



Discussion Bulletin

271

March 2007. Documents from National Committee for AWL conference 19-20 May 2007.

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PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONFERENCE

EC proposals agreed:

Registration fees similar to last year's should suffice (£20 increasing to £28 waged, £12 to £18 low-waged, £4 to £9 unwaged, depending on how early you pay).

Discussions proposed by outgoing National Committee:

Labour Party
"Inside organising"
Iraq.
Women.
Education.
Assessment and orientation.
Environment

Timetable:

24 March. NC. Discusses documents and resolutions from EC.

Week starting 25 March. Bulletin goes out with all the basic documents for conference, registration forms, etc.

Between then 28 April: meetings of groups of branches to discuss the documents from the NC

(31 March. McDonnell rally)

(7-8 April. Easter. NUT conference)

21 April. AWL socialist-feminist day school.

28 April: AWL National Committee. Deadline for alternative documents/ resolutions and "big" amendments (raising major or new questions). [NB apols in advance from Dan R, Pete, Jean]

Weekend of 5-7 May, or 29 April: Regional pre-conference meetings, one North and one South

(5 May. Off The Rails meeting in Birmingham).

Wednesday 9 May. Deadline for "small" (detailed) amendments and for NC nominations.

Between 9 May and 18 May: smaller pre-conference meetings in groups of branches (i.e. they can at a pinch be evening meetings):

London/ Brighton/ Oxford
Birmingham/ Leicester/ Northampton
Nottingham/ Sheffield/ Leeds/ York/ Manchester/
Newcastle
Scotland
Norwich

19 and 20 May: conference

NC nominations - the same as last year: i.e. anyone can nominate, but anyone nominated is obliged to write a brief self-description (upper limit maybe 100 words, lower limit as barebones as you like).

NC size: the same as it is (19).

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS (all from National Committee, except that the Iraq text goes forward in the name of the EC pending further discussion at the 28 April NC meeting)

ASSESSMENT AND ORIENTATION

1. The assessment we made in our long document last year on "Building a Marxist presence in the unions" remains cruelly true. The shift to the left in unions at the level of general secretary elections has not been matched by a new organising or class-struggle effort by those general secretaries, or by an upsurge in rank-and-file organisation or confidence: witness the limpness of union reaction on local government pensions or civil service jobs and pay. Working-class confidence remains generally low. That can change, and maybe quickly, but for now it shapes the basic framework in which we work (and not only our trade union activity).

2. The essential qualification, and direction for our activity, spelled out last year also remains valid: "It is possible to talk oneself into a certain fatalism, simply comparing 2006 to 1979. However, if we compare to the 'long view' historical picture (rather

than the unique circumstances between say 1945 and 1979), the picture for trade unionism in Britain shows considerable openings and opportunities... In the workplaces, the branches, regional structures, left groupings and so on and so forth, we can and do come across workers ready to listen and be organised... If we have answers for dealing with the bosses, in which our criticisms of the union leaders flow from those answers (rather than our criticism of the union leaders seeming to be hinged on critical comments in passing on the bosses), then we will be able to organise bigger forces than ourselves and, vitally, recruit".

3. Where we have a consistent political profile in the workforce and union - as on the rail with Off The Rails and Tubeworker - we can make advances, even in the absence of any new general upsurge of the rank and file or of the left.

4. The state of the unions and the broad class struggle has shaped and limited what we have been able to do in welfare state campaigning, in which at our 2006 conference we decided to make a new effort. Almost all AWL branches have been usefully active in health service campaigns, and sometimes picked up new contacts. That activity should continue. But so far Unison officialdom has kept an effective lid on the development of a real national campaign. The poor turnouts on the 3 March day of action were testimony to that.

5. Our activity among students continues to improve, through more vigorous organisation of our own forces rather than through any general political upturn in the colleges or in NUS.

6. Mostly from our student work, we have been able to relaunch some socialist-feminist activity, notably the successful Feminist Fightback conference and the 3 March demonstration for abortion rights.

7. No Sweat continues to attract a sizeable number of contacts from the diffuse "anti-capitalist" sensibility that exists among quite large numbers of young people. It does that especially through Students Against Sweatshops, as exemplified most recently by the Oaxaca tour. It is clearer than ever now, though, that no large number of those contacts will come over to AWL, or even to being regular and consistent No Sweat activists, simply through "osmosis" or through observing our virtues as "best builders" of No Sweat. Energetic, systematic work with contacts on the level of individual conversations and discussions is necessary in order to build solid results out of the No Sweat and Students Against Sweatshops activity.

8. Following our debate on anti-racist work at our 2006 conference, we have developed activity in asylum-rights, anti-deportation, and anti-BNP campaigns, and put together a new AWL broadsheet on racism and anti-racism.

9. The harassed and beleaguered condition of the labour movement in Iraq limits what we can do through Iraq Union Solidarity, but the modestly

successful launch of Iraq Union Solidarity Scotland shows that even in these adverse conditions good and useful work can be done. The rise in women's, students', and workers' struggles against the Ahmedinejad regime in Iran brings new duties, and new possibilities, for international solidarity work.

10. The moral and ideological decay of the kitch-left - bigger groupings of the activist left - continues.

11. The McDonnell campaign has allowed for some big meetings, and in some places for the creation of small but useful ongoing McDonnell committees. We have participated, and it is important we continue to participate energetically in the remaining weeks of the campaign.

12. In this, however, the same general picture holds as in other areas: the situation is very far from a flat calm; there are important mobilisations; there are sizeable numbers (very sizeable, relative to our own numbers) potentially interested in independent working-class politics, if we can reach them and establish discussions with them; but there is as yet no general upsurge on which we can "surf" and, so far as building solidly for the future is concerned, everything depends on our ability to seek and carry through those discussions, in short, to act as Marxist educators.

12. That indicates a priority for self-education. The dayschools decided on at our 2005 conference have continued to be valuable. They have dropped off in attendance in recent months, mostly, probably, because of a shortage of resources in the office to chase up mobilisation. In the next year central resources must be given to education - not just to dayschools, but also small classes and individual educationals - with the aim of ensuring that more or more of our members become not just educated, but effective educators.

EDUCATION

1. The fundamental long-term task of a Marxist organisation is to help the working class educate itself. In order to do that, the Marxist organisation must educate itself. We do our work by educating the advance-guard; educating, organising, and equipping, morally and materially, a revolutionary cadre that works within the working class to educate it, from books and from experience.

Marxism is essential to working-class self-emancipation. Though general socialist ideas arise spontaneously in certain conditions, Marxism cannot be improvised in that way. It has to be created and augmented and modified, over years, in the light of experience, propagated and passed on. That is our work, and our primary work.

