

# The Alliance for Workers' Liberty

## Our Constitution

### PREAMBLE

Aiming for the liberation of the working class from wage slavery and state oppression;

Believing:

- \* That the emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings, regardless of sex or race;
- \* That the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the working class itself;
- \* That without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement;
- \* That without revolutionary practice and organisation, socialist aspirations, like "academic Marxism", will be sterile;

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) aims to create an organisation of activists which can convince, mobilise and lead the working class to fight for workers' liberty.

To be effective, our organisation must be democratic; geared to the maximum clarity of politics; and able to respond promptly to events and opportunities with all its strength, through disciplined implementation of the decisions of the elected and accountable committees which provide political leadership.

### 1. MEMBERSHIP

The members of the AWL, here called "activists", are those who:

1. Defend the basic aims of the AWL, in words and deeds;
2. Engage in regular political activity under the discipline of the organisation;
3. Are members of their appropriate trade union;
4. Sell the literature of the AWL regularly;
5. Pay regular money contributions to the AWL and regularly remit AWL literature sales money;
6. Are loyal to the AWL at all times, and keep their links with other political groups under the supervision of the appropriate AWL committees;
7. Educate themselves politically and attend structured education classes of the AWL.

All activists are obliged to support the majority decisions of the relevant AWL bodies in action. They also have the right to express dissenting opinions, to gain a fair hearing for those opinions, and to organise inside the AWL to change AWL policy.

Activists should not pretend to hold beliefs contrary to their real ones. Minority comrades have a right to state that they hold a minority position, and to give a brief explanation, but without making propaganda outside the AWL against the majority line. They have a duty to state to the best of their ability what the majority line is, and in any vote or practical action they must support the majority line unless a decision has been taken to have a free vote. This might, for example, apply where the AWL works in association with nonmembers who are yet for practical purposes very close to us.

Activists do not have the right to organise outside the AWL for minority views. Unless the organisation is to be allowed to dissolve under the stress of political differences, and thus be rendered incapable of acting as an entity, the properly established leading committees have to retain the right to determine at any given moment whether views other than those of the AWL, properly established, will be expressed in our press, and how. This, however, will be a reserve power. AWL "custom and practice" will be that usually minority views can be expressed, and majority opinion challenged, in our public press.

Activists have no right to take internal organisational disputes outside the AWL in any way.

Activists should first raise political questions on the highest body on which they sit - branch, National Committee, Executive Committee. The matter must go to the National Committee for discussion if it is not resolved at the level raised. If after full discussion at the National Committee no agreement is reached, activists have the right to inform the National Committee that they are taking the issue to the whole membership or are forming a faction in line with section 7 of this constitution.

In AWL internal debates, equal speaking time at meetings, conferences, etc., shall be allotted to all the different points of view represented. Representatives of minority points of view have the right to demand relief from part of their normal AWL workload and financial assistance if these are necessary to enable them to travel to meetings, prepare documents etc. In any dispute between a minority point of view and the National Committee or Executive Committee, both the minority and the leadership have equal rights to use the organisation's apparatus.

All AWL branches, fractions and committees have the right to admit members. Any dispute over whether a particular person should be admitted should be referred to the Executive Committee, and then if necessary to the National Committee, which can make an overriding decision. Members will normally be admitted as candidates, to go through six months of education, training and disciplined activity before being admitted as full activists. A branch or fraction may, at the end of six months, extend the candidate period if it judges that the above requirements have not been fulfilled adequately. In such a case the candidate has the right to appeal to the Executive Committee.

Candidates do not have the right to vote in the AWL.

## 2. **DECISION MAKING**

The supreme policy making body of the AWL is the AWL conference, convened annually and attended by all members, or by the outgoing Executive Committee and delegates elected by the branches.

The National Committee is responsible for preparing the main political documents for the conference, and the Executive Committee is responsible for practical preparations. A Standing Orders Committee, elected at the previous conference, is responsible for running the conference itself. The conference elects a National Committee, and the National Committee an Executive Committee; the Executive Committee may elect various officers and organisational sub committees. All these officers and committees have the right to make binding decisions for AWL activity. They must be accountable to the bodies that elected them, and governed by the prior decisions of those broader bodies. Each committee decides its own rules of functioning, within the framework set by the body which elects it.

