

Alliance for Workers' Liberty conference 2003

The AWL and the revolutionary left

1. In the 20th century, after the early 1920s, the chances for working-class socialist revolution were aborted, essentially by the effects of Stalinism (including its rebound effect in extending the hold of social democracy over the working class in many countries). Socialists at the start of the 21st century have a more open field before us. But much of the very language of our movement has suffered through being annexed for so long by Stalinism. For example, many young activists today describe themselves as "anti-capitalist", but shy away from the words "communist" or even "socialist".

We need to rebuild a socialist political culture, remedying the deformations imposed even on anti-Stalinists by the decades of Stalinist domination of the left, and at the same time coming to terms with a radically changed world capitalist system and world working class. That work requires intense self-education, discussion and debate among already-committed socialists. At the same time we have to reach out.

For decades our comrades, the revolutionary socialist opponents of both capitalism and Stalinism, addressed themselves to, and moved among, primarily workers and youth who had already come to identify as "socialist" in a broad sense by reference to a culture sustained primarily by the Stalinist and social-democratic parties. That culture has not vanished, and will not vanish tomorrow. We need to appeal to people who identify as "old Labour", although not (as the SWP would have it) by pretending, implausibly, to be a rather diluted variety of "old Labour" ourselves. Nevertheless, that culture is waning. More and more today we have the opportunity, and the task, to "make socialists" among young people whose only notion and knowledge of socialism will be what we can take to them.

With the decline of the old Stalinist and social-democratic political labour movements, we can, and we must, address ourselves to a wider and more diffuse audience, with fewer fixed points of reference.

2. Some measure of what "building a revolutionary party" involves today can be got by tracing what is wrong with the SWP's mode of talking in which three categories, "electoral united front", "broad party", and "revolutionary party" are separated by Chinese walls.

Electoral agitation, which is aimed at the broadest audience and should therefore be limited to a few, simple, clear-cut ideas, is properly a lot simpler and cruder than the general writing and speaking of a socialist organisation, much of which is aimed at narrower audiences (active trade unionists; trade unionists in struggle; campaign activists; etc.) One-off "electoral united fronts" may be possible with all sorts of people.

But, fundamentally, consistent socialists cannot have one set of politics for the activists, and another for the broader working-class electorate. If we put one set of politics to the voters, then, to be true to ourselves, we must be active for those politics outside election time too. Unless we are to appear as, and be, ordinary bourgeois-electoral hypocrites, then the politics of our activity outside election times must be defended by us at election time too. A consistent "electoral united front", maintained over a solid stretch of time during which it must define itself in relation to wars, strikes, and political crises, can only be a party.

"Broad party" or "revolutionary party"? A revolutionary party is defined as revolutionary not by a desire (however sincere) to lead a revolution at some unknown time in the future, nor indeed by any one-off decision. It is defined as revolutionary by its constant striving to respond in a revolutionary way — that is, according to the logic of the class struggle, with the maximum of active, independent, working-class initiative — to daily politics. Any real socialist organisation is "revolutionary" not as a fixed state of being, but only as a measure of some success in that striving.

And the revolutionary organisation reaches the level of being a

party, a real party, only when it gets beyond the stage of being an ideological grouping (which we are all at now) and organises a decisive contingent of the most militant workers, the leaders of struggle in the workplaces and the communities. To be a real party it must be "broad" as well as "revolutionary".

That means it must be built in a struggle to transform the existing labour movement, and not as an "alternative" labour movement alongside the existing one.

3. Given the scope of the tasks of recomposition, both organisation and ideological, ahead, it is probable that the struggle will involve the creation of "broad" parties which are not yet revolutionary. We should not romanticise the Italian Party of Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione), formed by the more left-wing minority of the old Communist Party when it broke up, now expanded to include many more activists from other backgrounds (including Trotskyists) than old CPers among its 100,000 membership, definitely anti-Stalinist and class-struggle-oriented yet not clearly either revolutionary or "Third Camp". Nor should we think (as some do) that the task in other countries is to invoke something similar to what exists in Italy by incantation and mimicry, like dressing in green to make spring come. Nevertheless, it is quite plausible that the struggle will include at some stage the creation in other countries of "broad", not-yet-revolutionary, parties of refoundation".

