

The AWL Basic Education Programme

Introduction

This second edition is more self-contained, using material that has appeared in the magazine recently, and highlights a "tutors course" to be done by those who have completed the "induction" course. The reading under A1, B2 and B3 adds up to a brief explanation of what socialism is, why we oppose capitalism, and why we look to the working class: it should be useful with people new to politics who are considering whether to get involved with the AWL at all, as well as for our own educationals.

How the Education Programme is organised here

The titles of each section, the basic questions covered and the titles of the recommended reading are all in this document. Each of the classic texts can be found at the Marxists Internet Archive, www.marxists.org. Most of the other reading, articles from recent issues of Workers' Liberty and so on, is available by post if you do not already have it, while the few hard-to-find documents you will need are on <http://www.workersliberty.org>, linked from the relevant section of the programme.

A. Socialism and the Marxist Critique of Capitalism

A1. Why socialism?

What will socialism be like? Is it workable? Is it worth fighting for?

Excerpt from "How we live and how we might live", by William Morris.

"What Marx and Lenin meant by socialism" by Karl Kautsky.

"Why capitalism should not survive", AWL article from 1991.

A2. Why capitalism means "a sacrifice of life" for the great majority, the working class.

"The worker's life-activity he sells to another person... the creative force... the worker surrenders to the capitalist... living labour serves accumulated labour."

Read the first section of Wage Labour and Capital, down to the heading "By what is the price of a commodity determined?". Skip, for the present, the introduction by Engels. The first section, about three pages long, under the heading "What Are Wages?", is the essential one for now, but you may find it useful to read further; if doing so, skip the four pages or so (depending on the edition) from the heading "By what is the price of a commodity determined?", to "the same general laws which regulate the prices of commodities in general, naturally regulate wages."

Capitalism reduces human creativity to a commodity to be hired and exploited, or shelved, for the sole purpose of the profit and greed of the rich. Through the exchange between capital and labour - apparently a free and equal contract between individual capitalists and individual workers - the whole working class gets merely a pittance, to enable it to grab a bit of life in the time left after work ("life begins where [labour] ceases, at table, in the public house, in bed."); the capitalist class gets control of social wealth and the whole creative, productive power of society.

Marx's indictment of capitalism here sets the scene for the questions to be dealt with in the following sections: How are prices and incomes determined? How can such inequality arise even when the exchange between capitalist and worker is, on the face of it, free and equal, and the worker is paid "the rate for the job"? What is the answer to this inequality and inhumanity? Just to get better wages and conditions, or to replace the whole system of wage-labour by a different one? How can that different, better system be brought about? What can we do within the existing system to speed its replacement by a new one? What is capital? Why and how does it create unemployment, crises and increasing inequality?

A3. Why labour produces all values; how profits come from unpaid labour.

"The working class alone produces all values... however... the working class receives back only part for itself... the part which the capitalist class keeps for itself becomes larger with every invention."

Read Wages, Prices and Profit section VI ("Value and Labour"), VII, VIII, IX and X; and the Introduction by Engels to Wage Labour and Capital.

Here Marx answers the questions: how are prices and incomes determined? How can a "fair wage", the "rate for the job", result in inequality? The essential ideas are:

- * a) Prices represent value, which is the social labour-time embodied in different commodities.
- * b) Wages are the price of labour-power, not labour. Labour-power is the relatively fixed, available commodity on sale when the worker hires himself or herself out for this or that many hours in the week; labour is the variable, creative process set in train when the capitalist "consumes" the labour-power he or she has bought.
- * c) The value of labour-power is set by the socially-established "living wage" (averaged over the whole working class, children, etc. included).
- * d) Profits arise from the difference between the total new value created by labour, and the limited quota of old value paid out for labour-power.

A4. Why the class struggle over wages and hours is central to capitalism; why we fight for the abolition of wage-labour.

"Between the limits of the rate of profit, an immense scale of variation is possible. The fixation of its actual degree is only settled by the continuous struggle between capital and labour... At the same time, the working class... instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work'... ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wages system!'."

Read Wages, Prices and Profit sections XI to XIV.

