

# The Alliance for Workers' Liberty

## Introductory briefing for new members

### Activists and sympathisers

An activist - or member - of the AWL is expected to:

- guarantee a minimum of activity and attendance at meetings;
- defend the organisation and basic politics of the AWL in the labour movement, accepting the democratic, collective discipline of the organisation in day-to-day political work;
- sell the AWL's publications;
- pay regular contributions to the organisation.

There is a six month period of 'candidate' membership for all activists, during which they are not entitled to a vote. During this period, before becoming full members, new activists go through a basic education course and establish a regular pattern of activity (this system is designed to protect the AWL's democracy, by ensuring that the people who have the deciding votes on our policy are those who are firmly committed to carrying them out and who know something of the political background to those decisions).

If you want to help our work, but are not willing to become an AWL activist, you can become an AWL sympathiser. We ask sympathisers to pay us a regular financial contribution - as much or as little as you like. Only activists have a deciding vote in our political decisions (e.g. at our conference).

Precise details of our decision-making and structures - including activists' rights to discuss and dissent - are outlined in the AWL constitution.

### The obligations of activists

- The AWL and the broad workers' movement need politically educated activists. It is an AWL member's duty to read, participate in internal and external debates and discussions, and to attend AWL education courses and programmes. AWL democracy depends on an educated membership made up of individuals who are capable of independently assessing complex political questions. Studying Marxism must be a basic part of every activist's political work, and the AWL organises classes and schools to help.
- "The emancipation of the proletariat is not a labour of small account and of little people: only they who can keep their heart strong and their will as sharp as a sword when the general disillusionment is at its worst can be regarded as fighters for the working class or called revolutionaries." - Antonio Gramsci  
Slow-moving, bureaucratic, social-democratic organisations require - and depend on - a token level of commitment and activity from their members. A revolutionary group must be the opposite. To have the necessary political sharpness and strength required for the hard struggles ahead, we need a high level of activity and commitment from our activists.
- Our perspective is not an all-out six month dash from now to the revolution. We try to accommodate comrades' special interests and the practical difficulties our activists face in everyday life.  
However we ask that:
  - if you have agreed to carry out a job, you do it;
  - comrades are willing to participate in full national mobilisations where necessary (for particular demonstrations or events);
  - comrades attend our national meetings (conference and summer schools)
  - extra effort is put in when a major struggle takes place (a big strike or campaign).
- Activists' regular, routine, minimum obligations are:
  - regular attendance at your local AWL branch and fraction (see section on 'AWL fractions') and union meetings;
  - regular public AWL activity - i.e. specifically AWL activity, not just general labour movement or student movement work: literature sales or street stalls or contact visiting, etc.
  - regular sales of AWL literature at work, at meetings and to interested individuals. AWL members sell our magazine Workers' Liberty, books and pamphlets produced by the organisation, as well as our paper Solidarity. Sales money is remitted to the organisation;
  - a regular financial commitment, dependant on income and circumstances;
  - conscientious fulfilment of all obligations to the labour movement.
- The AWL expects activists to abide by majority decisions and the decisions of the appropriate elected committees and organisers. Comrades must be prepared to discuss all political activity in local AWL organisations and appropriate AWL fractions.
- Activists should consult the organisation about changes in job or residence, or when taking a job when leaving college. Our policy is that comrades should try to get work in areas - geographical and industrial - which are politically useful.

### Education

We have a basic education course which includes short items to read on fundamental issues of Marxist politics.

Your local group will organise a series of discussions to cover the basic reading course. Once you have completed this course part of your AWL work will be to help other new members educate themselves.

It is indispensable, of course, that you read the books we publish, the magazine, and the paper Solidarity, and join in the discussions around these which are held in your AWL branch.

## Recruitment

All revolutionary activity depends on convincing people of our ideas, and almost always face-to-face discussion is decisive in this.

In every sphere, we seek out those who are interested in talking to us, and try to develop discussions, ensure they receive our literature regularly, and develop areas of co-operation in practical work.

The rules are simple:

- listen to what people say; don't lecture;
- seek out the quiet people, too - the people who sit at the back of the meeting, or the less confident, or those who are "so-and-so's friend";
- be positive and assertive. Our politics are an urgent call to turn the world upside down. Propose them accordingly. Say what we think positively, and talk about our differences with other left groups in that context.