4. The struggle to make such a "broad party" revolutionary should be waged not by futile administrative coups (packing the appropriate meetings and voting through a decision to be "revolutionary" over the heads of the uncomprehending or aggrieved members) but by convincing the members in broad and open debate. But it should be waged. After all, by what logic can we say a broad party *should* not be revolutionary? Of what class-struggle test can we say that the party *should* fail it? That we would not even *try* to convince the broad party to take an independent working-class stand? Which predatory war would we want the "broad party" not to oppose, which workers' struggle would we want it not to support, which socialist principle would we want it to flout? To erect a Chinese wall between "broad party" and "revolutionary party" is false.

5. Internal democracy is necessary for the struggle. It is false to think, as the SWP does, that a party or organisation can somehow reach a height where it no longer needs broad internal democracy (including the right to form tendencies and factions) by demonstrating to its own satisfaction that it is "revolutionary". How can it remain "revolutionary" in response to new challenges? What is its mechanism for getting back on course if its leadership, previously "revolutionary", proves less-than-revolutionary in some new situation?

6. We should reject the entire defeatist conception promulgated by the SWP that the normal and natural condition on the left is to have a small "revolutionary party" ("revolutionary" by fixed self-proclamation, and therefore not needing to allow any "platform rights" or large space for dispute inside its ranks) on one side, and various "broad" groupings and "united fronts" on the other with which the "revolutionary party" may or may not involve itself depending on its assessment of "moods" and the "gate receipts" to be got.

7. Our most fundamental role in fighting for the recomposition and unity of the revolutionary left will be by way of our contribution in ideas. It will be by way of what we can do to reconstitute an authentically Marxists, consistently democratic and socialist viewpoint based on today's realities and the experience of past decades. In terms of immediate organisation-to-organisation dealings, the practical question is in the first place as one of our relations with the SWP and its membership.

8. In late 1998 we, together with some people from the Socialist Party and the now-gone Independent Labour Network, launched the initiative which eventually led to the current Socialist Alliance. The SWP's decision to join in increased the organisational resources of the venture, and meant that involvement gave us a chance to work and discuss with people in and close to the SWP, but also put fetters of SWP preponderance on the development of the Alliance.

Our basic reasons for being involved in such a venture were (a) given the development of New Labour, wanting to promote the cause of independent working-class political representation in the public electoral arena as well as in resolutions and suchlike in much narrower trade union activist circles; (b) wanting to maximise collaboration and dialogue with the rest of the left. Those reasons remain.

Electorally, the Alliance has in general made only the most marginal impact, partly because of avoidable political errors mostly originating from the SWP. Nevertheless it has provided us with a vehicle for involvement in a number of modestly effective socialist election campaigns, with our own comrades or other good socialists as candidates.

As regards the internal political life of the Alliance, the SWP visibly sees allowing some degree of pluralism as a tedious necessity imposed on them by circumstances, and to be evaded wherever possible. Nevertheless, even that has allowed us to develop essential political arguments over Israel-Palestine, Europe, Islamic fundamentalism, etc. in a much more intense and "close-quarters" way than we otherwise could.

Almost everywhere, the range of people actively involved in the Alliance goes not much beyond a selection of SWPers, ourselves, and a smattering of activists who have been "around" the left for a while, often ex-members of one group or another. Nonetheless involvement would be worthwhile even if it were only the SWPers and ex-SWPers it gave us access to.

Local Socialist Alliance branch life has been poor in most areas since the May 2001 local government elections at last. Given the SWP's view of the Alliance as its "united front" "for elections" that situation is not likely to improve substantially and generally before the next big electoral deadline in 2004.

