as committed No Sweat activists, and recruit a significant number of them to the AWL,

it is necessary that the AWL branches operate as alert, active, cohesive collectives, with consistent public activities accessible to new recruits (paper sales, industrial bulletin distributions, etc).

11) Every branch meeting should include a "political report" (current developments, and consequences for our activity) and "business" (including some accounting for decisions of the last meeting, and activities since that meeting) as indispensable core items. Even open meetings primarily devoted to discussion or debate on some less-immediate question should include short "current-politics" and "business" sessions.

12) Every branch must elect an organiser with whom the buck stops; every NC member who is not a branch organiser must take responsibility for helping their local branch organiser. But the organisation and monitoring of comrades' activity should be done primarily through branch meetings, thus developing a sense of collective responsibility. It should not be primarily a personal transaction between branch organisers and individual members.

13) For their public or open meetings branches should look to staging debates with other groups, and developing new comrades as speakers, rather than exclusively relying on the same circle of established AWL speakers delivering setpiece speeches.

14) We should use the new No Sweat pamphlet for basic political discussions with young contacts. We should publish a new basic "We Stand for Workers' Liberty" pamphlet, oriented to young people who want to check us out.

15) Our literature has to include debate with the other avowedly-Marxist currents. Our members and sympathisers cannot act as a coherent force without some flow of written explanation of what we propose as distinct from (and it is sometimes very distinct from) other currents on the left; new people are not going to join us just on the basis of activism, without checking out how our ideas compare with those other left currents. We must also find ways to talk with young radicals who are not familiar with the points of reference we share with other avowedly-Marxist currents, and work with them without lecturing and ultimatums. It is a difficult combination. We have to train ourselves to be able both to discuss patiently and accessibly with new young radicals who may have no idea what the word "socialism" means, and to argue our ideas boldly against the SWP, for example, in the many arenas where we will meet them (and, often, the young radicals).

16) No amount of literature-production, or general campaigning, or even organisation of meetings, will bring recruits unless we are also geared up to do the work of face-to-face discussion with interested contacts. Branches should focus their "contact work" on organising their activity, and training their comrades, to make the winning of new contacts a central concern in all activity. We should educate our members in the idea that their first political job is to "radiate" - to find contacts and points of political dialogue wherever they go. Every activity (stall, participation in a protest or meeting) should be approached and audited in the expectation of getting new contacts from it.

17) Of course, much activity involves "ancillary" work with small committees and so on, where few new contacts can be gained. Of course, we should not discard such work. But if it squeezes out broader activity, then the means has consumed the end.

18) We should see ‘contacts’ not just as those people who already more or less agree with us, but as anyone willing to discuss with us seriously about ‘big politics’. Every person we come across in political activity should be approached with a view to finding some area of common interest from which we can develop common activities and discussions.

19) Each branch should also maintain, and keep constantly updated, a large list of people regularly emailed or mailed about meetings and activities, and a smaller list of people regularly phoned to discuss what’s going on politically and offer invitations to upcoming meetings and activities. (This regular phoning-round is most efficiently done as an assigned priority of one particular branch member). The administrative side of contact work must however be seen as secondary and ancillary to the political side, the primary means of which is face-to-face discussions.

20) Email is a very valuable means of communicating information quickly, cheaply and easily to those who want to get that information. All comrades should read their email and use email to send reports and information. But email is not a means of organising. It cannot be a substitute for face-to-face talking (or even for the fallback, phone-to-phone talking).

21) Branches should therefore develop plans based on the following points:

a) Building a local No Sweat group as a collective, public, accessible, consistent activity. Making sure that every comrade is involved in this activity in one way or another.

b) Holding regular branch meetings, with ‘political report’ and ‘business’ sessions.

c) Holding monthly public or open meetings.

d) Regular discussions of contact work centred around (i) gaining new contacts from activities; (ii) purposeful discussion with contacts interested enough to discuss. Branches should also organise appropriate backup in the way of email lists, mailing lists, and regular phone-rounds.

e) Doing regular public stalls or sales, and using petitions on them. Making sure that every comrade is involved in this activity in one way or another.

f) Getting out more. The people we need to recruit are generally not to be found in our usual round of meetings.

MOTIONS REFERRED TO INCOMING NATIONAL COMMITTEE

ADDITION ON HIJAB

1. Against exclusion from education but for the prosecution of parents for withdrawing their children from school.

2. For a rule in school against the burkha and the veil.

3. We should approach our Iranian and Iraqi comrades and build a joint campaign against the religious oppression of women in education.

4. The AWL must campaign against the growth of cultural relativism counterposing it with anti-racism and support for liberation. The AWL should not wait for groups in the ‘Muslim community’, ‘Hindu community’, ‘Catholic community’ or any other religious community to take the lead. The AWL should actively aim to build support in every section of the working class.