A special AWL conference may be called by the National Committee when it wishes. The National Committee must call a special conference within two months of receiving a written demand for one signed by at least 25 per cent of the activists of the AWL.

The Executive Committee convenes the National Committee; it must do so at least every two months, or within one week of receiving a written demand for a meeting signed by at least 25 per cent of the National Committee members.

National Committee members must fight for the implementation of National Committee decisions within the AWL, and Executive Committee members for Executive Committee decisions, except where they have deep and declared political differences; and in that case they must at least maintain discipline. They should not, however, pretend to hold views which are different to their own.

Every activist or group of activists can submit resolutions and amendments to the conference or to the National Committee, and have the right to speaking time and participation in the debate on them.

Democracy is impossible without full and timely information. The Executive Committee must make minutes of conferences and National Committee meetings available to all members of the AWL and minutes of the Executive Committee available to the National Committee members. Minutes must normally include the full text of all resolutions and amendments, together with an outline of the discussion and record of the vote. Skeleton minutes may, however, be circulated when security requires it.

The National Committee has the right to structure discussion within the AWL so that maximum political clarity may be attained. The National Committee may stop debate on an issue, but only after full discussion has led to a decision. Under no circumstance does this override the right of the membership to hold the National Committee to account at the conference. In all matters the National Committee may overrule the Executive Committee and the conference may overrule both the National Committee and the Executive Committee.

## 3. **BRANCHES AND FRACTIONS**

The AWL shall be organised in AWL branches in geographical areas or workplaces, and fractions in areas of work. The Executive Committee shall recognise, and where appropriate strive to initiate, branches and fractions in consultation with the members concerned. Every AWL activist should be a member of the appropriate branch and, if relevant, fraction.

The branches and fractions are responsible for recruiting new members and organising the activity of the AWL in their areas.

Each branch or fraction shall elect an organiser and other officers. The organiser is responsible to the AWL and is subject to the political and administrative supervision of its leading committees for the functioning of the branch or fraction and for ensuring that AWL policy is carried out.

Branches shall normally meet weekly and fractions at least quarterly to educate members and contacts and to organise AWL activity in their areas. The organiser is responsible for convening meetings.

Decisions on matters specific to their area shall be made democratically by branches and fractions. Branches and fractions can be overruled in such matters by the Executive Committee, National Committee, or conference, in which case representatives of all viewpoints have the right to put their case to the overruling body. Branch and fraction organisers must report regularly to the EC, and this must include communicating all the opinions within the branch or fraction different from the organiser's own opinion.

Branch or fraction organisers can give binding instructions to activists in their areas on all day today matters. In any AWL activity, the right to take decisions and give instructions on the spot belongs normally to the branch or fraction organiser responsible, or other comrade delegated to be responsible. In the event of a big political issue needing an immediate decision, the organiser can be overruled by the senior National Committee or Executive Committee member(s) present. The Executive Committee and the National Committee have the right in extreme cases, and after written notice and a fair hearing, to remove branch or fraction organisers from their posts and impose replacements.

#### 4. **INTERNAL BULLETIN**

The Executive Committee is responsible for producing an internal discussion bulletin, to be distributed to all AWL activists and candidates (and, unless the Executive Committee decides otherwise, to them only).

Any activist submitting a polemical document of fewer than 3,000 words has the right to insist it be circulated within two weeks.

The Executive Committee has no right to refuse for publication or delay unreasonably any article submitted for the internal bulletin, unless in line with any National Committee decision to close debate on an issue. They can, however, ask for a contribution and/or labour towards the production of articles over 6,000 words, and insist that any document over 12,000 words be produced at the expense of the author(s).

#### 5. **DISPUTES COMMITTEE**

Conference will elect a Disputes Committee consisting of three people. They will not serve on the National Committee. The role of the Disputes Committee will be:

- \* To investigate and adjudicate in disputes between members of the AWL where such a dispute has a bearing on their own or the organisation's political functioning, at the request of one of the parties to the dispute.
- \* To act for the National Committee or Executive Committee as an investigatory body. When it acts in this capacity it will report to the activating body.
- \* To:
  1. receive and investigate complaints against the leading committees or officers of the AWL on any matter of concern to any member of the AWL.
  2. present a report on any such investigation to the National Committee and, if it chooses, to present proposals and recommendations for action to the National Committee. Any proposal or recommendation from the Disputes Committee to the National Committee will be deemed to have a very strong moral authority. Where the Disputes Committee comes into irresolvable conflict with the National Committee on some matter which it considers of fundamental importance it will have the right to call a special AWL conference.
  3. censure, where it thinks fit, after proper investigation, any action of AWL committees, or any AWL officer, or any AWL member and present motions of censure to the National Committee.
- \* To present a report of its activities over the previous year to each annual conference of the AWL.