A small body of Alliance "independents" with at least this in common with us, that they favour a more rounded and active political life for the Alliance than the SWP would wish, emerged at the December 2001 Alliance conference, and has become more vocal since. A good number of these people also agreed with us on Europe.

So far as can be expected, the next year will be a poor one in the Alliance. We should nevertheless continue work in the Alliance on our own perspective. Even if we had a 20/20 crystal ball enabling us to say that the Alliance will become a dead duck at some determined point in the future, to conduct ourselves now as if we are just tagging along to observe the dying days would only cripple us. Even if we calculate that our maximum result from the Alliance, realistically, is likely to be discussing with and convincing individuals and small groups, we must be in the Alliance as activists with policies, proposals and perspectives for the Alliance as a whole, fighting energetically for the Alliance as a whole to adopt them and local Alliance groups to pioneer and model them.

We fight for:

* A working-class and labour movement orientation for the Alliance. For the Alliance to become, and present itself as, a force fighting in the labour movement for independent working-class representation, for the trade union base to assert itself politically against Blairism, and for an organic new workers' party.

* Local Alliances to root themselves in long-term, serious work in local workplaces and working-class communities.

* A real political life in the Alliance – discussions, political education meetings, study groups, etc.

* Rallying the "dissident independents" as a force in the Alliance around such ideas, possibly around an unofficial Alliance paper.

* Real discussion and dialogue with rank-and-file members of the SWP.

* The unification of the activist working-class socialist left into an open, democratic party or proto-party. We are in favour of the

Socialist Alliance, already an electoral "party", becoming a party (or proto-party) in a more comprehensive sense. We explain that at present – until its internal political processes had advanced much further – it would have to be a loose federal "party", and that such a "Socialist Alliance party", even in its best variant, would only be a lever towards the creation of a genuine new workers' party, not that party already-formed in miniature.

All AWL members should join the Socialist Alliance apart from those unable to be active in the Socialist Alliance because of important Labour Party work. All AWL members should also hold Labour Party cards, whether they are immediately active in the LP or not. In practice there is little or no problem, given the most minimal discretion, about holding an Labour Party card — or even attending some ward and GC meetings — and simultaneously being active in the Alliance.

9. The SWP visibly has not done well out of the Alliance. The SWP is dissatisfied with the experience of the "SW Platform" in the SSP. The ISO (Australian offshoot of the SWP) is openly considering withdrawing from the Australian Socialist Alliance after the New South Wales state elections due in March 2003. Will the SWP dump the Alliance? Probably not, if only because if they did so they would "leave behind" a remnant, including ourselves and probably including some SWP members too, which could probably link up with the Socialist Party to create a "refounded Alliance" able to compete publicly with the SWP. In any case, if the SWP should dump the Alliance, that "refoundation" should be our response.

10. Interaction, debate, close-quarters polemic is useful in self-clarification even if it garners few recruits in the short term, and even if some of it seems to be preaching to people with their ears wilfully closed (because they lack the concern for truth and clarity which would make them even begin to question a "line" that seems to "work"; or because they are too unsure of themselves to question something that seems to them left-wing "common sense"; or because they lack the courage or confidence even to think thoughts that seem to breach "party loyalty". As Trotsky put it: "Revolutionists are tempered not only during strikes and street battles but, first of all, during struggles for the correct policies of their own party". Or Cannon: "Polemics are the mark of a revolutionary party".

11. Given the organisational conceptions and methods of the SWP, there is no chance in any foreseeable future of our relations with the SWP and its membership being worked out in what, abstractly, would be the most rational way: unification in a common organisation with broad internal democracy, and a vigorous political battle within that democracy. In the short term we have to rescue new young activists from the maw of the SWP, and develop dialogue and debate with SWPers and ex-SWPers to win them over politically.