AMENDMENT TO “INDEPENDENT WORKERS’ FOCUS”

Add new 3a vii:

‘Political ideas are not static to be preserved as relics, but are developed by applying our class principles to the actual class struggle. There is no room for complacency: just because we are right today, or more right than anyone else, gives no guarantee for the future. The only guarantee is a politically alert cadre developed through education, involvement in the living class struggle and in honest, clarifying political debate.’

Add at end of 3c i:

‘our paper needs to be directed to the audience generated by our priorities identified in 3b above. At the moment it is unbalanced, and suffers from the absence of a magazine or theoretical journal for over a year. The concept of a ‘combination tool’, if it is to be any use, needs to specify what combination of tools for what purpose. The incoming NC as a priority should discuss the issue of publications (including the website) and come forward with proposals.

Add at the end of 3c iv:

‘The failure of the magazine to appear has serious consequences both for the theoretical profile of the group and for the readability of the paper.’

Add at end of 3c v:

‘- our website has improved and gained ‘readers’ in the last year but it is still chaotic and unplanned and does not give a good impression to first time visitors. As part of the review of publications, attention should be given to the allocation of resources and political oversight of the content, for example by a ‘web editorial board’.

So the whole would read:

3. We have potentially the political ideas, the practical campaigning stratagems, the activist/ educational materials, and the core of politically-educated activists to do it.

a. The political ideas:

i. Workers’ solidarity on an independent class basis (the ‘Third Camp’) internationally:

ii. Independent working-class representation as the axis for politics in Britain:

iii. Building rank and file movements on a class-struggle basis in the trade unions:

iv. Fighting to transform the labour movement rather than create a sect beside it:

v. Consistent democracy, both internationally and in British politics:

vi. The need for a revolutionary party as a living political force interacting with class struggle, rather than just an organisational machine

vii: Political ideas are not static to be preserved as relics, but are developed by applying our class principles to the actual class struggle.

There is no room for complacency: just because we are right today, or more right than anyone else, gives no guarantee for the future. The only ‘guarantee is a politically alert cadre developed through education, involvement in the living class struggle and in honest, clarifying political debate.

b. The practical campaigning stratagems:

i. Our work in and around No Sweat:

ii. Our work in the Campaign for Free Education:

iii. Our workplace bulletins:

iv. Our work in the trade unions:

v. And others we will develop.

c. The activist/ educational materials:

i. Our paper - our paper needs to be directed to the audience generated by our priorities identified in 3b above. At the moment it is unbalanced, and suffers from the absence of a magazine or theoretical journal for over a year. The concept of a 'combination tool', if it is to be any use, needs to specify what combination of tools for what purpose. The incoming NC as a priority should discuss the issue of publications (including the website) and come forward with proposals:

ii. The pamphlets, leaflets, petitions and briefing papers of No Sweat:

iii. Our workplace bulletins:

iv. Our magazine and pamphlets, and the large stock of basic material in past magazines, pamphlets, books. The failure of the magazine to appear has serious consequences both for the theoretical profile of the group and for the readability of the paper:

v. Our website - our website has improved and gained 'readers' in the last year but it is still chaotic and unplanned and does not give a good impression to first time visitors. As part of the review of publications, attention should be given to the allocation of resources and political oversight of the content, for example by a 'web editorial board':

vi. The No Sweat website.

d. The core of politically-educated activists.

MOTIONS REJECTED BY CONFERENCE

MOTION ON STOP THE WAR COALITION

(Nick H)

The Stop the War Coalition has deteriorated markedly since the declared end of the war. Partly this is a result of the changing nature of the conflict in Iraq since many who were against the bombing are not against the 'police actions' of the occupation, or at least not against them sufficiently to protest. But it's also the result of the SWP's leadership, seeking to turn the StWC into a catch-all standing campaign against any and all acts of 'US imperialism', Tony Blair and Israel.

The Coalition's position is further weakened by its relationship with the MAB, the repeated failure to condemn acts of terror, and the use of slogans such as 'Bush is the real terrorist'.

The creation of the RESPECT electoral coalition, and its presentation as 'the electoral wing of the anti-war movement' also poses sharply our relationship with the StWC. The Coalition is being used as a rallying point for RESPECT - the SWP clearly want to continue the Coalition in order to present it as natural and logical that those who oppose the war inevitably support RESPECT. The continued existence of the Coalition serves this purpose. We should not lend it any credibility.

We were, and are, in favour of a coalition against the war on Iraq.

However, we're not in favour of extending that coalition into a de facto standing campaign against all acts of US foreign policy.

One of the results of the StWC continually changing its focus is that effective positive solidarity work with the US's first target, Afghanistan, has been ignored when the bandwagon

moved on to Iraq. The danger is that this pattern will repeat, with the attention of the StWC shifted each time Bush or Blair declare a new target, and nothing being left behind for positive solidarity work.

We will therefore withdraw from the Stop the War Coalition, doing so publicly and with a proposal that the Coalition itself should be disbanded since it is no longer addressing the purpose for which it was created. We will continue to argue for the creation of a trade union-based solidarity campaign for the Iraqi workers' movement. And we will advocate, as appropriate, the creation of new organisations and coalitions against specific US or British acts of foreign (or domestic) policy.