#### 6. **DISCIPLINE**

Where activists have become inactive or failed to meet their commitments to the AWL without adequate cause such as illness, and there is no dispute about this fact, branches, fractions, or appropriate committees may lapse them from membership with no more formality than a week's written notice. Activists who allege invalid lapsing may appeal to the National Committee.

Branches, fractions, and appropriate elected committees may suspend activists or candidates from membership (for up to six weeks), and the National Committee may expel them, in the event of:

1. Action contrary to workingclass principles e.g. strike breaking, racism etc;
2. Proof that the person in question has disloyal links with another political group;
3. Serious breach of discipline in AWL's public activity, or disruption of the AWL's functioning.

No activist may be subject to disciplinary action solely on grounds of their political views, as long as they remain loyal to the AWL's basic aims. Members must not, however, use political differences as an excuse for inactivity or disloyalty. Any member who does so is liable to be expelled.

Branches, fractions, and appropriate elected committees may impose fines or reprimands for lesser breaches of discipline. Any activist has the right to defend himself or herself before a decision on disciplinary action is taken on him or her, except in the case of fines for absence or suspensions where the AWL's security or integrity are at risk.

For all disciplinary action other than minor fines, the following safeguards apply.

Any activist subject to discipline must have at least one week's written notice of the charges and of the time and venue of the hearing. If expulsion is proposed, he or she must have two weeks' written notice of the charges.

Any activist who is expelled may appeal to conference, and the Executive Committee must circulate the material relating to his or her appeal to all activists within 14 days.

Any AWL body taking disciplinary action must immediately send details, including a copy of the charges, to the Executive Committee, which must make those details available to the National Committee.

Previously expelled members may not be readmitted without the approval of the National Committee or conference.

## **7. FACTIONS AND TENDENCIES**

The AWL rejects the ideal of a monolithic, single-faction party, and strives to build a culture where differences are resolved by rational and constructive discussion without hardandfast factional lineups. It recognises, however, that as a last resort any group of members has the right to form a faction or tendency to fight for a particular point of view within the AWL, offer itself to the membership at the AWL conference as an alternative leadership, or campaign for election in the organisation.

The AWL recognises a tendency as an ideological grouping organised for an ideological discussion within the organisation. The AWL recognises a faction as a group which sets out to fight either for a change of policy of the AWL on a particular issue or to replace the existing leadership by members of the faction.

1. Members wishing to form a faction must circulate to all AWL members a platform explaining their views, signed by all members of the faction. The faction must make an uptodate list of its members available to any AWL member on demand. Membership in the faction must be open to all AWL activists who agree with its platform. Candidate activists can not be recruited to a faction.

2. Factions can produce their own publications for circulation within the AWL, can hold internal meetings to put over their views, and can put up members for election on a factional platform. Factions have a right to proportional representation on the National Committee and in any election to delegates to conference.

3. All faction meetings and documents must either be strictly internal to the faction, or open to all members of the AWL. This clause can not be used to restrict private conversation or correspondence between individual AWL activists. A faction must not carry its platform outside the AWL without the permission of the conference or the National Committee.

The same rules apply for tendencies as for factions.

## **8. LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

A member suffering from illness or other distress may be granted a total or partial leave of absence from activity for up to two months; but the leave of absence must be ratified in writing by the Executive Committee, and the activist must continue to pay financial contributions to the AWL.

## **9. FULL-TIMERS**

The appointment, pay, terms of reference, and dismissal of AWL full time workers shall be decided by the Executive Committee, subject to ratification by or (if factional victimisation is alleged) appeal to the National Committee. In the event that an appeal is to be made to the National Committee, the Executive Committee's decision will not come into operation unless endorsed by the National Committee.

## **10. CONSTITUTION**

Branches, fractions, and appropriate committees must supply every new activist with a copy of this constitution. The Executive Committee must supply a copy to any activist on demand. The constitution can be changed only by an AWL conference.