All the organisational and practical work of a Marxist organisation, right up to leading mass uprisings, is based on that fundamental educational work. Our agitation, propaganda, and

organisational initiatives are determined and shaped by that task. It lays down what we can and what we can not do in our activities and in our agitation against capitalism and imperialism. The crime of the existing left (for instance, the SWP and its satellites) is that its agitation, propaganda, commentaries, organisational initiatives, and alliances can not do other than miseducate the working class.

2. The centrality of education is even more true in a time of ebb of the labour movement and decay of the left, as at present. In a period of the eclipse and ideological collapse of the left and of socialism, this work is, even more than in more favourable circumstances, the to-be-or-not-to-be question for socialists.

3. In today's conditions, relatively little of the educational work can be done "on the fly", in the course of day-to-day activities and debates.

4. Therefore we should give central priority to self-education.

5. This is self-education with the purpose of creating ideologically-equipped and competent Marxist educators, each one of whom is the bearer and proponent in the working class and labour movement of a more or less full Marxist education.

6. Its test is whether the person being educated can then educate others, not whether they have passively sat through this or that many classes and day schools.

7. This conference mandates the incoming NC and EC to devote central resources to a new educational drive geared to:

(a) a consistent induction system for new recruits, through which they all pass, becoming full members when they have established their ability to function as educators

(b) educating all our existing members so that they become competent educators. (Being "educators" does not mean that they have to be skilled lecturers; it means that they are competent to explain our basic ideas to contacts and to people whom they meet, and to speak up for our ideas - if only briefly - in meetings they attend).

FEMINIST WORK

1. We will undertake a programme of education in the group around the history, theory and politics of socialism and feminism/socialism-feminism over the next year. This will begin with the Socialist Feminist dayschool on 21 April. We will collate and make available on our website reading and background material related to our own history, record and programme on these issues.

2. We will propose and build other campaigning activity on abortion rights. This might be: some direct action, a dayschool (especially explaining the importance of the

availability of late abortions), publicity material/downloadable leaflets etc.

3. We will help organise another Feminist Fightback conference later in 2007.

4. We will look for and keep under review other areas of work we could be involved in as a group - e.g. No Sweat work, international solidarity work.

5. We will continue to produce a Women's Fightback supplement (approximately every two months) and use this to develop our theoretical and political knowledge and organise women interested in socialist-feminist ideas and the politics of the AWL.

IRAQ

Since US and UK troops conquered Iraq in April 2003, the country has slipped further and further into gangster chaos, and, since early 2006, into outright civil war.

The USA's perspective in 2002-3 was that a short, sharp military blow would shatter Saddam Hussein's regime, and after it Iraqi society would generate a reliable, world-market-friendly government with no more trouble than that with which more-or-less parliamentary, IMF-friendly, WTO-friendly governments emerged in Eastern Europe after the fall of Stalinism.

This new Iraqi regime would, in turn, give a powerful impulse to the reconstruction of the whole Middle East on US-friendly terms.

The politicians who pushed the invasion were keen on the use of military force to project US world power, but at the same time loud in their opposition to the US military being used for "nation-building" or long-term military occupations.

The USA had been unable to put together an agreed Iraqi "government-in-exile" before the invasion, which started on 20 March 2003. Different sections of the US government favoured rival exiles, Iyad Allawi for the State Department and Ahmed Chalabi for the Pentagon. Presumably they agreed to wait and see which group of exiles would do best once the Ba'thist carapace was knocked off Iraqi society.

The fall of Baghdad was followed by immediate chaos and descent into gangsterism, with widespread looting and widespread resentment that the US troops did nothing to prevent the looting except around selected buildings such as the Oil Ministry.

A new Iraqi labour movement was able to emerge. But what emerged faster and on a larger scale was a collapse of Iraqi society into communal and sectarian identities.

The USA's first choice as ruler of Iraq was General Jay Garner, who started off with plans for Iraqis to hold elections within 90 days and for the US to quickly pull troops out of the cities to bases in the desert.

The destruction of the Ba'thist state had opened the way for the emergence of an independent labour movement and a more or less independent press. But the overwhelming fact was chaos. Presumably alarmed, the US replaced Garner within a few days (on 11 May), putting Paul Bremer in his place.

Bremer disbanded the Ba'th party (16 May) and purged "Ba'thists" from the public administration, which meant purging thousands of people who had been Ba'th party members only as necessary lip-service in order to get their jobs. He dissolved the Iraqi army (23 May) and police.

In July he appointed an Iraq Governing Council of 25 members - Allawi, Chalabi, and other exiles, calibrated to "represent" the different communal-sectarian interests (13 Shi'ites, five Sunni Arabs, five Kurds (also Sunnis), one ethnic Turk and an Assyrian).

The IGC was only a consultative body; like all subsequent Iraqi government bodies to date, it did not even have well-attended meetings. Most of the exile politicians proved to have very little support inside Iraq.

Bremer resisted pressure to call elections, and busied himself with issuing decrees which would later be given retrospective "constitutional" authority by way of the Transitional Administrative Law (pro-constitution) installed by the USA via the IGC. He decreed the whole Iraqi economy (other than the actual oil reserves, under the ground) open to privatisation (order 39, 20/12/03), and a 15% flat-tax system (order 37, 21/09/2003).

Those decrees could not be implemented because of the chaos, but they did alarm and anger Iraqis.

Meanwhile, the practical running of everyday life - amid power cuts, lack of drinking water, huge fuel shortages, and mass unemployment - fell into the hands of religious authorities, religious or warlord militias, and tribal chiefs. There was no Iraqi state to administer society. In so far as the US army took on the role of a state authority, it did it arrogantly, clumsily, brutally, nervously, in short in a way that did almost nothing to restore everyday life and a lot to antagonise Iraqis.

In Fallujah, for example, radical hostility to the Americans started with an incident on 28 April 2003, when US troops killed 15 people and wounded 53 by opening fire on a crowd of 200 people protesting at a curfew and the closure of a school (by conversion to a military HQ).

Ever since then, things in Fallujah have gone from bad to worse, from almost every point of view (that of the Iraqi working class; that of Fallujah's ordinary inhabitants; and that of the US, too). In April 2004 US forces tried to reconquer it. That ended in an uneasy compromise, and soon the city was under the control of even more extreme Sunni Islamists than before.

In November-December 2004 US forces launched a bigger attempt to reconquer Fallujah, first telling the entire population to leave the city. By all accounts this US attack killed many hundreds of civilians and reduced much of the city to rubble. Yet even today Fallujah is not "secure" for anyone, and by late November 2006 US military commanders were considering giving up on the whole province of which Fallujah is part (Anbar), withdrawing all forces from that area.

US-organised reconstruction efforts were almost all channelled through contracts given to US corporations. They made a very bad job of it, and vast amounts of money disappeared in corruption (one official US estimate is \$9 billion).

Involvement by the UN and aid agencies in reconstruction began to diminish drastically with the bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad (19/08/2003), and since then has dwindled to practically zero.