The Coalition does not speak for the broad anti-war movement. Our arguments consistently receive a much better hearing 'on the streets' on anti-war protests than within the StWC itself. Leaving the Coalition should in no way reduce our audience for our positive arguments for solidarity with the Iraqi working class, and continued opposition to the occupation and to the 'resistance'.

COUNTER-MOTION ON THE HIJAB

1. The hijab, veil and burkha are public expressions of the ownership of women by men, fathers, husbands, brothers, laid down in muslim teaching, socialists should oppose it.

2. We do not support state bans on adults self abuse but to confuse that with the case of schools is wrong.

3. Most of the left and many liberals in Britain have focused on opposition to the French ban on the veil in school while ignoring the issue of girls in British schools being withdrawn from sex education and sport and a regime of 'multi culturalism' in many schools that stops teachers from challenging the anti women and feudal ideas imposed on children by their parents.

4. While socialists are highly critical of capitalist education and it's institutions we support compulsory education for children, within that we fight for the best education, the best syllabus and the best facilities. Support for compulsory education has to include methods of enforcement, preventing children from doing full time work or just not turning up to school. We support using the law to enforce compulsory education, this is the biggest 'oppression' of children's freedom, we would not accept this form of compulsion for adults.

5. Even back in the nineteenth century when child labour was the general rule and few people supported compulsory education Marx wrote 'The right of children and juvenile persons must be vindicated. They are unable to act for themselves. It is, therefore, the duty of society to act on their behalf.....The working man is no free agent. In too many cases, he is even too ignorant to understand the true interest of his child, or the normal conditions of human development. However, the more enlightened part of the working class fully understands that the future of its class, and, therefore, of mankind, altogether depends upon the formation of the rising working generation. They know that, before everything else, the children and juvenile workers must be saved from the crushing effects of the present system. This can only be effected by converting social reason into social force and given circumstances, there exist no other method of doing so, than through general laws, enforced by the power of the state. In enforcing such laws, the working class do not fortify governmental power. On the contrary, they transform that power, now used against them, into their own agency. They

effect by a general act what they would vainly attempt by a multitude of isolated individual efforts.” Marx went on to explain that this compulsory education must include, mental education, bodily education and technological training.

6. Given this approach to compulsory education it is right that we argue against religious and private schools on the basis of equality, and decent education for all. We argue too about what is to be taught in schools. It’s not just being at school that matters, but what children learn, including things parents don’t want them to be taught like sex education, questioning the society they live in and science rather than medieval rubbish like religion. We demand secular education, parents have plenty of time to teach their children rubbish, we oppose the ‘parents right’ to restrict their children’s education at school. The hijab, veil or burka are religious symbols of women’s oppression, girls should be given space to learn they do not need to wear them, that they can take part in sports like swimming. If these girls ‘choose’ to robe up out of school or after they leave then so be it.

7. The issue of the veil has been hyped up by Islamic reactionaries, and most of the left and their cultural relativist allies have jumped on the bandwagon. In fact a far more important issue is the fact that reactionary parents, can ‘withdraw’ ‘their’ children from sex education and that the education system is capitulating on many issues like sport and even science to parents’ ‘cultural or religious objections’, also Blair is supporting yet more religious schools. This is the real issue, a victory on the veil in school is one more step in the wrong direction, but all the left can go on about is the veil. We must cut sharply against this stupidity.

8. The selective ban on the veil in French schools with left wing teachers or where a school or teacher understands that a veil interferes with a girls education is not an acceptable middle way but a formula for unfair treatment. We support equal treatment in all schools.

9. Socialist should not oppose secular education in French schools but demand an end to all religious schools.

10. The French right are using the law but so to are the Islamists. A victory for the Islamists against the law would be a victory for the enemies women and the working class. We cannot support the French governments use of the issue to ‘unite republican France’ while keeping religious schools, we should expose their racism and nationalism. Neither should we give an inch to those opposing the law.

11. Compulsory secular state education for all children. Stop the wearing of the veil or burkha in schools; for a full education for all children.

COUNTER-MOTION ON LP/TUS

Tom R and Tom C

1. Marxism is the theory and practice of working class selfliberation.

Marx was not a god or a saint he was a scientist, a revolutionary, a product of the enlightenment who sought to extend the magisterium of reason to cover the realm of human social and economic organisation. It is our commitment to a rationally organised and consciously controlled society that distinguishes us from other reformers and revolutionaries. As an organisation we exist primarily to educate the working class, to teach it to measure and analyse the world and to eventually control it.

2. But we are not passive preachers. A revolutionary transformation of society can only happen when the working class, that is all those people who drive trucks and trains, make cars and condoms, serve in shops, clean streets, and pass papers over desks the real life working class not some mystical force from the ‘Book of Revelation’, are educated and organised enough to make it and then defend it and extend it. We seek to build an organisation to make a revolution. We do not have perfect knowledge of the workings of history. We do have some basic methods of analysis, which we seek to apply to a world of which we have imperfect knowledge. We must tell the class the truth, but more than this; we must teach the class to discover the truth for itself.