Longer-term the questions are: (a) how we can make visible a reasoned Marxist alternative to the SWP, so that activists repelled by the SWP can move from that instinctive repulsion to positive political struggle; (b) how many of the activists now in and around the SWP can be "recycled" into authentic Marxist politics when the SWP disintegrates.

We fight to make it many; it may be few. The "Healyite" current, SLL/WRP, was the largest avowedly-revolutionary organisation until the mid-1970s, yet only a few years after its final collapse, in 1985, only scattered and mostly broken-spirited handfuls of people from it were still active in revolutionary politics. Many of the old Communist Parties, even where they had within recent memory represented some vigour and militancy against the local ruling class, have left very little active residue as they have subsided into plain social democracy or folded altogether.

Today the SWP is in creeping crisis. A Socialist Alliance activist very close to the SWP describes its condition, plausibly, as follows: "Its old structures which held the party [his term] together through the 1980s have been disbanded and they have yet to find a permanent replacement structure. As a result... many of their most active members are semi-detached from the organisation but heavily

involved in Stop The War, Anti Nazi League, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, Socialist Alliance etc. They also have a very large number of inactive members who are still loyal to the party but aren't going to get up to do a paper sale. I was talking to a comrade about the view of the SWP as 'monolithic' and he couldn't stop laughing. 'We'd surely have to know who was a member first – and then talk to each other — to be a monolith', was his response". Its new tactic in recent years – the "Linksruck turn in Britain", which means in practice a lurch into multiple popular frontism – is not working well in its own terms. At the same time it is loosening the connecting ligaments of the organisation. On all evidence the SWP leadership, minus the late Tony Cliff, are unsure what they are doing and even less sure about making any new turn to a new tactic. Such is the culture of the SWP, and the lack, in its operations, of space for debate and education, that this loosening-up produces no large ferment of critical thought (though it must surely make it easier for individuals here and there to start thinking outside the box). Moreover, size, profile, material resources, give the SWP considerable force of inertia. Short of unexpected, dramatic, all-shaking events in the wider world, the SWP may well be able to continue trundling on for a good while. We will not know how far the inner decay has gone until the blast of lightning which shatters the tree.

The practical conclusions for us, in the meantime: (a) not to be overawed by the material resources and numbers (insignificant in any real terms, but large compared to us) of the SWP; (b) to have an open and personally friendly attitude to individual SWPers, and seek out discussion wherever we can; (c) never to assume that individual SWPers are just "SWP hacks" not worth discussing with: even the person whose "front" of defending the "party line" seems utterly impermeable may have critical thoughts in the back of their mind.

12. [Section on RDG: see earlier]

13. A year ago the "karaoke Leninists" CPGB/WW seemed almost as close to us as the RDG on many of these questions, though even then they were visibly further away in their disdainful attitude to trade union work; in their flat opposition to the fight for a workers' government, and rejection of transitional demands in general; and in their support, in the name of "partyism", for a centralised structure for the Socialist Alliance.

The disputes since their October 2001 reaffirmation of the idea that the April 1978 Stalinist military coup in Afghanistan was "a genuine democratic revolution", and their February 2002 outbursts against us when we said that more prior political discussion on orientation was needed before we could decide on merging Solidarity and WW, shed more light.

Their defence of their oracle, John Bridge/ Jack Conrad, over their "no-platforming" of us in Leeds in September at the behest of Mike Marqusee, has been particularly instructive.

The concurrently-running argument in which they have stubbornly insisted that they were not Stalinist even when they gave open retrospective support to the Russian military occupation of Afghanistan, the imposition of martial law in Poland against Solidarnosc, and the Russian invasions of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, likewise.

Over and above agreements or disagreements on particular issues, the CPGB/WW has a fundamentally different attitude to political ideas and political accounting from us. The political ideas on which they agree with us – for example, on Israel, or on democracy – are simply not very important for them. They do not even rank as high as keeping the less-than-glittering "star draw" of Mike Marqusee as a guest speaker!