Sectarian militias emerged very early. Some writers have speculated that Saddam deliberately decided to have Iraqi army resistance collapse quickly, so that Ba'thist soldiers could disperse in good order in order to start a guerrilla war against the Americans and the Shia leaders who, with a majority of the population behind them, were likely to take control, thus reversing many centuries of Sunni hegemony in Iraq.

Maybe, maybe not. In any case, very soon there were a lot of Sunni-sectarian armed groups fighting the Americans and the Shia. The same day as the bombing of the UN headquarters (19/08/2003), a car bomb in Najaf kills more than 120 people, including the Shia leader Ayatollah Mohammed Bakir al-Hakim. The background to this was that the Sunni Arab minority in Iraq had been dominant, and the Shia Arab majority disadvantaged, for centuries; the Sunni feared the rise of the Shia.

Over the last four years, the Sunni-sectarian groups have grown in strength, organisation, and popular support among the Sunni Arab population.

According to all accounts, these Sunni-sectarian groups involve many former army officers and Ba'thists. Whether they are Ba'thist now is another matter: the balance of evidence seems to be that most of them are "genuinely" Islamist, not just "Ba'thists who have grown beards".

Bremer wanted to leave a long period before holding elections, presumably in the (mistaken) belief that his decrees, and his administration of Iraq through direct US military force, would provide a more stable basis for a strong and US-friendly government to be elected. The USA's hand was forced to some degree by the Shia religious leader Ayatollah Sistani, who in April 2004 issued a "fatwa" calling for elections.

April 2004 marked the first watershed in developments since April 2003. It saw not only Sistani's statement and the USA's first attempt to conquer Fallujah, but also the USA start a small "extra" war to try to wipe out the Mahdi Army of Moqtada al-Sadr, the most militant and the most anti-American of the Shia militias. That small war dribbled on for months, leaving Sadr undefeated; today the US has to deal with an Iraqi government whose leader (Maliki) got his post only thanks to Sadrist support, and in which Sadrists serve as ministers.

On 30 April 2004 the scandal of US troops torturing Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib broke in the media. Meanwhile it had become plain that the Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction", cited by Bush as his pretext for the invasion, did not exist.

The USA shifted course somewhat, formally "transferring sovereignty" on 28 June 2004 to an Iraqi Interim Government (an appointed one, headed by Allawi). Bremer quit, being replaced by successive US ambassadors John Negroponte (2004-5) and Zalmay Khalilzad (since June 2005).

The "sovereignty" of Allawi's Interim Government - as of the succeeding Iraqi governments of Jaafari and Maliki - was mostly notional. It had no effective machine of administration. It controlled very little outside the "Green Zone" in Baghdad - and that Green Zone was controlled by the USA. It did not even have notional command over the Iraqi army. To this day, only two or three of the ten divisions of the Iraqi army are under even notional Iraqi command, and even those two or three can do practically nothing without logistical support from US forces.

The purpose of the Interim Government was to prepare for elections in January 2005, and presumably to boost Allawi as the USA's favoured candidate. (Chalabi had fallen well out of favour by then, and was being investigated for fraud).

As the elections approached, Iraq's Sunni Arabs became more and more alienated. Almost all Sunni groups boycotted the elections, and some threatened to kill anyone who voted.

That the election took place at all (as it did on 30 January 2005), and with a respectable 57% turnout, was in the circumstances something of a triumph for the USA - about the first they'd had

since April 2003. In the aftermath of the election, there was a fall in Sunni-insurgent activity; reported dissent within the "resistance" (some groups objecting strongly to the threats to kill voters); and much talk of the USA now being able to begin to withdraw, starting by pulling back into its bases and using air power to support the Iraqi army rather than troops on the streets.

But the election had been primarily a sectarian-communal headcount, and the Shia bloc which won the majority was a loose alliance of groups each with its own militia and local bases of strength. It took two months (to 07/04/05) until it could agree on a prime minister, Ibrahim al Jaafari, and another month (28/04/05) until it could agree on ministers.

Any slight chance there might have been of the elections producing an Iraqi government commanding wide assent, and able to run the country even minimally, was lost. The government did not much except draft a new constitution (under relentless US pressure).

The constitution deleted even the weak recognition that the US-shaped Transitional Administrative Law had given to the right to strike, tilted Iraq heavily in the direction of accepting sharia as the basis at least for family law, and allowed for the formation of almost-entirely-autonomous regions within Iraq. This last provision was, reasonably enough, seen by the Sunni Arabs as a move by the Shia Arabs of the south, and the Kurds of the north, to grab all the revenue from Iraq's oilfields, and leave them with an oil-less, impoverished, landlocked statelet in the centre.

On 15 October 2005 the constitution was approved in a referendum (again, a sectarian-communal headcount). On 15 December 2005 new elections, for a new government under the new constitution, followed.

Again, the holding of the election, as such, was a minor US triumph.

By relentless arm-twisting the US, at the last minute, had secured modifications to the constitution, and a promise to have it amended later, sufficient to convince some Sunni Arabs to semi-accept it and to take part in the December 2005 elections.

Again, any hopes for the creation of a stable or effective Iraqi government were illusory. From the point of view of the USA, seeking a reliable Iraqi partner, and probably also from the point of view of an ordinary Iraqi citizen wanting a minimum of ordered social life, the new government resulting from the elections, headed by Nouri al Maliki, is worse than the Jaafari government, which in its turn was worse than the Allawi government. Far from functioning well even in its own terms, the Maliki government is unable even to gather a quorum for meetings of parliament: many Iraqi

politicians have fled the country, and now live most of the time in London.

After the December 2005 elections it took not two but four months for the victorious Shia-Islamist/Kurdish warlord parliamentary majority to agree on a prime minister (22 April), or for the parliament to meet for a full session (3 May); longer again for ministries to be agreed. The chaos resulting from the delay increased ordinary Iraqis' propensity to look to local warlords or imams for help and redress, and of course did nothing to diminish the Sunni Arabs' fear of Shia domination.

Even within the Shia-Islamist spectrum, the USA preferred a different candidate to Maliki, and Maliki won the position only thanks to the support of the Sadrists, the Shia ultra-Islamists with whom the USA was at open war in spring 2004. US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley are fairly open about regarding the Sadrists as a worse problem than the Sunni "resistance", and the Maliki government machine as disastrously infected with Shia sectarianism.

According to the Sunday Times (10/12/2006), the appointment of Maliki was the final straw in bringing the breakdown of secret talks (in January-April 2006) between US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, Allawi, and representatives of a large section of the Sunni-Arab "resistance". The USA has been trying to get such talks going for some time, probably since early 2005, and may not have entirely given up even now, but all attempts to negotiate have failed.