3. Because of our basic politics it is never permissible for us to use or encourage faulty logic, the substitution of emotion for reason, or any of the other advertising tricks which are the stock in trade of bourgeois politicians and some of the self defined left. Hoping to make short-term gains or pull off cunning stunts at the expense of serious work in the class is a betrayal of our cause.

4. The tactics of the Marxist organisation in the trade union and labour movement have to start from the reality of the class as it is, rather than, as we would like it to be.

5. The Labour affiliated trade unions encompass the overwhelming majority of the organised working class in industry, and the bulk of organized low paid workers in the public sector. A decisive majority of class-conscious workers continue to vote for and support the Labour Party. It has won two landslide election victories and looks likely to win the next.

In England and Wales socialist candidates get an average of less than 2% of the vote. No more votes than any left wing challenge over the last 30 years. In Scotland that figure is 7% in a PR election. A figure boosted in comparison to England and Wales more by the SSP’s appeal to Scottish nationalism, rather than any intrinsic socialist bias on the part of the Scottish working class.

6. There is only one coherent orientation to mass trade union politics today, that is to trying to mobilize the unions *as unions* to put their collective weight on the political scales: to fight for the trade unions to assert control over the Labour Party, to fight to transform it into an organisation that represents the working class and in the process rally and organise the forces of a new proto party within the womb of the old.

7. This policy involves trying to radically destabilize and undermine the existing Trade Union/Labour Party link, through the unions breaking from the existing relationship which is one of subordination to the government, to it’s opposite: a fight for workers’ democracy in the labour movement as part and parcel of the fight for a workers’ government.

8. We reject the alternative of declaring that Labour is dead and immediately pressing for the unions to walk away and organise a new workers’ party as a sectarian /opportunist dead-end. We also reject the shamefaced versions of the same orientation, which in radical rhetoric says we should not shy away from winning trade union support for socialist candidates out of fear of seeing unions disaffiliated. These policies have only become popular amongst certain layers because of the impact of defeats on the minds of some union activists. The prominence of the demand is a symptom of demoralisation and dis-orientation, rather than of any real willingness to engage in a political fight by the trade union as a trade union against Blairism. It is a demagogic cop-out not a militant stance. As

typified by Bob Crow of the RMT it heralds a collapse into a political trade unionism, with a bit of radical posturing for good measure, rather than a fight to rebuild the political labour movement. It is no part of the job of a Marxist organisation to pretend otherwise.

9. Our key task remains the same as stated at our last AGM, to organise within the affiliated trade unions to assert working class interests against the bourgeois ideology of the Labour Party leadership, which is currently Blairism. This should be the priority for our political work in trade unions.

10. Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party. If any qualifications need to be made to this formula they would be that it has become a neo-liberal, business unionist, bourgeois workers' party.

11. Marxists should not be surprised or express horror to find that in a bourgeois society the dominant ideas are bourgeois, or that the default political understanding of the world in the working class is bourgeois, or that the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class. Whatever else would comrades expect it to be?

Nor should we be shocked to note that the politics of the Labour leadership and the TU leadership are the same, and what is more, the bulk of the working class agrees with them on most things.

12. Blair has indeed made a great show of announcing that he governs in the interests of the nation, rather than the working class. He is not unique in this. All labour leaders from the founders onwards have been at pains to stress the idea that labour would not form a **class government**. The 1945 Labour government kept a wartime ban on strikes on the statute book and was prepared to use it. The fact that there has not been a greater trade union revolt against the anti-union laws is what needs to be explained, not Blair's commitment to them.

13. The organisation cannot adopt an attitude to the working class movement which assumes that we have some sort of mystical right to lead the class and that it is only the betrayal of Blair or the bureaucrats that prevents us from adopting our rightful place at the head of the class and leading it to the seizure of state power. To do so is not much better than claiming the Gods are angry and have turned their faces from us. But we detect a strong undercurrent of this in the idea that Blair has "hijacked" the Labour Party or carried out a "coup". He did not.

The workers – and not the most backward, but some of the most advanced – voted him into the leadership of the Labour Party.

We need to earn the right to lead the class, rather than assume that if we unfurl the banner the class will flock to us. The fundamental lesson of the failure of Socialist Alliance to do any better in elections than the lunatic WRP managed in the 1980's is that the conditions are not right for the tactic. The support is not there in the class. The grotesque opportunist/ reactionary spectacle that is RESPECT is the result of the SWP trying to build a short cut round this reality.

14. Labour has never been a workers' party in any meaningful political sense, it has always been a bourgeois political machine sitting on top of the trade union movement.