The answer is not higher, fairer or better wages, but to do away with the whole system of domination of one class over another which is built into wage-labour. But also built into wage-labour is a continuous and lively struggle over the level of wages, hours and conditions. In that struggle the working class gains the solidarity and confidence to overthrow capitalism.

A5. Why capitalism constantly tends to increase inequality and domination.

"Capital is a social relation of production... a sum of commodities becomes capital as an independent social power, the power of a part of society... wage-labour produces the alien wealth dominating it, the power hostile to it, capital."

Read the later parts of Wage Labour and Capital (from "Wages will rise and fall according to the relation of supply and demand...", on the ninth page or so, depending on the edition).

- * a) The inequality and domination in capitalism is not just a fact of each week's transaction between capitalists and workers. The whole dynamic of the system is to increase and sharpen that inequality and domination.
- * b) This happens even if real wages increase.
- * c) Under capitalism, the necessary processes of correlating each individual's labour with overall social labour take the form of the individual being coerced by "social relations between things" - commodities and money.

- * d) Labour thus becomes, for the worker, a mere "sacrifice of life", and only incidentally a positive, creative activity.
- * e) Capital is a social relation. However, under capitalism it appears as a thing, a fact of nature, which demands profit as a "return to capital" by its very nature. The human relations between workers and capitalists appear as relations between the commodities labour-power and capital.
- * f) Conventional accounts of wages, price and profit simply mirror these appearances. They assume that capitalism is eternal.
- * g) In fact the economic forms of capitalism - prices, wages, profit, capital - are not eternal but transitory. Our aims should not be limited to fair exchange, fair wages, democratic control over capitalism, or such like. We should stretch our imaginations to envisage the abolition of the wages system.

A6. Why capitalism produces crises and unemployment.

"A gallop of industry, commercial credit and speculation finally, after breakneck leaps, ends where it began - in the ditch of a crisis... The overwork of some becomes the condition for the idleness of others."

Socialism Utopian and Scientific section III.

B. How Class Struggle Changes the World

B1. Capitalism is only one stage in history, shaped by class struggle.

Where does capitalism come from? What other social and economic forms have there been in history? Why is capitalism only a transitory stage of development?

Communist Manifesto sections I and III.

B2. Why is the working class the decisive force for progress?
Why the working class, and not just "the poor" or "the people"?

What is special about the working class compared to other exploited classes in history?

Communist Manifesto sections I and III

"Why the working class?" [abridged], by Hal Draper

B3. Stalinism is not a form of socialism, but the opposite of socialism.

Working-class socialism versus "state socialism".

The Lies Against Socialism Answered.

B4. Why must we build a revolutionary party?

What is special about the revolutionary party, as compared to other political parties?

Why must we build a revolutionary party?

B5. Why trade-union work is central for us.

Why does the working class organise in trade unions? Why is trade-union work central for revolutionaries, even when the trade unions are conservative? What do we do in the trade unions?

Workers Liberty 37, p.47.

B6. Transform the existing labour movement, not create a new one!

How can we transform it? Why do we orient to the Labour Party as well as the trade unions? What do we aim to achieve by work oriented to the Labour Party?

Article "The Labour Party in Perspective" from Workers' Liberty 28 (and current articles in recent magazines).

C. The revolutionary outlook

C1. Militant or sympathiser?

What does being a revolutionary involve, as a choice about your aims in life? Why is it worthwhile? Why do revolutionaries "drop out"? Why should they remain committed?

Workers Liberty 24, p.22.

C2. Materialist dialectics

Is history shaped by ideas or by material relations? What does "dialectics" mean? Does God exist?

Articles by Edward Conze in Workers Liberty 28ff, also published as an AWL pamphlet.

Socialism Utopian and Scientific section II.

C3. Women's liberation

"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race and sex." Why should women have equality? Why do they not have equality now? Why is women's liberation linked to working-class struggle?

Pamphlet: The Case for Socialist Feminism, especially pages 9-14.

C4. Against all oppression, not just class oppression

Why must revolutionary Marxists be consistent democrats, for equality for all? How to beat the racists? Why must we be for liberation for lesbians and gay men?

Workers Liberty 36, p.45.

C5. The national question: Ireland

Why do nations exist? Have they always existed? Will they always exist? What is our basic programmatic answer to national conflicts? In particular: on Ireland, why we argue for consistent democracy; for a free federal united Ireland, with local autonomy for the Protestant-majority area and confederal links to Britain.