On 22 February a bomb attack severely damaged an especially holy Shia shrine in Samarra. From that point, sectarian civil war has been coming closer and closer to the boil. Around one and a half million Iraqis have fled the country, and a similar number have fled within the country to areas where their "own" sect or community is stronger.

In August 2006, the USA responded by reversing its policy of the previous year and a half, and put large numbers of troops on the streets of Baghdad in an attempt to "re-conquer" the city. The exercise has produced no results other than an increase in sectarian violence in Baghdad, and an increase in US military deaths (previously somewhat reduced, since the troops were staying in their bases more).

Working in collaboration with Iraqi government forces, the US troops in Baghdad cannot but be seen by the local Sunnis as accomplices in Shia-sectarian "ethnic cleansing". Several areas of Baghdad previously mixed have in fact been converted to Shia domination.

Where the US troops go into a solidly Sunni area, they may be able to kill or drive away a number of insurgents, but they are incapable of policing the area continuously; as soon as they move on, the

area reverts to Sunni-sectarian domination, only more embittered.

There is sectarian civil war in Baghdad and some other towns and cities. In Anbar, Iraq's mostly-desert and heavily-Sunni western province, there is a fairly straightforward war of conquest by the USA against almost the whole local population. In the Shia south, there is less sectarian conflict (though many Christians and Sunnis have fled), but a lot of gangster violence involving rival militias.

Almost everywhere, the local militias have been "radicalised", making their local rule more and more like "mini-Talibans".

Electricity supplies are still poor, indeed worse than in the immediate aftermath of the 2003 invasion. Supplies of clean water are said to be a bit improved, but are still poor. There is 50% unemployment. This year, runaway inflation has been added to the economic mix. Schools and universities, which operated relatively normally even in 2005, now have very small attendance. The two great good by-products of the 2003 invasion, the creation of space for an independent labour movement and an independent press, still survive after a fashion, but under continual harassment and continual threat of being overwhelmed by the chaos.

Iraqi Kurdistan is relatively prosperous and peaceful, though under a sort of "soft-Stalinist" regime run by the two Kurdish warlord parties, KDP and PUK. Even there, sharia law is being written into the constitution; and on the edges of the Kurdish region, notably in Kirkuk, there are other incipient sectarian civil wars.

The Brookings Institute, in the USA, publishes regular statistical measures of the condition of Iraq.

Its set for November 2006, shows: * Iraqis fleeing Iraq: up to 1.8 million by November 2006 (double the figure up to November 2005).

* Iraqis fleeing inside Iraq: 650,000 by November 2006 (other estimates are higher: in any case, three times the figure in November 2005).

* Unemployment: 33% (other estimates are higher: in any case, the same figure as in 2004).

* Electricity production: the same figure as in 2003.

* Household fuel available: 54% of estimated need (was 76% in November 2003).

* Daily average number of inter-"ethnic" attacks: 15. (Was zero in November 2003).

* Number of Sunni insurgents: 25,000 (was 5,000 in 2003); of Shia militiamen, 50,000 (was 5,000 in 2003).

* Iraqi civilian casualties: 4000 (was 1250 in November 2003).

The Pentagon's latest official report, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq" (November 2006) fills out the picture: "About 26% of Iraqi children examined were stunted, severely or moderately, in their physical growth—a symptom of chronic malnutrition..." "Iraq averaged 11 hours of power per day nationwide... Baghdad averaged only 6 hours of power per day..." "Unlike in previous years, when inflation was confined mainly to rents, fuel, and transport, prices are now increasing rapidly in all sectors. [Officially] the annual inflation rate from October 2005 to October 2006 was 53%. It is widely believed that the official inflation rate underestimates the actual inflation rate".

"Sectarian violence has steadily increased... Attack levels - both overall and in all specific measurable categories - were the highest on record during this reporting period... In the past three months, the total number of attacks increased 22%... Shi'a death squads leveraged support from some elements of the Iraq Police Service and the National Police... Death squads are armed groups that conduct extra-judicial killings; they are formed from terrorists, militias, illegal armed groups, and - in some cases - elements of the Iraqi Security Forces... Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM)... has replaced al-Qaeda in Iraq as the most dangerous accelerant of potentially self-sustaining sectarian violence in Iraq".

In short, the US neo-cons' experiment in Iraq in their variety of imperialism, following on decades of economic and political pulverisation in the country (totalitarian regime since the late 1970s, war 1980-88, war again 1991, sanctions 1991-2003) has taken Iraq into the abyss.

A victory for the Sunni-sectarian "resistance" - i.e. scuttling by the US - would predictably mean: a) Full-scale civil war, with great bloodshed; b) Probably, invasion by neighbouring countries such as Iran, maybe Turkey, maybe others; c) The carving-up of Iraq into a number of statelets, and, probably, the extinction of any possibility of democratic self-determination for the peoples of Iraq for a long time to come; d) The destruction of the new Iraqi labour movement and the limited press freedom and civil liberties which now exist.

We are against the status quo in Iraq. But at this moment in time all we can do is try to build the forces which can change the situation for the better. We have no immediate answer.

In these conditions, the question, when should the US/UK troops get out, is in reality a question between the various ruling-class and reactionary factions.

To respond the US talk of future withdrawal by saying "no, no, now!" is simply to try to dictate one or other option to the ruling class. It is fantasy to think we can do that. In any case, their withdrawal as a result of failure and defeat at the hands of the sectarian militias is not our programme for Iraq.

Our programme is for a democratic, secular Iraq (with the right of the Kurds to self-determination, rights for other minorities, etc.) and for working-class power throughout the Middle East.

The victory of the sectarian militias would push any near-term feasibility of this programme even further away, and bring the rapid destruction of the force that might (as it becomes stronger) lead a successful struggle for the programme, i.e. the Iraqi workers' movement.

The only way to answer the question "should the troops withdraw immediately, or stay until whatever?" is to say: in fact it is beyond our collective power to determine when they withdraw. It is a fantasy of "anti-imperialist" politics that somehow the Western anti-war movement, in abstraction from the sectarian militias in Iraq, is going to drive out the troops. In any case, it is the wrong focus.

If we care about the peoples of Iraq, we should build solidarity with those forces who can ensure that when the troops withdraw, Iraq can be a democratic and secular country.

George W Bush's new "surge" policy in Iraq is a recipe for more bloodshed on the lines of the assault on Fallujah in November 2004 - but also, so it seems more and more, a botched compromise which makes no sense from any angle at all.

It is a compromise between those in the US ruling class who argued for a big increase in US forces, and those who argued for winding down the US military presence. Between those who argued for "betting on the Shia", focusing fire on the Sunni resistance, and those who wanted a simultaneous or fiercer push against the more militant Shia Islamists. Between those who want to boost the Maliki government, and those who want to push it aside. Between those who still want to seek a deal with elements of the Sunni "resistance", and those who see no alternative but to try to beat down that "resistance" by crude force.