15. To talk of the Blairite coup representing the end of Labour as any kind of workers' party and the end of any kind of working class representation in parliament is wrong headed in the extreme. The Blairite ideology has remained the opinion of a

small minority of the PLP and a much smaller number of activists and members. There has been no noticeable commitment to 'blairism' beyond the small number of people who initiated the 'Project', despite its dominance of Party organisation and of Government policy. To exaggerate the 3 differences between Old and New Labour as the organisation has done since Blair took over the leadership is to allow ourselves to become the victims and unwitting prisoners of the ideology of the Blair faction.

16. Our task is to recognise where we are, to understand that Blair did not steal the Labour Party, there was no coup. The leadership of the Labour Party was handed to Blair by the members, including the trade union members. It is not even true that Blair has done the most damage to the Labour Party.

Kinnock was the leader who smashed the organised left in the party. He could only do this because the CLP based left, for all its debating society skills and conference tricks, had not won even a significant minority in the unions. Smith followed this up with the proposals to reduce the role of the unions at conference and cut them out of the selection of MPs.

17. The union/labour link has always functioned in the last analysis as a mechanism tying the bedrock organisations of the class to the capitalist state. The fact that through this mechanism of ruling class domination the trade unions have also secured piecemeal reforms and concessions, is no more remarkable than the idea that the union leaderships can sometimes achieve concessions through agreements regulating the terms of the labour contract.

a. The structural changes that Blair has introduced to the Labour Party have been far more limited than claimed by the Blairite propagandists who seek to paint New Labour as a party of a fundamentally different type from Old Labour.

b. The increase in the number of cabinet ministers on the NEC has not been so decisive as to prevent right wing trade unionists on the NEC saving the day for Blair by voting against representatives of the CLPs and the other unions. For instance over the original vote to re-admit Livingstone. Though the precise proportion of trade union officials on the NEC has changed their basic function of supporting the parliamentary leadership has not. The way the NEC has actually worked since these changes were introduced is not evidence of decisive change between "Old" and "New" but of continuity in the relationship between the trade union bureaucracy and the parliamentary elite.

i. There has been no qualitative change in the real role of conference and the NEC. The fact is that conference and the NEC never "controlled" the actions of the Labour Party in government - not even in theory. What conference used to possess - and still does possess - is something entirely different: the ability to determine a paper policy that the Labour government can choose to ignore. Blair has already made it clear that he will ignore party policy as determined by annual conference on a number of issues. This does not make him unique. Rather it marks him out as a typical Labour leader. Party conference can still vote against the government. The decisive factor that would allow the party in the country to counterpose itself as an alternative power to the Labour government is not the letter of the party rule book, but the existence of a substantial revolutionary party rooted in the unions, workplaces and communities, and therefore within the Labour Party itself.

ii. The political life of the CLP's still expresses itself in ward meetings, CLP GCs and at regional and national conference. It

might not be the same “political life” as in the Bennite period but it still finds expression.

iii. In comparison to the early eighties it is harder to get an MP de-selected, but not in comparison to the situation that existed in the Labour Party for 90% of its history. In reality, de-selections are still easier now than they were from foundation till the mid 70's. De-selections have happened post Blair .

iv. ‘Selections in seats where MPs are retiring have not resulted in the selection of left wingers, despite there being little pressure or interference from the Party. This indicates a low level of political involvement by the organised left rather than formal blocking by the apparatus. For example, CLPD/Briefing activist Christine Shawcroft is on the parliamentary candidates panel and has lost selection contests in Reading and Hackney South.

She has not been excluded from the panel.

v. “At annual conference the unions have defeated Blair whilst he has been PM on all the policy issues there has been a union consensus to challenge. Unfortunately these can be counted on one hand ; Brown’s 5p pension increase; PFI and the two tier workforce; foundation hospitals. On the first issue Brown made concessions following the Conference, on the second issue a bad agreement was reached in with the union leaders bargained away their member’s position on the eve of the following Spring (Local Government) Conference and the third issue was the subject of a significant revolt by the PLP. Opposition to Tube privatisation was defeated at the 1998 Conference despite a motion being submitted by all the rail unions because the majority of other unions voted it down. Likewise the motion which called for no military action in Iraq at 2002 Conference was lost because the unions were divided on the issue, roughly in the same proportion as CLPs 40% for the anti war motion but 60% against.

vi. The so-called Blairite revolution is already starting to lose momentum and unwind. The 2003 conference voted against the leadership to greatly increase the scope for motions from the party rank and file. Blair has been forced to champion the readmission of Ken Livingstone back into the party in what amounts to a morale-sapping and humiliating political climbdown for his faction.

18. The Blair government - despite its open right wing rhetoric and its neo-liberal ideology - has not attacked and reduced working class living standards as the Wilson, Callaghan and MacDonald governments did. There has been no New Labour equivalent of the MacDonald government’s dole cuts or the Wilson and Callaghan government’s real wage cuts.

19. Working class support for the Labour Party remains strong, and the working class component of the declining party membership is still high and getting higher. Only 28% of the Party membership has joined since Blair became leader. Only one in four could be described as middle class (Guardian/ICM poll February 2004) with 60% of members in social groups C2 or DE and only 25% in social groups AB. Talk of an erosion of core working class support for Labour lacks any real factual grip.