Communist Manifesto section I; Workers Liberty 29, p.36; Workers Guide to Ireland.

C6. The national question: Israel-Palestine

Why we say: a united socialist states of the Middle East, with self-determination for all minority nationalities; self-determination for both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews.

Workers Liberty 31, p.30.

D. The state and revolution

D1. The state is "the executive committee of the ruling class."

Why is the present-day British state a capitalist state? How can the state represent the interests of the capitalist minority when everyone has the right to vote?

Workers Liberty 38, p.47; pamphlet: Socialism and Democracy, especially pp.38-43.

D2. Reform and revolution

What is class struggle? How are reforms won? Can socialism come through Parliament? Can the workers make a revolution? How?

Pamphlet: Socialism and Democracy, especially pp.36-70.

D3. The French Revolution

Where did the slogans of "liberty, equality, fraternity" come from? Why was the French revolution such a tremendous dividing-point in human history?

Article in Workers' Liberty 23.

D4. The Origins of Socialism.

Socialism or communism, as a dream of a better society, is centuries old. As an active political movement, it dates back to the French revolution and the "Conspiracy of Equals" led by Babeuf in 1795-7. Babeuf's tradition was continued by revolutionaries like Auguste Blanqui (whose followers, the "Blanquists", eventually merged into the Marxist movement) and groups like the Communist League (for which Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto).

Alongside that tradition, there developed in the first half of the 19th century many groups which reacted to the social dislocation created by the rise of industrial capitalism by working out blueprints for a better society and preaching them or trying to put them into practice by setting up model communities. Marx and Engels saw much to learn from these traditions, but developed socialist theory further by (a) linking it to a historical and economic analysis of the development of capitalism, and the contradictions within capitalism that would lead to its downfall; (b) identifying the agency within capitalism that could create socialism, the working class - and the self-organisation of the working class.

Communist Manifesto parts III and IV; Socialism Utopian and Scientific part I.

D5. The English Revolution.

When did England have a revolution? Why? What was the difference between that revolution and the one we want to make now?

Comments in Socialism Utopian and Scientific, Introduction; and excerpt from Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution 1603-1714

D6. When British workers had a mass revolutionary movement: the Chartists.

Does the British working class have a record of revolutionary struggle? Why were the Chartists defeated? Can the British working class rediscover that revolutionary tradition?

Excerpt from A People's History of England, by A L Morton

D7. The Paris Commune.

The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first workers government. It showed how working-class rule needs, and can create, a democracy much wider than bourgeois democracy, with access to political life for the majority, right of recall, abolition of official privileges, merger of legislature and executive.

Feature in Workers' Liberty 29 and 30.

D8. State and revolution.

Why does the state exist? Is it neutral? Whose interests does it represent? What do we do about it? What is a "workers state"?

Socialism and Democracy, especially pp.93-96; State and Revolution.

E. The AWL, Trotskyism and the Marxist tradition

E1. The Russian Revolution.

Was it a real revolution, or just a coup, as conservatives claim? What made it different from other revolutions of the 20th century? How did it happen?

Lenin and the October Revolution; Socialism and Democracy, pp.88ff; relevant parts of our book on "The Fate of the Russian Revolution".

E2. The Stalinist counter-revolution in the USSR.

How did the Russian revolution degenerate? Was Stalinism the continuation of Bolshevism, or its negation?

Socialism and Democracy, pp.50-61; relevant parts of our book on the "The Fate of the Russian Revolution".

E3. The Russian Revolution and Marxist theory.

Why does the fate of the Russian revolution not prove that socialism (or revolution) is bound to fail? Why do Marxists argue that socialism can only be built internationally (not in one country alone), and on the basis of the achievements of developed capitalism (not by sheer will on the basis of backward economic conditions)? Given that, what did the Bolsheviks think they were doing when they led a revolution in one country, and that a backward one?

Re-read The Lies Against Socialism Answered (see under B3); relevant parts of our book on "The Fate of the Russian Revolution".

E4. The Internationals.