Between those who want to try to do a deal with Iran and Syria, and those who want a "hard line" and exclusive alignment with Iran's enemies, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.

None of the "pure" alternatives can be judged to have any great probability of producing good results. The botched compromise has even less.

The only hope for democratic self-determination for the peoples of Iraq lies with non-sectarian forces like the harassed Iraqi labour movement. Our duty is solidarity with the Iraqi workers against both the US/UK forces and the sectarian militias.

LABOUR PARTY

A.

1. John McDonnell's campaign for Labour leader is the first attempt since the Benn-Heffer campaign of 1988 to propose, on a wide, public, national level, a working-class political alternative to the Blair-Brown policies of anti-union laws, privatisation, marketisation, warmongering, and squeeze on civil liberties which have stifled the labour movement in politics for over a decade now. We support the campaign. The question is, how can we "build on" it?

2. The fact of the McDonnell campaign, and of our involvement in it, does not in any fundamental sense contradict or negate the basic assessment of the Labour Party and our relation to it which we have made over the last ten years or so. Our basic political orientation remains one of fighting for the unions to rebuild themselves, to stand up for working-class interests in politics. That is, effectively to restore the working-class franchise which has been massively degraded by the hijacking of the Labour Party. To break the labour movement from Blair and Brown. To convince the labour movement to aim for a workers' government, accountable to and serving the working class. Those are the politics we argue for in the McDonnell campaign.

3. Given the poor condition of the Constituency Labour Parties, the focus of the McDonnell campaign is in the unions.

4. Our overall, long-term assessment of New Labour and its relation to the working class indicates that though we support such things as the McDonnell campaign when they exist, we maintain and strengthen the AWL's open revolutionary socialist political profile. Wherever it is possible to do so in a serious, worthwhile fashion, we organise challenges to New Labour by initiating or supporting independent socialist election campaigns such as the campaigns we ran in Nottingham in 2005 and Hackney in 2006.

B

1. Our basic characterisation of the Labour Party as a bourgeois workers' party remains what it was. It is of the general species of political formations beset by a contradiction between a primarily working-class base, and a bourgeois leadership and policy.

In relation to all such bourgeois workers' parties Trotsky pointed out our guiding concerns: it is fatal to be "indifferent to the inner struggle within reformist organisations - as if one could win the

masses without intervening in their daily strife!" We "intervene". In certain circumstances we organise the left. We seek levers and channels by way of which to revolutionise and reshape the labour movement which history - that is, the wills and ideas of others - has created.

2. The particular tactics of Marxists will differ widely depending on specifics. Trotsky: "The mass organisations have value precisely because they are mass organisations. Even when they are under patriotic reformist leadership one cannot discount them. One must win the masses who are in their clutches: whether from outside or from inside depends on the circumstances".

As a norm, as well as whatever activities we do which are specifically geared to the internal life of a bourgeois workers' party, the staple activity of Marxists is open campaigning under our own flag (publications, election campaigns, etc). The reason for this is that bourgeois workers' parties by their nature rely on working-class passivity, rarely involve very large numbers of workers in actual activity, and sometimes involve quite small numbers. Marxists have to reach out to the younger, more militant workers, and not let their light be hidden under a bushel of general platitudes about "the workers' party". This consideration is important in Britain today.

The exception comes when the Marxists are very weak, or the bourgeois workers' party is unusually broad in its reach over working-class activists and unusually open in its internal regime, or both.

Thus, for example, when Trotsky recommended the British Trotskyists in the 1930s to focus their activity in the Labour Party, he wrote: "Had it been a question of a formed, homogeneous party with a stable apparatus, entry in it would not only be useless but fatal. But the Labour Party is altogether in a different state. Its apparatus is not homogeneous and, therefore, permits great freedom to different currents".

3. For some of its history, the British Labour Party has been an exception to the rule of bourgeois workers' parties. In some of its phases it has had a comparatively loose, open, federal structure - with trade-union delegates functioning in the party structures at every level - and has been unusually broad in its reach over working-class activists.

For those reasons, the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky and the Comintern Congress of 1920 advised the British Communists to seek affiliation to the Labour Party, though no similar tactic was proposed in relation to any other bourgeois workers' party in Europe. They hinged their assessment not on the British Labour Party's policies - which were reactionary, and of the same type as other bourgeois workers' parties - but on its unusual structures and the opportunities those gave to communists.

4. That Labour Party "exceptionality" has been changed radically over the last 20 years, and

especially since Tony Blair took over in 1994. The Labour Party now differs from bourgeois workers' parties in other countries, on the whole, by having less openness and life, rather than more. Its working-class base has been massively eroded in the last decade.

5. Blair and Brown, building on Kinnock and Smith, have pushed through big structural changes in the Labour Party which have radically diminished and qualitatively changed working-class political life within it. The details are set out below in section D.

6. Every bourgeois workers' party embodies a contradiction between two tendencies: on the one hand, it is a bourgeois machine for ensnaring working-class organisations in bourgeois politics and maintaining and enforcing working-class political passivity; on the other, it offers some levers for working-class political activity. In the British Labour Party today, the first tendency is massively predominant.

7. Previously work among the activists in the CLPs could, by way of the Labour Party structures, feed back into a political vitalisation of the relatively slow-moving and passive unions; now the Labour Party, and the future of the Labour Party depends on the policies and initiatives of the unions. Previously, in elections, it was possible and plausible for Marxists to have a public political presence along the lines of "vote Labour and fight" - "vote Labour, but fight for working-class policies, against the Labour leadership, within the Labour structures". In the absence of a working-class alternative we still vote Labour "by default", if only to facilitate the necessary fight within the unions, but the old "vote Labour and fight" slogans now lack grip.

8. No serious struggle can be carried through without first making a realistic assessment of the terrain and the tasks. For example, to dismiss the structural changes which have already been carried through in the Labour Party as insignificant is necessarily also to say that a successful battle to reverse those changes would be insignificant; and thus to weaken, rather than strengthen, our effort.

9. The McDonnell campaign offers us opportunities for work in and around the Labour Party such as has been barred to us for a decade and a half. We have seized and acted upon these opportunities; we should continue to do so. Neither the fact of the McDonnell campaign, nor its calculable effects, changes anything of our basic assessment. It would be political foolishness and political disorientation to imagine that they do.

C.

1. Our general conclusion in 1998 from the changes in the Labour Party remains valid. "To continue to forgo socialist propaganda in elections in deference to the monopoly of the anti-socialist and anti-working class Blair party is increasingly to boycott our own politics and our own proper working-class concerns".