We aim to get regular, structured political meetings with those that are interested. Such meetings can begin with whatever a particular individual is interested in, and move on to more abstract ideas and general Marxist theory. We encourage people to read our material and the Marxist classics - by lending or selling literature to them - and then encourage them to discuss what they have read with us.

The main point of such discussions is not so much to get people to do things, but rather to convince them of our ideas.

Once someone has a minimal commitment you should ask for them to help our work, give money and promote our organisation.

## Selling our publications

Selling publications is important financially. It is even more important politically. It is one of the two main ways we have of getting over our ideas (the other is by the main ways we have of getting across our ideas and making new contacts).

If you feel nervous at first, do a sale alongside or with another comrade. Here are the rules for the various types of sale:

- **Street and college sales:** use a petition - when a passer-by signs, ask them to buy a paper. If they buy a paper, say a few words about the political work we are doing; ask them if they want to be kept informed. If they seem interested tell them about our next public meeting (you should have leaflets with you). Approach people as they pass (be polite); don't stand around silent and glum, or chatting to other AWLers. Your branch should have a stall (a portable paste table) on which magazines, leaflets and papers are placed in addition to holding papers.
- **Door-to-door sales:** The best times are early evening or Sunday morning. Take a note of who you sell to, and then go back with the next issue. Introduce yourself: "We are selling Solidarity and campaigning against privatisation (or whatever is on the front page). Would you like a copy? It is 80 pence, or 30 pence unwaged". If people are prepared to talk, discuss with them. Ask them if they want to be kept informed about our work.
- Sell at college or at work. If victimisation is a real threat at work, identify interested individuals and sell to them discreetly.
- Always have papers and magazines with you. You can sell to people with whom you strike up a conversation on a train or bus. At meetings, ask each person present to buy a copy. Don't stand in a corner, don't ignore right-wingers and members of other groups. Stay behind at the end of meetings or demonstrations, because often that is the best time to sell literature or strike up conversations.

## Finance

We have no big financial backers and our organisation could not function without regular financial contributions from our members and sympathisers.

The most reliable and time-saving method of paying subs and literature money is by standing order, monthly. (Download a form here). If a comrade does not have a bank account, payment is made in cash to the local branch treasurer. We ask comrades to guarantee a minimum number of paper and magazine sales and include this money in their standing order payments.

The minimum number of papers and magazines comrades take is six of each, per issue (one for yourself and five to sell), although it should be possible, soon, for most comrades to sell more.

The minimum monthly subs are: £2.50 unwaged; £5 students; £5 waged (rising, dependent on income and circumstances).

Many branches make small local levies to pay for meeting rooms and other running expenses.

## Internal schools

New activists are invited to an introductory school. This school deals with some basic ideas as well as practical matters of AWL organisation.

In addition education schools are regularly held at local, regional and national levels.

## Our meetings

Our basic meetings, local branch meetings, are held weekly. Local AWL public meetings are monthly.

In addition:

- Our National Committee, elected at the conference, meets about every six weeks to take political decisions and guide the organisation. Occasionally we hold ' extended' NCs, at which all activists are invited to attend a special meeting to discuss some particular pressing issue. Activists can send resolutions to the NC.
- We have an Executive Committee, a London-based sub-committee of the NC, which meets weekly to guide the organisation between NC meetings.
- Discussion and the internet. We have policy which encourages all activists to get an internet address and sign up to the AWL' s e-lists, including the awl-announcements information list, the awl-debate list, and the higher-volume awl-chat list. You can send messages to the debate and chat lists. Printed Discussion Bulletins, collating material from the debate list, are also produced from time to time. mailings by post. The AWL web site [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org) carries both current political comment, access to the AWL e-lists, access to AWL circulars and Discussion Bulletins, and other resources.

## **AWL fractions**

In addition to local branch structures and meetings the AWL operates through ' fractions' organised around areas of work. We have various trade union fractions, a student fraction and we operate ' fraction work' in the Labour Party (i.e. certain specific AWL members operate, carefully, in the Labour Party, where our organisation is banned and open membership can lead to expulsion).

Fractions have their own convenors and meetings, organising our day-to-day work in their particular areas of responsibility. Ask the AWL office if you need contact details for your relevant fraction, or have any other questions about how the AWL works not covered by this briefing.