For the CPGB/WW, the basic core is the Stalinoid hangover on which they differ most fundamentally from us – so-called "partyism". They don't much mind which words they sing to the karaoke background tune, so long as that tune is "Leninist". Despite a very different manner and pitch, their fundamental method is no different from the SWP's.

The resolution below, passed by our National Committee some months ago, stands. What the months since then have taught us is

that the points of political agreement with the CPGB/WW, mentioned at the start of the resolution, have astoundingly little weight with them.

We need to fight through the dispute we are now in with the CPGB/WW for at least two reasons. (a) Thanks to material resources (website, etc.) they have established a certain profile as "democrats" and "critical thinkers" in the Socialist Alliance, and from a distance, even to people who do care about the politics, they can seem quite close to us. We have to establish the record with the periphery they have thus gained. (b) In that periphery, and even among the CPGB/WW members, there may be a few who can be won over. (c) For our own education, and that of the broader left. For anyone educated in Trotskyist politics in the days when the Communist Parties were a real force, the fact that a group calls itself "CPGB" and adapts the name of the Stalinist lie-sheet "Daily Worker" (founded 1930) for its paper signals immediately that the group has an ambivalent (at best) attitude to Stalinism; and if despite the names the group is not in fact a old-Stalinist last-ditch outfit (as this "CPGB" isn't), then that its thought-processes involve the sort of cultist eccentricity and mysticism which evades ordinary logic by giving special private meanings to words and symbols. Evidently, however, there are now a fair number of people on the left, by no means Stalinists, who see the group's use of the names "CPGB" and "Weekly Worker" as a harmless bit of retro chic. Anti-Stalinist awareness has dimmed. We should brighten it up again.

The resolution passed by our National Committee (in outline) on 14/09/02:

1. We recognise that the CPGB/WW has moved a great distance closer to Marxist politics in recent years, notably on the Stalinist states, Ireland, Israel-Palestine, Islamic fundamentalism, Europe, and the Labour Party. To the average watcher of the left, the CPGB/WW seems very close to Workers' Liberty and Solidarity. In line with our general advocacy of maximum revolutionary unity where there is agreement, maximum dialogue where there is disagreement, we want to pursue links with the CPGB/WW. We should state that we want to discuss the possibilities of unity, and, therefore, discuss the key issues on which unity would depend.
2. The fact that the CPGB/WW has moved on so many issues indicates an ability to think and reassess on the part of at least its leading people. Such ability is not a common thing on the left.
3. However, there remain important political differences between us and the CPGB/WW.
 - a) We fight for a workers' government. They propose, as their highest political demand, only "a federal republic". We are for a democratic federal republic. We are against pretending that republicanism, or federalism, are the key issues (or even the key democratic issues) in Britain today. We are against limiting revolutionaries' summary political demands to political-democratic issues alone.
 - b) We fight to transform the labour movement, and for the building of a revolutionary party as the instrument to transform the labour movement. The CPGB/WW promotes "building a Communist Party" ("without such a party the working class is nothing; with it, everything"), as if the existing labour movement were a brainless nullity. They have dropped the old baroque formula of "reforging the Communist Party of Great Britain", but some of the old thinking evidently remains.
 - c) We follow Trotsky's idea that revolutionaries should "base their programme on the logic of the class struggle". The CPGB/WW interprets opposition to "economism" to mean that revolutionaries' task is to push into the working class "political" demands which otherwise would scarcely arise at all and to consider all "economic" concerns strictly secondary. Logically, that means that they base themselves on counterposing democracy to the state, whereas we base ourselves on counterposing the working class to capital (and fighting for consistent democracy in that framework).
 - d) We believe that responsiveness to the direct class struggle is the first duty of revolutionaries, and accordingly give much of our attention to workplace and trade-union work. Even a small group can make a sizeable difference (examples: our PCS comrades in the Mark Serwotka campaign; our Tube comrades). And even where and when we are too small to affect events on any large level, such

work is vital simply for what we learn from it — for the training it gives us in addressing bedrock working-class concerns. The CPGB/WW considers it permissible to neglect such work simply on grounds of resources.