Marxists have been active in organising four international associations of socialist and working-class groups: the First International, 1864-72; the Second, 1889-1914; the Third, founded in 1919, destroyed by Stalinism over the 1920s, and openly going over to class-collaboration and counter-revolution in the 1930s; and the Fourth, founded in 1938, but dispersed and decayed from the late 1940s. Why did Marxists seek to organise on this international scale? Why did each International collapse and decay?

A Short History of the Internationals

E5. Why we are Trotskyists.

What are the general, basic ideas of Trotskyism? We argue that "Trotskyism" is only the name given to the continuation of revolutionary working-class politics by the social-democratic and Stalinist distorters of such politics. Why?

Relevant parts of our book on "The fate of the Russian Revolution." Also: Workers Liberty 34, p.33; Workers Liberty 36, p.36.

E6. The AWL's Trotskyism and "official" Trotskyism today.

Why do we say that the Yugoslav, Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese, etc. revolutions were not workers' socialist revolutions? What were they? What do we think of the regimes they produced? What did the "mainstream", "official" Trotskyists say about them, and why? Why do we think they were wrong to continue to use Trotsky's formula about the USSR being a "degenerated workers state"? Why do we think our ideas are closer to Trotsky's basic politics?

Relevant parts of our book on "The fate of the Russian Revolution." Workers' Liberty 11 editorial; article on "Our Tradition" in the report of the 4th AWL conference.

E7. The AWL.

A brief outline of our history.

A more detailed account of the history from 1978 to 1990 will be found in the pamphlet, We Stand For Workers' Liberty.

E8. Summing up.

Our view of socialism. What's wrong with capitalism? How does it produce its own grave-diggers in the working class? How working-class socialism cuts against "state socialism" and Stalinism. Why the working class needs a revolutionary party. Why that party must be built in a fight to transform the labour movement. Why the working class must break up the capitalist state and create its own workers state. Why revolution is not alien to Britain. Why revolutionary politics demands long-term commitment; why it involves an all-round struggle for consistent democracy and human equality. How the workers took power in Russia in 1917, why they could not sustain that power, why revolutionary politics today must build on the authentic ideals of the Russian revolution, and is as opposed to Stalinism as it is to capitalism.

Glossary

Wages, Price and Profit

Adam Smith (1723-1790):

Founder of theoretical economics. Hailed today as a hero by the Thatcherites, though in fact his ideas were by no means in tune with theirs. He recognised that between employers and workers, the "interests are by no means the same", denounced the conspiracies of businessmen, and argued for higher wages.

Physiocrats:

18th century French writers who started to develop an economic theory. They regarded only farm labour as productive.

Anti-Jacobin war:

Britain's war against France after the French revolution. The Jacobins were the revolutionary party in France.

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, section III

Joint-stock companies:

Companies owned by a number of shareholders, rather by a single individual.

Trust:

An alliance of companies in a particular line of industry. These were common in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Bismarck:

Prime Minister of Prussia and then Chancellor of Germany from 1862 to 1890. Used state ownership to develop German industry, and social insurance to try to bind the workers to the state.

Communist Manifesto, sections I and II

Metternich:

Reactionary politician, who dominated the Austrian Empire (then a great power) from 1809 to 1848.

Guizot:

Leading politician under the constitutional monarchy in France from 1840 to 1848. Rounding of the Cape: The Cape of Good Hope, in South Africa, i.e. the opening-up of the sea route from Europe to India (by Vasco da Gama, 1498).

Absolute monarchy:

The regime of transition from feudalism to capitalism in which the king had established his supremacy over the lords and barons and held dictatorial power, balancing between the bourgeoisie and the nobility. (In England, the Tudors and Stuarts, approx. 1485-1642).

The Ten Hours Bill:

Of 1847, limiting the work hours of women and workers under 18 to ten per day.

"Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties":

What Marx and Engels chiefly wanted to emphasise here was that their organisation, the Communist League, did not counterpose itself to the existing mass working-class party in England, the Chartists.

Bare existence:

This was the common view of socialists of the day (and some orthodox economists, too), that wages must be forced down to near-starvation level. After his economic studies, as he explains in Wages, Price and Profit, Marx vehemently opposed this dogma.

The ancient world:

In this context, the Roman Empire.