2. The precedent we cited then also remains valid: the "electoral guerrilla war" of the socialist groups (SDF and ILP) in the late 19th century, in the period leading up to the formation of the Labour Party. Neither SDF nor ILP could pose itself as an alternative governing force against the Liberals who dominated the working-class vote at the time. But the SDF and ILP contested elections selectively in order to build up support, to spread socialist education, and to promote the basic idea of working-class political representation. Their efforts laid the ground for the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (forerunner of the Labour Party) in 1900.

3. Also valid are the conditions we stipulated in 1998: "The left will have to find ways of uniting its efforts - that is of uniting itself - before it can mount effective socialist propaganda challenges to New Labour in local and Parliamentary elections. A combination of standing united left candidates in selected elections and continued work in the Labour Party is what we need".

4. The Socialist Alliance of 2001 was a positive and promising venture along those lines. The idea that its failure means we should "turn to the Labour Party" is nonsensical "wishful thinking". Whether we should "turn to the Labour Party" depends on the state of the Labour Party. The failure of the Socialist Alliance has no bearing on the state of the Labour Party.

The state of the Labour Party - its political role, and above all else, the opportunities (or lack of them) for work in it - is what determines our political relationship to New Labour. The failures of the SWP, the SP, and the SSP in no way detract from the truth of what we said in 1998 about the changes in the Labour Party. On the contrary, those changes have been reinforced, hardened, and consolidated by nine years of Blair governments.

5. The Socialist Alliance's relatively poor results from its 98 candidates in 2001, and its subsequent demise, were due to the specific political choices of the dominant political force in the Alliance, the SWP - or, in other words, to the relative weakness of the AWL within the would-be revolutionary left - rather than to any general impossibility of effective independent socialist electoral efforts in current conditions.

6. The Scottish Socialist Party's record, despite all the SSP's faults, testifies to the possibility in current conditions of effective independent socialist electoral efforts. The recent setbacks for the SSP are due to specific bad political choices by the SSP leadership, and in particular to the destructive irresponsibility of Tommy Sheridan, rather than to any general impossibility of effective independent socialist electoral efforts.

7. With the political collapse of the SWP and the retreat of the Socialist Party into cultivating its own tiny electoral bastions, the necessary united left

electoral effort has become much more difficult to organise. In fact, for now, impossible. The formation of the Socialist Green Unity Coalition helped us run candidates plausibly as "Socialist Unity" in Nottingham in 2005 and Hackney in 2006, but as yet has little promise of anything more than that.

8. Further "Socialist Unity" candidacies by us may well be worthwhile. This will have to be judged according to circumstances. In anything like current conditions, we can effectively organise only very few such candidacies. That is because of our weakness, and the political weaknesses of the broader class-struggle left, not because the Labour Party today is so open, and commands such wide and active working class support, as to make such candidacies inadvisable.

That the SWP fouled up the task of organising a selective socialist electoral challenge to New Labour does not mean that the job was impossible.

9. Moreover, doing the independent electoral work we have done has not disabled us from taking part in the McDonnell campaign.

D.

1. Input to Labour Party conference from the labour movement has become qualitatively more difficult. For CLPs and rank and file Labour and trade union members, it is in practice effectively blocked off: an exception here and there does not change that. The unions still have nearly 50% of the vote at Labour Party conference, but they are very limited in using that 50% (only four motions, decided de facto by the four biggest unions without the smaller unions having any say). The conference has become entirely a stage-managed publicity event. Except for the trade union leaders, when and if they use their weight against the Labour Party leaders, conference is no longer a parliament of the labour movement. Not by rule-change, but by dint of repeated open dismissal of conference decisions by the Blair-Brown leadership, and silence from the union leaders, conference decisions have ceased to have weight in the Labour Party.

2. The union say in the National Executive has been reduced both numerically (to 12 out of 32) and in substance (the Executive has become essentially only a consultative committee for the parliamentary leadership). Union input has been further diluted by the setting-up of the National Policy Forum, where the unions have only 30 out of 183 representatives. Those 30 operate "behind closed doors" as far as the rank and file of the unions are concerned.

3. It is not just that "the unions" in general have a reduced input to the Labour Party. The union input is to a much greater degree channelled through the top union leaders, rather than coming through a diversity of forms as in the old Labour structures.

4. Important unions now have rules which further restrict rank-and-file activist influence on their union input into the Labour Party. Unison has a separate political structure, not very permeable to the rank and file, and Unison conference cannot mandate the Unison political structure. Amicus also has a separate political structure, even more impermeable than Unison's. The political structure of the proposed merged TGWU-Amicus organisation remains unclear.

5. Meanwhile, a veritable army of "New Labourites", many with no labour-movement background or allegiance at all, sits above the formal structures of the Labour Party. Even before the 1997 general election, this Blair-Brown "party on top of a party", organised around the personal offices of Blair and Brown, was weightier than the formal "Labour Party machine". Over the last nine years in government the "party on top of a party" has acquired further weight through a vast proliferation of "adviser" jobs, "task forces", "think tanks", and so on.

6. The Constituency Labour Parties have a lower membership on paper than they had even in World War 2, when all electoral contests with the Tories were suspended and most activists had been drafted into the armed forces. On all accounts, the active membership has declined even more than the paper membership. Union delegates to CLPs have become rare. About half of all CLPs no longer bother to send a delegate to Labour Party conference. Those CLP delegates who do arrive vote, in their majority, way to the right of the unions.

7. While Labour councils carry out relentlessly anti-working-class policies, rebellions by left-wing Labour councillors are much rarer than for decades, even though councillors are necessarily much more vulnerable to pressure from even quarter-alive local Labour Parties than MPs are.

8. The Labour Party has not had a functioning youth organisation, unofficial or official, for nearly 20 years. Nominally, a Young Labour organisation exists, but it is lifeless. There are very few active student Labour Clubs.

9. Labour government policy is relentlessly and directly anti-working-class, and counter to mass working-class opinion, on all the key issues - trade-union rights, privatisation, health service, education, pensions, Iraq... Of course all previous Labour governments betrayed their working-class supporters, and directly clashed with workers in struggle. None gloried in affronting working-class opinion as this one has done.

E.

1. At the time of the great upheaval in the Labour Party in 1979-82, we warned that the old adage that "those who make a revolution by halves dig their own graves" applied here too. If the left did not push through the transformation of the Labour Party to the end, creating a political labour

movement genuinely accountable to the rank and file and genuinely committed to fighting for a workers' government, then the alternative would not be a return to the old, easy-going, ramshackle Labour Party. The Labour leaders who defeated the rank-and-file rebellion would take steps to protect themselves against future rebellions. At the very least they would transform the Labour Party regime into something much tighter and more centralised, on the model of the social-democratic parties of continental Europe.

2. We were right. Kinnock and Smith started the process. Blair pushed it qualitatively further.

3. In September 1996, Stephen Byers, then a top Blairite, called for the Labour Party to break all links with the unions. In January 1997 Tony Blair declared that the Labour Party must be transformed into an unambiguously "pro-business" party like the Democrats in the USA.