e) We are for developing a higher level of political life in the Socialist Alliance, i.e. developing it towards a party, but for us that policy remains in the context of our general orientation to the labour movement. The CPGB/WW interprets its stance "for an SA party" to mean that the trade unions, for example, should be addressed essentially by way of advocating that the Socialist Alliance does trade union work. If the Socialist Alliance can be got to do useful activity in the trade unions, that is excellent; but it is irresponsible to wait (a long time!) for the Alliance to develop rounded revolutionary trade union work under pressure of our urging, rather than directly discharging our duties ourselves.

4. Those political differences do not exhaust the matter. There are other political differences. Tied up with the CPGB's line "for an SA party" is much wishful thinking about the SWP changing for the better. The CPGB/WW has only moved half way on Israel-Palestine, thinking that they can couple "two states" with continued vague venom against "Zionism" and support for the Palestinian "return".

Their claim that the 1979 Afghan coup was "a real revolution" indicates continued confusion on Stalinism. There are theoretical differences. The CPGB/WW rejects transitional demands and upholds the old Stalino-social-democratic notion of minimum and maximum programmes. It rejects permanent revolution and upholds the old cod-Leninist notion of "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". And, very immediately, there are "procedural" difficulties.

a) The CPGB/WW said plainly, in a recent private perspectives document, that their aim in pursuing relations with us was to split us. They prosecute that aim, not by open polemic on the big principled questions — which would be entirely their right — but by chickenshit agitation based on scraps of private conversation. (Thus, Mark O being rude about an SWP leader, and Jill saying that she is "cool" about the Socialist Alliance, in private conversation, becomes material for long articles in the WW about the AWL being internally divided on the question of the Alliance. Meanwhile the CPGB/WW makes no attempt at all to engage with or discuss our rather copious conference and public documents on the Alliance).

b) This indicates that they preserve from their Stalinist past not just some theoretical ideas (minimum/ maximum programmes, "democratic dictatorship", real revolution in Afghanistan) and repulsive idioms (the use of the Stalinist word "Trotskyite" to refer to the Bolshevik-Leninist-Fourth-Internationalist tradition), but conceptions of political morality too.

c) The CPGB/WW are not as open and democratic as they make themselves out to be. Thus, while we invited them to our conference, and all our conference documents are available to all to read, the CPGB/WW's perspectives document is a private text and their discussions around it were private. That the document came into our hands caused them great chagrin. They do sometimes run internal debates in their paper, but not, it seems, whatever debates they have among their inner core.

d) The CPGB/WW's appearance of being a highly ideologically-trained and compact group selected around a definite set of ideas is also partly illusory. What holds them together is also certain buzzwords, a certain "style", and a rather cultist authority granted to their "theoretical compass", namely, the "one comrade" whom they describe in their internal documents as the sole person among them doing serious theoretical work.

5. That the CPGB/WW refuse to call themselves Trotskyist — that, indeed, they choose to use the old insult-word "Trotskyite" — is significant. To call oneself Trotskyist today does not carry much positive meaning. But to insist that one is not Trotskyist means a lot — just as insisting that one is not a Marxist, or not a socialist, or not a democrat, means a lot. In the case of the CPGB/WW, the "not Trotskyist" label serves essentially as a claim to proprietorial rights over ideas which they have in fact learned from the Trotskyist, Bolshevik, Marxist tradition — a claim, in fact, ludicrous though it is when spelled out explicitly, that genuine Marxism somehow

"reincarnated" itself (as in Buddhist mythology) in them after 60 or more years' absence from this unhappy planet.