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, section II

The French philosophy of the eighteenth century:

Writers like Diderot and Rousseau who were atheists (they did not believe in God) or deists (they believed in a God as a philosophical concept, but not as a person issuing instructions from burning bushes, dictating books, etc., in the usual manner of the God of Christian and other religions).

Hegel:

German philosopher of the early 19th century. He rejected the scheme, common among earlier thinkers, that spirit existed alongside and above matter; he argued that all reality was made up of developments and manifestations of the Absolute Spirit (i.e. God).

Dialectics:

See the article by E. Conze in *Workers Liberty* 28ff for a simple explanation. To think dialectically is to study things in their interrelations (not in isolation); in movement and development (not statically); in both opposition and unity (rather than just either opposition or unity); and through their internal contradictions.

Metaphysical:

The word has many different meanings. Here, as he explains in the next few pages, Engels uses in the same way that Hegel used it, to mean the opposite of dialectics - i.e. studying things in isolation, statically, without looking at their internal contradictions, etc.

Darwin:

Author of "The Origin of Species (1859), in which he argued that different species of plants and animals - including the human species - emerge through evolution on the basis of natural selection, mutations favourable to survival being reinforced and those unfavourable dying out.

Hegel was an idealist:

This does not mean that Hegel was someone who devoted himself to ideals, as opposed to a materialist who would care more about a comfortable life. (In fact, he did have a comfortable life, as a university professor, and seems to have trimmed his ideals somewhat to secure his career). "Idealist" here means someone who thinks that spirit or mind or the soul exist over and above material reality (or, in Hegel's case, that material reality is just an expression of spirit). "Materialist" means someone who believes that

mind is a part and a function of material reality (and thus that the idea of God, a "spirit" existing before and beyond material reality, and creating that material reality, is a nonsense). For more on materialism and idealism, see the Introduction to "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific".

Nominalism:

Roughly speaking, the theory that "universals" (e.g. "white") are just names, not entities as real as matter.

Agnosticism:

The view that we do not, or cannot, know whether God exists.

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, part I

"The great men, who in France prepared men's minds for the coming revolution":

The materialist, or semi-materialist, writers like Diderot, Rousseau, Voltaire, etc.

Babeuf:

Leader of a communist movement (1795-7) during the French Revolution. Babeuf and his comrades demanded real equality, instead of the formal equality before the law of the bourgeois revolutionaries which still left some in luxury and others starving. They rejected the idea (fairly popular at the time) of dividing up property to give everyone a little patch of land or a little workshop because, they said, it was naïve: inequality would immediately re-emerge. They demanded common ownership of wealth. Under the regime of the Directory (the first stage in the bourgeois consolidation of the revolution, from the overthrow of Robespierre in 1794 to when Napoleon took power in 1799), they agitated through newspapers and meetings and then organised for an uprising to restore the radical democratic constitution of 1793, believing that this would open the way to communism. The leaders were betrayed and arrested in May 1796, before they could launch their uprising, and subsequent attempted uprisings by their comrades remaining at liberty were easily crushed. This was, however, the beginning of communism as an activist political movement. Ascetic, Spartan: Engels means that the early communists, like Babeuf, saw a communist society as guaranteeing basic minimum rations of food, clothing, and housing to all, but nothing extra to anyone. The Babeuf movement's Manifesto Of The Equals declared: "Perish, if it must be, all the arts, provided real equality be left us!"

Utopians:

People who proceeded by working out a blueprint for a perfect future society.

Communist Manifesto, part IV

The French revolution of July 1830:

When the king who had been restored to power after the British-led coalition finally defeated Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 was overthrown and replaced by a different king who was willing to rule more constitutionally, in collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

The English reform agitation:

For the Reform Act of 1832 which gave the middle class the vote.

The Restoration period:

1815 to 1830 in France, a period of reactionary dominance.

French Legitimists:

Supporters of the 1815-1830 regime in France.

Young England:

A section of the Tory party in the 1840s.

Guilds:

In the cities of the Middle Ages, each trade would have its guild, regulating all the workshops in that trade.

Feudal absolutism:

An "absolute" (i.e. dictatorial) monarchy closely linked to a feudal landlord class.

Proudhon:

Advocated a sort of socialism based on worker cooperatives with "fair exchange" between them. Opposed strikes and trade unions.