As we assessed it the time: "Blair has said it openly. They want to make the Labour Party into an out-and-out bourgeois party... The lesser, half-way-house, versions of the Blair project would, while keeping some formal ties, make the unions junior lobbyists rather than the decisive core of the party".

So far the Blair-Brown faction has gone for the "half-way house" version. They decided not to use the strong position accruing to them immediately after their election victory in 1997 to go for a quick and complete break with the unions. They did not. The union leaders were so servile that they felt no need to go for something so risky.

The basic "project" remains, though. Now elements of the Labour leadership are proposing to reduce even the nominal union say at Labour Party conference to 30%, or 15%.

4. History shows us examples of social-democratic parties which had shrivelled - as any sort of working-class activist-based force - apparently to the point of death, but then, in the absence of an adequate working-class Marxist alternative, regained a considerable degree of life. Example: the French Socialist Party. Shrivelled in the early 1920s; lively in the mid-1930s; shrivelled again in the late 1960s; reviving in the 1970s. In 1924 Trotsky had to warn the French Communists, who could see no need for united-front tactics towards the Socialist Party because the Socialist Party was so weak, that by their very nature reformist parties tend to have a pool of passive support - which under certain conditions can change into active support - out of proportion to their active strength. "The [SP] may under certain conditions prove to be a much more important counter-revolutionary factor within the working class than might appear, if one were to judge solely from the weakness of their organization and the insignificant circulation and ideological content of their paper, *Le Populaire*".

5. Another example is the New Zealand Labour Party after the Lange years.

6. It is not impossible that the same thing could happen with the British Labour Party: that, say, after losing a general election, a new leadership might decide it was safe to repair its ties with the working class and to return to something more like "old Labour".

7. For our own orientation it is necessary to stress a central fact here: we cannot conceivably by our activities make that "return to old Labour" happen. We should not tell those we reach that they should join the Labour Party and make it happen. That would be the witch-doctor dressing in green to make spring come back! Our objective is not, and cannot be, to wait and see if that "return to old Labour" happens, nudging it along if we can.

Our objective is to mobilise working-class forces now against the Blair-Brown stifling of working-class political representation. The quicker and more energetically workers do mobilise, the more likely is a sharp, open split in which the Blair-Brown faction takes the "party on top of a party", probably most of the MPs, some of the unions, and at least a section of the CLPs (that section represented by the large number of CLP delegates who regularly vote with the platform at Labour Party conferences). After such a split, the Blair-Brown faction would have a large political machine, something altogether weightier than McDonald and Snowden had after 1931. But we would also have, on the other side, the beginnings of a genuine new workers' party based on the unions.

8. That is what we should go for. We argue against unions disaffiliating from the Labour Party - not on the grounds that they should wait until some supposed automatic "swing of the pendulum" restores something like "old Labour", but on the grounds that they should urgently use every toehold in the Labour structures to mobilise workers politically against Blair and Brown.

9. Ever since 1997, starting with the rebellion by 61 Labour MPs in late 1997 against cuts in disability benefit, we have been on the look-out for political developments which could provoke a revival in the CLPs. The ferment over the Iraq war, and the shift by the union leaders in recent years towards a more combative attitude (at least, and, alas, so far, only, in words) to Blair, were possibilities of that sort. In actual fact, so far, those developments have led to a further bleeding-away of leftish Labour Party members rather than a revival in the CLPs.

It may not always be so. Therefore, all AWL members who have not been specifically expelled or excluded from the Labour Party should not only get Labour Party membership cards, but also (around the current McDonnell campaign) check out their local Labour Party ward and GC meetings. They should not just attend one or two meetings and withdraw straight away if no lively left wing is immediately visible, but investigate properly.

F.

1. We reaffirm the basic practical guidelines for our work round the McDonnell campaign.

AWL union fractions should: - seek to establish pro-McDonnell networks in their unions (including non-affiliated ones); - push motions through the union structures (in Unison, the APF) for support for McDonnell.

AWL branches should: - seek to establish AWL members as local contacts and organisers for the campaign; - seek out local LP leftists and talk with them; - help organise local public meetings with McDonnell; - canvass their AWL members to follow AWL policy of being signed up as individual members of the Labour Party; - put motions in union branches to support McDonnell or sponsor debates on the LP leadership with representatives from the various candidates; - seek to get CLPs to set up such debates.

2. In this activity we should also promote opposition to the moves to reduce the union say at Labour Party conference; positively demand Labour Party democracy; and call for a reduction in the current prohibitive nominations threshold for Labour Party leadership candidacies.

"INSIDE ORGANISING"

A large part of our whole effort is about organising ourselves to be at the right place at the right time - at the right meetings and demonstrations, in the right places for public agitation and paper sales, on the right doorsteps to talk with contacts.

To operate well, we need a number of activists who give their full time to political activity, or who take part-time jobs so that they can give most of their time to political activity.

Most of our activists have to work for an ordinary wage. But the time they spend working for a wage need not be dead time as regards socialist activity. In fact, our historical perspective on socialist politics tells us that, in the long term, among workers in the workplace is the most "right place" of all to be.

In the short term, too, workplace disputes and trade-union activity are central for us - and we can always intervene much better if we have people "on the inside" than just from "the outside".

Thus we should encourage our activists and sympathisers, when they are looking for jobs, to go for jobs which will give them the best chances of building a base for intervening in working-class struggles from "the inside".

This means, generally, going for jobs in those sectors where there is a higher level of class combativity in the workforce, a higher level of union activity, a greater political life in the union,

and/or an already-established nucleus of AWL people in the sector and in the union.

We summed it up in our 2005 conference document: "The unions are a critical element in the work of a Marxist organisation that aspires to lead the working class. Persuading student comrades and sympathisers to take certain jobs and to add their commitment to our campaigns in certain unions has to be made a priority once again. The NC must set out the political arguments for, and strongly encourage, student comrades and sympathisers to get jobs in the Post, BT, health service and on the tube".

Four points need to be made about how the question presents itself to us today, in 2006-7, in Britain.

1. This rank-and-file project is not a matter of compulsion. Where compulsion, or something near to it, has been used in the past to "colonise" ex-student socialists into industry, the results have been destructive.

The prime example is the SWP-USA in the late 1970s. It announced that "world revolution" was becoming "more proletarian" and that therefore all its activists needed to get jobs not only in industry but in the hardest, most-exploited sectors of industry. The organisation shrivelled to a sect; much activity outside industry withered away; many activists became demoralised; not much was gained in the chosen sectors of industry.

Sensible encouragement to activists to get jobs where they can best be effective revolutionaries in work time as well as outside it is different from moralistic compulsion based on hype. It does not mean, for example, that activists who are currently school students should not go to university if they have a chance. We should strongly encourage comrades to use that chance. They can be politically effective at university as well as using what they will get at university (and possibly never again in their lives) in the way of access to libraries, free time, and so on, to learn a lot.