20. Though there is widespread opposition to Blair on issues like the NHS, privatisation and tuition fees, there is also strong support – particularly amongst low paid workers - for reforms such as working families tax credit. Even where all the government has done is phase in European legislation – such as on paid holidays – it has nonetheless received the credit. The

government is also cushioned from discontent by the very low levels of unemployment.

21. What is decisive and all-shaping in the Labour Party today is the refusal of the union leaders to fight Blair on issues like union rights or PFI and their bureaucratic grip on the unions preventing the rank and file doing so. The changes to the Labour Party rulebook introduced with Partnership in Power provide small scale secondary obstacles limiting what small 4 organisations with poor roots in the union and constituency rank and file can do, but they amount to no serious obstacle to the trade unions if they were led by people serious about confronting Blair. Nor would they be anymore of a serious obstacle to getting an internal struggle going to a revolutionary organisation of a few thousand people rooted in the workplaces, unions and constituencies.

22. To argue that Blair’s rule changes represent a qualitative change in the nature of the Labour Party is mistaken. It is to lapse into constitutional fetishism and a morbid variant of CLPD style “resolutionary socialism” which deludes itself about the realities of party democracy in Classic Labourism. After all, the normal practice of Labour Governments over the last 80 years is to ignore Party Conference! Nor is Blair the first leader to say that he will govern in the interests of the “nation” not the working class. That fashion started with MacDonald. All that the post 1994 changes have done is to provide a convenient alibi for soft left and official trade union inactivity and a more serious obstacle to the AWL in our attempts to organise as we used to do in the old days of the ultra open conference around highly critical motions. To argue otherwise is to show that you have been mesmerised by Blairite propaganda.

23. The tactic of standing socialist candidates against Labour has failed spectacularly to provide a focus for widespread disaffection with Blair’s Labour government. Even in Scotland the small scale electoral advance that has been achieved (7%) has happened on the basis of making impermissible concessions to Scottish nationalism in the form of the SSP’s nationalist programme “for an Independent Socialist Scotland”.

24. These facts indicate that a struggle to reclaim the Labour Party is the necessary strategic next step of the fight to revolutionise the working class and its’ movement. The alternative policy of attempting to win official union affiliation to socialist electoral challenges to Labour has no grip. As does a policy of calling for the trade unions to form a new party to fight the Labour Party in elections.

25. When addressing the unions we should raise the question of working class political independence in terms of what the union is, or is not doing, to fight for trade union control of the Labour Party and of the Labour government. We should demand accountability of union representatives in Labour Party positions.

We should call for the accountability of Constituency supported MPs. We should demand accountability of political fund expenditure and propose initiatives for the use of that money. In many unions the majority of the political levy will be direct expenditure by the appropriate union structure, ie a minority of the political fund will go direct to the Labour Party in affiliation payments. There are millions of pounds available in union political funds for expenditure on political campaigning. We should prioritise unions spending their political money on initiatives such as LRC, United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti Union Laws and campaigning against privatisation. Not only are these issues worthy of support in themselves but also perform the function of getting unions to campaign together on political issues.

26. There are now limited, but very encouraging signs that with the election of a new leaders the support that Blair could take for granted – despite token protests – from the retiring generation of union leaders is no longer guaranteed. Workers are slowly becoming more assertive and want to know what the union is getting from the Labour Party.

27. We propose that as an immediate central priority of the work of all AWL fractions in the affiliated unions, and of the Marxist socialists active in the Labour Party, that we seek to direct and mould the emerging Labour Representation Committee into a campaign involving union organisations, existing campaigns and CLPs around the theme of ‘Reclaim the Labour Party’. This movement should be trade union based and would focus on specific demands to restore and extend Labour democracy and promote the idea of de-selections and the selection of trade union and working class socialist candidates. To further this work all comrades who are not members should join the Labour Party and expelled comrades should seek re-admission.

28. The AWL should not take the initiative in proposing fragmenting the trade union political funds. Nor should we support proposals that would do so.

29. When proposing a political policy for the unions *as unions*, we should do nothing that undermines the fundamental collective purpose and class solidarity of the trade unions and renders them incoherent and ineffectual. If there is to be a meaningful political aspect to the unions, it has to be collective and unitary, anything else is out of kilter with the essential nature of trade unions as the embodiment of the principle of class solidarity.

30. The problem with proposals to parcel up the trade union political fund with different branches backing different parties or multi-party affiliation in which there would be no precise link between any union organ and any candidate, is that they would politically splinter the union and render accountability and control impossible. For the union to be unable to speak with a unified political voice is to put the union in a subordinate relation to the parliamentarian - or would be parliamentarian.

Only if the union has a unitary bond with the parliamentary representatives and their party is any form of accountability possible. Without the possibility of accountability, of replacing those who act against you, of subordinating them to the basic class organs, then what is proposed is not the Marxist tactic of the trade unions supporting, creating and controlling a new workers’ party, but merely a proposal to give trade union financial support for various incoherent, social democratic- cum -populist initiatives. This would mean reproducing all the worst characteristics of the Labour Party in miniature while losing sight of the revolutionary democratic working class principle of a party controlled by the workers.