6. We should pursue discussions with the CPGB/WW, making them as open and public as possible, and drawing in as much of the CPGB/WW membership and periphery as possible. Our aim here, whatever the outcomes as regards practical collaboration, is to educate and clarify. We listen and we are ready to learn new things, of course, but we go into the discussions not empty-handed but with a clear purpose to win people to "Third Camp" Trotskyist politics.

14. The new vigour in pursuing international connections called for by our last conference has scarcely been achieved, although we have maintained a number of dialogues and had a presence at the European Social Forum (November) and the Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference (March). More effort should be put in.

We argue for a "First International" type regroupment of the working class socialist left internationally; we maintain and develop relations with individuals and groups everywhere which show an interest in dialogue.

The largest forces of the activist left internationally are now the USFI (centred on the LCR in France) and the SWP's international network. Those two groupings are in discussion with each other. We are and should be interested in contact and discussion with SWP-offshoot groups, especially those which show signs of independent thought, like the ISO Zimbabwe. In practice real dialogue is very difficult.

It is also, perhaps more surprisingly, very difficult with the IS splinter groups which now exist in considerable number internationally, and which the ISO-US and Socialist Alternative (Australia) are attempting to regroup. Our best contacts with such splinter groups have probably been with the "Socialisme" group in France (which is now joining the LCR) and the former Belgian IS (now fused with the Belgian offshoot of Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party). We are in touch with individuals elsewhere, but many of the other IS-splinter groups have either been unresponsive, or vanished quickly, or both. The ISO-US/SA-Oz axis shows no signs of developing politics even one smidgeon better than the SWP's. The ISO-US's venture at the European Social Forum, where it organised a joint meeting with the Morenists, whose main plank was to denounce the enlargement of the European Union as an "imperialist conquest of Eastern Europe", shows its confusion.

The USFI is a different matter. In a recent letter to the SWP the LCR lists the following chief political differences:

- The need to argue for self-determination for the Kosovars in 1999;
- The need to organise demonstrations against the Afghan war under slogans directed both against the USA and against the Taliban, rather than only anti-US slogans;
- No "complaisance towards reactionary political and religious [Islamic] authorities against which our comrades fight in their countries (sometimes in peril of their lives)";
- The need to "take into account the qualitative transformations" of social-democracy (as against the SWP's view that nothing essential has changed in New Labour);
- The need for proper united front work, to "stimulate class-struggle positions on the basis of the experience of sectors of the mass movement" rather than by mechanical "party" control (in particular, the LCR expresses incredulity at the claim that Globalise Resistance is any sort of united front, rather than an SWP artefact);
- Recognising that a "revolutionary organisation" cannot be such through fixed, once-and-for-all demarcation, but that its character can only be continuously "corroborated... through the test of events";

- Insisting that "we disagree with a conception of the party that does not integrate the possibility of an organised pluralism. In brief: tendency rights", and opposing the model of a single-faction party (in particular, the LCR finds the SWP's claim that it had to eject the ISO-US because the ISO-US was too "sectarian" to be "hardly convincing").

There is a great deal that is blurred in the LCR's arguments. For example, their agitation for self-determination for the Kosovars in

1999 was developed only as a second string to agitation against the NATO war. In practice the LCR's "united front work" tends towards flabby self-dissolution in a multiplicity of campaigns, the sort of softness that led them to vote Chirac in the second round of the French presidential election. While in practice the LCR's position on Israel-Palestine is "two states", they shy away from the actual slogan, and do not challenge the SWP head-on around this issue. Their letter to the SWP grossly evades the task of re-examining the place in history of the Stalinist states – a central question for understanding the whole of the 20th century, and one on which the SWP is in fact less wrong than the LCR. (The LCR's leading author, Daniel Bensaïd, has written in his books *Trotskyisms* and *Marx for Our Times* that it was methodologically unsound to call the "bureaucratic societies" workers' states, "degenerated and deformed", or post-capitalist. Nevertheless, neither the LCR collectively, nor Bensaïd individually, have made any clear reassessment of the whole perspective on the 20th century shaped by seeing the Stalinist states as deformed expressions of a "process of world revolution").