It can only be destructive if our discussion about an orientation to worker organising "from the inside" degenerates into a moralistic squabble between some protesting that they (for this or that reason) "deserve" "nicer" jobs, and others denouncing them for lack of self-sacrifice.

2. We are living in a time of low industrial struggle and low union activism. That could change rapidly; and even while the general level remains low, there is a tremendous amount still to be done, and a lot of exciting things happen, in the workplaces and unions. But for now and in general the level is low. In the early 1940s the Workers' Party USA could quite easily convince hundreds of its young ex-students to take jobs in shipyards and car factories, because they were sure that a big wave of industrial struggle and political ferment in the trade unions was coming within the next few years. We don't know whether the next big wave

of industrial struggle will be within the next few years.

Obviously this makes convincing activists to take the job which is better for political activity, but perhaps involves harsher conditions or lower pay than another, more difficult than it was in the 1970s or '80s. There is no administrative answer to this. Better to follow the example of the US socialists in "Solidarity" who have organised their "Rank and File Youth Project" in terms of offering help and support to young socialists interested in taking rank-and-file working-class jobs.

3. Generally, in previous eras, not only in the 1940s but also in the 1970s, this sort of thing has meant primarily persuading ex-students, usually from middle-class family backgrounds, to take manual jobs.

With the majority of the working class, and the majority of union membership, now in "white-collar" jobs, and a much larger proportion of young people going through university, the question is posed a bit differently.

For example, high-school teaching is one of the jobs that the US "Rank and File Youth Project" encourages people to go into, because it involves large workplaces and a relatively high rate of union activity and industrial action.

It would be very valuable for us today to have even a handful of keen ex-student activists in the post or on the Tube. In those areas, where there is a substantial history of WL activity and a relatively high level of union activism, a few new young activists could bring us gains much quicker than in other areas.

But the point is that the general orientation to rank-and-file workplace organising is not limited to that sort of more "dramatic" job choice. It is possible for ex-student socialists to participate in this orientation by going to jobs not very different from those that their classmates choose, and just choosing those areas which are better unionised or where they will work in a larger workplace.

The whole issue can be falsified by seeing it as a matter of demanding ex-students make a romantic gesture of self-sacrifice. Yes, it includes some ex-students getting jobs which have harder conditions and poorer pay than they might otherwise have got. But they do that not so that they can play "more self-sacrificing than thou", but because revolutionary politics is central to them, and being revolutionary organisers among more the combative and responsive sectors of the working class gives them more satisfaction than pursuing a bourgeois "career". They do not envy their former classmates who become stockbrokers or managers.

Moreover, a BT engineer is fairly well-paid, enjoys better-than-average conditions, and is in an interesting, skilled job where he or she will constantly be learning something new. Tube

workers have better-than-average conditions and pay, precisely because they are relatively combative and well-organised workers. BT engineers, and Tube workers, are "manual workers", but their jobs do not involve the sort of heavy physical exertion which might have made going into a "working-class" job seem too difficult to an ex-student seventy or even thirty years ago.

The general orientation can be expressed in many different ways. For example, Lutte Ouvrière in France has never been keen on putting ex-students into manual jobs. Instead, it encourages ex-students to get part-time teaching or office jobs which leave them lots of time free for political activity. But it also encourages worker activists or sympathisers who work in small workplaces (manual or white-collar) to change jobs to get into bigger workplaces (manual or white-collar) with better openings for political activity. That, too, is an expression of the orientation to rank-and-file workplace organising.

4. Thus, many of the white-collar jobs which in the '40s or even in the '70s would represent for ex-student activists a choice not to "colonise" are today strong possibilities, though not yet top priorities, as ways to pursue a general orientation to rank-and-file workplace organising.

In that sense, it is much easier to pursue that general orientation today. There is, however, also a new problem.

These days, a lot of ex-student leftists go from university to jobs in NGOs or as low-level full-time union officials. Those job paths scarcely existed 20 or 30, let alone 60, years ago. But they raise problems of a different order from ex-student leftists going into school or college teaching or into social work, the more likely "default" paths of 20 or 30 years ago.

An ex-student leftist absorbed in an NGO job will do very little workplace organising. The workplaces are generally small. The life of the workplace is geared around getting in the grants that will finance its continuing "good work", not around producing goods or services for an employer. It is almost impossible for the leftist - who will have chosen the NGO job because it is "more interesting", and seems to offer them a chance of "doing good" more immediate than the long-term perspectives of revolutionary socialism - not to get sucked into the terms of reference of the NGO, i.e. of their employer.

Sometimes it is good for revolutionaries to have "soft" jobs which offer little scope for workplace organising because those jobs allow them more free time and energy for essential political activities outside the workplace (meetings, demonstrations, writing, visiting contacts, and so on). But NGO jobs rarely offer that benefit. They usually involve more almost-compulsory (and often unpaid) overtime than even moderately well-unionised "regular" jobs. And of course it can always be justified in terms of doing the "good

work" the NGO is all about, and securing the necessary grants for it to continue. A low-level full-time union official job, too, offer little scope for the person who takes that job to organise as a worker, with fellow-workers. To relate to worker organising "from above" is very different from relating "from inside". Where we have had AWL members in low-level full-time union official jobs, that has not brought us political or trade-union contacts from among the workers "below" them, but rather, as you might expect, from among their "fellow-workers", the other low-level full-time officials.

Like NGO jobs, the low-level full-time union official jobs offer little scope for workplace and union organising "from the inside", and simultaneously do not allow for lots of free time and energy off the job for political activity. They tend to suck the person into doing the job (and then overtime, and then extra overtime) as a substitute for political activity (and one seeming to offer more immediate results).

Part of the degeneration of the WP/ISL current in the USA was the drift of many of its activists into full-time union official jobs. Of course, it was an effect of previous political softening and adverse circumstances; but it also in time became a cause of degeneration in its own right, a "social" factor skewing the activists' perceptions.

The large number of young people who have been radicalised by the "new anti-capitalist" mobilisations over the last ten years - by now they must count in the hundreds of thousands - have made surprisingly little impact on general politics as they grow up and settle down. Why? On all the evidence, a major factor is the propensity of so many of them to graduate into NGO or low-level union official jobs, and the ability of that sort of job to neutralise them. We should discourage our activists and sympathisers and contacts from taking such jobs, and encourage them to take jobs where they can take part in rank-and-file workplace/union organising from the "inside", by setting up a programme of help and support modelled on the US "Rank and File Youth Project".

A Rank and File Youth Project will have organisational implications for the AWL. Union fractions must be prepared to improve communication and coordination to accommodate and support new comrades in this work. Such changes will be of benefit to our trade union work as a whole and to the wider functioning of the AWL.