31. As a result of a serious fight by the trade unions to regain some control over the Labour Party, it is highly likely that the issue of supporting working class candidates against imposed Blairites will arise. This would be the actual counter-position of a significant part of the worker’s movement –at a local level – to the Blair machine. Once such a fight develops it is impossible to predict how it will evolve, except to say that it will be uneven and will of necessity defy the ability of any budding master strategists to make it run along neat and tidy lines. That is the beauty of the class struggle it is explosive, unpredictable, in a word revolutionary. The Marxist, however, also needs to be able to distinguish the first weeks of pregnancy from the last, and to be able to spot the difference between a genuine

movement of the workers and a populist bandwagon. We have to be clear what the starting point is. What is under discussion right now in the real life labour movement is the option of unions affiliating to RESPECT or the SSP rather than Labour.

32. From the late ‘90’S the AWL looked to the emergence of ‘solid locally based labour movement candidates’ against the Blairites. So far there has only been a handful of examples of anything even remotely close to this, Livingstone is the most 5 prominent example. Right now, and for the foreseeable future, we are a long way away from ‘solidly based local labour movement challenges’ to the Blairites. The actual opportunities open to the AWL on the independent electoral front are instead very limited indeed.

33. The overwhelming majority of candidatures are those of existing would be ‘revolutionary’ organisations such as SWP/SSP/SP and should be judged on the basis of their politics.

RESPECT is a populist organisation embodying all that is degenerate about the pseudo left and is not supportable full stop.

We are for a Labour vote against RESPECT.

34. The SSP is only supportable critically, and on condition of our tendency waging a struggle within it against its’ nationalist form as a separate Scottish organisation and for a re-orientation back to Labour Party work.

35. Scotland is not an oppressed nation. Scotland has been an equal partner with England in British Imperialism. Unlike the national demands of oppressed nations Scottish nationalism has no intrinsic democratic merit. To organise on a Scottish exclusivist basis as the SSP does is reactionary and disruptive of working class unity. Even if Scotland was an oppressed nation socialists would be for the full and unconditional unity – including organisational unity – of the workers’ movement in the oppressed and oppressor nations.

36. One of the central arguments in the recent past for participating in independent anti-Labour electoral work was that Socialist Alliance campaigns provided an important opportunity for us in that they created an organisational framework for left unity that had not existed previously. This condition no longer applies. What the group is left with is a strategic calculation about the gains to be made from an independent electoral intervention that would be both anti-Labour and anti-RESPECT in comparison to refocusing on non-electoral independent propaganda activity and taking advantage of being the only Marxist group active in the political labour movement.

37. Given our political characterizations of these organisations we will not support moves to win official trade union backing for RESPECT or the SSP candidates or trade union affiliation to these organisations.

38. The outcome of the RMT leaderships stunt expulsion/disaffiliation from the Labour Party is simultaneously a victory for the Blairites and the left Scottish nationalists of the SSP and a defeat for the principle of class solidarity and UK - wide workers unity. It is in principle wrong for the RMT to decide its UK wide political orientation on the basis of allowing a handful of branches to affiliate to a party that doesn’t even aspire to organise on as broad an internationalist basis as the union itself. In practice the stance adopted by the union is typical of the manipulative bureaucratic posturing of the RMT leadership.

39. Only those keenest on self delusion can see the fact that the RMT is now outside the Labour Party as a step towards a

new worker's party. What it is a victory for is Crow's political model, which sees union support going to the highest bidder, rather than the union as the base for a distinctly working class politics.

40. The RMT experience should focus minds on the real substance of the policy of advocating branch/ regional autonomy in the deployment of the union political funds. In reality it is nothing more than a dishonest and cynical gambit by supporters of Respect/ SSP to confuse questions of overall UK wide political policy with the rights of branches and regions.

41. The RMT experience should also lead the AWL to abandon the pretence that - apart from exceptional one off cases like Livingstone - the policy of a union simultaneously backing Labour and anti-Labour candidates and being serious about staying in the Labour Party is in any way tenable. It can only function in reality as a blustering demagogic cover for manipulative disaffiliation. In the exceptional case of the FBU executive's conversion to the policy it is a convenient way of holding back pressure for outright disaffiliation, while reserving the final say on the issue to the executive.

42. The idea of Marxists seeking official financial and political support from Labour affiliated unions for electoral challenges to the party is a very new one. It never played any part in any of the electoral activity of the CPGB when it was a revolutionary force, nor was it raised by the RCP or any other part of the British /Irish Trotskyist tradition during any electoral turn. The idea comes from the SP/SSP who floated it in the FBU in 2000 and it was then taken up by the Socialist Alliance. The bald political fact is that the people who were making the running and filling out the content of the demand were people who were for the disaffiliation of the trade unions from the Labour Party.