And more. Nevertheless, it is plain that as against the SWP the LCR has a lot of common political ground with us (and, on each question, some elements of the LCR would have even more common ground with us, though different elements on different questions). And, at least as importantly, the LCR has a real intellectual life, an understanding of the political need for critical thought.

We have long been in favour of getting closer relations with the USFI. Three years ago we made a specific attempt to approach the USFI to discuss some sort of associate or sympathiser status. We got rebuffed. The perennial obstacle is the hostility to us of the accredited incumbent USFI representative in Britain, the ISG (ex Socialist Outlook) grouplet. We have reasonable relations with a number of people and groups in the LCR; an ex-member who continues to support our ideas in the RSB (the main German USFI group); contacts elsewhere; but all that is a poor substitute for some "official" dialogue.

Exactly how best to try to get that dialogue is not clear, and will be in part a matter of fine-tuning "tactics"; but we should take the basic political decision to make the effort.

Labour representation/ Socialist Alliance

From Gerry Byrne. Add new 10, to 'AWL and the revolutionary left' and renumber.

The SA is stagnant. In the two most important tests of the class struggle – the firefighters' dispute and the anti-war movement – it has failed to make any gains and has arguably put back the movement. It has done so because it is dominated by the SWP and its Popular Frontist politics; its conception of the SA as purely electoral front; and its own internal inertia. We are not strong enough alone to counter this destructive effect. What allies we thought we had have deserted us, coat-tailing the SWP. The best independents, who signed up for the unofficial SA paper, are bitterly disillusioned and not likely to stay in the SA.

We should not simply walk out and thus lose whatever support we have among those independents, but we should angle our propaganda in such a way that it is not dependent on the SA. We should stress the need for a workers party, and win them to this perspective, recognising that it will be recomposed from struggle within the Labour Party, the trade unions and independent socialist activists who may be in the SA. We take as our starting point the need of the working class for its own political party, not our tactical relations to the rest of the revolutionary left.

International work

Addition to section 14 of 'The AWL and the Revolutionary left', from Gerry Byrne.

We should up the profile of our international work. Specifically we should work towards:

- a. defining a broad class-based 'third camp' bloc in the anti-war/anti-capitalist movements, initially on the basis of the 'No to war, No to Saddam' appeal, but aiming for a longer term intervention/discussion in the Social Forum movement;
- b. elaborating a programmatic basis for a Workers Liberty International tendency.

To facilitate this, the incoming NC to set up an international commission to:

- a. allocate resources and if necessary launch a fund-raising appeal to enable attendance at international meetings, translations, etc.;
- b. increase the level of education on international issues (with, for example, branches taking responsibility to inform themselves on particular areas of the world);
- c. define priorities

First International

From Bruce Robinson.

In the document 'Awl and the revolutionary left', delete 2nd para of point 14 and add new point 15 as follows (which includes the original paragraph):

We argue for a 'First International' type regroupment of the revolutionary left internationally; we maintain and develop relations with individuals and groups everywhere which show an interest in dialogue.

We should recognise that major world events can cause — often unexpectedly — shifts and realignments within the revolutionary left. The wars in Kosova and Afghanistan and issues such as attitudes towards Islamism and popular frontism have already served to create new lines of demarcation.

We should therefore:

- argue for and build international initiatives based around issues of working class independence and 'Third Camp' politics, including where other participants come from very different traditions from us;
- build practical solidarity with 'Third Camp' forces such as the Labour Party of Pakistan and the FNPBI in Indonesia (No Sweat can play an important role here.); — seek closer links wherever possible with the perspective of building a 'First International' type current.

Through our presence on the web and the circulation of our publications, we have also encountered groups and individuals willing to reproduce and circulate our material (e.g. in the Ukraine, Norway and Finland). We should work to bring them into closer relationship with the AWL and consider relaunching an international platform.