Though it might have been possible for comrades to conceal the political logic from themselves for a certain period what has happened with the RMT should now make that impossible.

43. The SWP SSP and others are proposing motions to union conferences calling for the political funds to support non Labour candidates as long as they make a vague commitment to "support the policies and principles" of the union. We believe these proposals should be voted down. They are a manipulative back door way of proposing trade union funding for the RESPECT Coalition and George Galloway MP, and in reality inseparable from that. They are pitched in such a way as to appeal to people who want to open the door for support for Plaid Cymru, the SNP, Greens and Lib Democrats. They say nothing about the need for a fight to control what the unions representatives do in the Labour Party and are usually motivated by people who would rather such a fight didn't happen. If the people proposing the motions were serious, they would take put forward an actual rule change, which workers could support or not on its merits, rather than a vague gesture. They ignore the central guiding idea for Marxists of workers' control and democratic accountability. We want candidates, councillors and MPs who are answerable to the trade unions and accountable to them.

44. The principle here is of working class or labour representation. The working class must liberate itself, not look to saviours from above, no matter how benevolent or well meaning. We propose to the working class organisations that they put workers from their own ranks up for selection through the Labour Party as candidates to become MPs and councillors and if they win, that the union holds them to account and binds them with its collective discipline.

45. We believe that one cautious pro-Labour proposal that seeks to impose a measure of control and accountability on union representatives in the Labour Party structures or Parliament, or which seeks to get more workers in to parliament to promote union policy, embodies more of our programme than the RESPECT/SSP's ill-disguised gambit to get their hands on union money. Marxism is the theory and practice of working class self-liberation: we should play no part in fostering a model of trade union politics in which the union looks for enlightened saviours from above. Between cautious pro-Labour proposals that introduce a measure of accountability and radical postures that propose the trade union writing blank cheques to the likes of Galloway there is a class gulf. We should vote accordingly.

46. Marxists normally support limited and partial proposals because they embody an aspect of our programme. The RESPECT/SSP motions do no such thing. They contain a depoliticised organisational formula in lieu of a political proposal.

They fail to embody anything of our central concern here, which is, working class representation through trade union control and accountability of candidates, representatives and parties. In trade union conference debates we should sharply distance ourselves from the sectarians. To pretend that this can be done through amendments that talk about supporting only unnamed "working class candidates" is an unprincipled lame-brained illusion.

47. The experience of the RMT clearly demonstrates that the "do both" strategy is not an option. The people who devised the RMT stance always saw it as a politically useful way of disaffiliating and supporting anti-Labour candidates and never at any stage believed that "doing both" was possible or feasible.

You couldn't have a more graphic or clear demonstration that the "do both" policy is a pipedream than what has happened in the RMT. The reality is that either we are for the unions supporting organisations that stand against Labour and accepting disaffiliation as the necessary price, or we are for the trade unions asserting themselves within the Labour Party.

48. The starting point of the militant revolutionary outlook is the defence of every gain that the working class has made and an unwillingness to surrender any ground without a fight. Unlike middle class radicals who can run after the next project or stunt, the working class stays put and lives with the consequences of defeat every day. This is as true of the political arena as it is of the workplace. If it were not true, then the workers would have abandoned support for the Labour Party years ago. To say that the Marxists are not yet ready to push for a new trade union party and disaffiliations, implies that we are not yet ready to surrender the Labour Party to the Blairites and pronounce that all the unions can do is give up and start again from scratch. To walk away from a political fight is the not the way of Marxists.

We stay with the class.

AMENDMENT WITHDRAWN BEFORE CONFERENCE DEBATE

ABSTAIN IN JUNE

Rewrite para. 18 of motion on Respect to read: 'In the GLA and euro-elections, we can neither support Respect against New Labour nor New Labour against Respect. If Respect is standing on a watered-down non-socialist platform, the New Labour candidates, approved by the Party leadership and mainly hand-picked Blairites, are standing on the record of the government.

We are not with Galloway. But we are not with the Blairites against Galloway, either.

New Labour's remaining ties to the trade unions would not normally be sufficient to mandate voting Labour where there was an independent socialist or working-class alternative. There is no such alternative in these elections as a result of the setting up of Respect. However we should not, however, let recoil from the SWP's stupidities push us into thinking that New Labour is an alternative, or "vote Labour and demand working-class measures" has again become a policy with real grip. We should certainly not appear as champions of New Labour against left coalition-making. We say we want a left coalition, but one based on an independent working-class stance.

We should not present New Labour as the "working-class" alternative to the "popular front" Respect coalition. To do so would be to intoxicate ourselves with formulas.

To urge a Labour vote would therefore not relate to the real state of the left and the labour movement. It would only serve to isolate from those attracted to Respect out of disgust with New Labour, from radicalised youth and from trade unionists beginning to seek alternatives to Blair.

There is therefore no alternative to abstention in these elections. We should use the opportunity to explain that this is forced on us by the inadequacies of the alternatives on offer and to encourage 'active' forms of abstention (as in the Euro referendum).