

Join the fight for solidarity!

Why you should join the AWL

In Britain today, one child in three grows up in poverty, in a household with less than half the average income. In 1968, the figure was only one in 10.

Thousands are homeless on the streets, while 600,000 dwellings stand empty. Millions are jobless, while those with jobs have to work longer and longer hours.

Health care, state education, and public services are ruined by cuts and privatisation, while the wealth of the rich snowballs.

Workplace stress escalates, under new technologies which, rationally used, should ease it.

Profit before people; "wealth-creation" before human need - that's capitalism.

It polarises the population, more and more, into capitalists and the working class, into wealth-owners and the sellers of labour-power whom the owners exploit.

Discontent and anger are growing. Over 70% of people think there is a "class struggle", while in the 1960s fewer than half did. Probably fewer working-class people than ever before are satisfied with the future that the powers-that-be offer them. Strike figures are low, for now, but **resistance is brewing**.

What is socialism?

Solidarity is the opposite of capitalism: working-class people standing together to help each other, rather than each one elbowing others aside in a war of all against all for individual advantage. Without solidarity, the individual worker, or small group of workers, is powerless against the accumulated and concentrated power of the wealthy.

With solidarity, we are strong against our enemies.

Socialism will be solidarity raised from a principle of resistance to the guiding principle of society. Every major industry will be reorganised on the lines of the Health Service at its best - social provision for need. It will be democratically controlled by workers and the community. The privileges of managers and officials will be abolished. The government will be democratic self-rule that will be far more flexible, responsive and accountable than any government of today.

Each electorate will control its representatives and be able to use a right of recall at any time. The whole industrial structure can thus be planned, in broad outline, to meet human need.

There will be no rich and no poor, no profits and no wage-slavery, no palaces and no homeless, no jobless and no overworked. The huge waste resulting from unemployment, advertising to sell trash, and competition between identical products, will be eliminated, and the working week cut to a level which enables everyone to have ample free time to develop as an individual - by study, sport, art, handicrafts, friendship, travel, or whatever they wish.

Socialism means liberty as well as economic planning.

A world gone wrong

The gross inequality within Britain is repeated on a far bigger scale on the world stage. Thirty million people each year die for lack of food while the advanced world is glutted with agricultural surplus. One child in every five, across the world, eats enough not to starve to death, but not enough of the right balance of foods to keep healthy.

One person in four has no regular access to clean drinking water. Yet a tax of four per cent on the personal fortunes of the richest 225 people in the world - *just 225 of them* - would pay for setting up access to food, drinking water, education and health care for everyone in the world. To maintain regular nutrition, clean water supplies, and sewage for everyone in the world would cost \$13 billion a year. That could be paid for just by reversing the tax cuts given to the rich in Britain alone since the 1980s.

Worse. Capitalism is not just destroying lives today, but also destroying the conditions for life in the future. It is generating a **possibly irreversible ecological disaster**. Since its criterion is short-term private profit, capitalism is by its very nature reckless of long-term public good. Global warming, erosion of the ozone layer, destruction of biodiversity, proliferation of untested and maybe dangerous technologies - all these costs, in the long term possibly fatal, rank much lower for capital than the lure of high profits this year or next. Under capitalism, the amazing new technologies of the 21st century tend to spread blight, not blessing.

But **working-class resistance**, too, is reproduced much larger on a world scale. In South Korea, Brazil, Taiwan, South Africa, Zimbabwe and other countries, assertive new workers' movements have emerged at the end of the 20th century. Modern communications allow them to exchange information and ideas much more quickly and cheaply than ever before. If capital is going global, so too is solidarity.

Renovate the labour movement

Today there are 165 million trade unionists worldwide. When Karl Marx published *Capital* in 1867, there were barely 250,000 in Britain, and very few anywhere else.

To make solidarity a steady, effective force, and to win even sizeable reforms - let alone to remake society - the working class needs organisation. And the modern working class is organised, on a scale never done by the peasants, serfs or slaves in older systems of exploitation.

The chief **weakness of working class organisation** is the bureaucracy that encrusts the labour movements. We see a particularly miserable crop of such trade union leaders in Britain today. They feel closer to the bosses they negotiate with than to the workers they represent. Normally they are closer, in their standard and manner of life. They'll cut any deal with the boss that keeps them safe in their offices, their quiet routines and their expense accounts.

The strength of the bureaucrats is that they are in place. They have their hands on the levers of communication in the labour movement. The bureaucrats' weakness is that they are few in number, and have no clear independent purpose or role in society. Strong and effective solidarity among the rank-and-file members in the trade unions can **sweep away the bureaucrats and replace them** by honest, accountable leaders taking no more than a worker's wage.

The job of organised socialists is to promote and help build working-class solidarity so that it transforms the labour movement into a force dynamic enough to draw in the many workers as yet unorganised, and strong enough to remake society. As Karl Marx put it long ago, we represent the future of the movement by our activity within the movement of the present. Reform can never be more than limited and vulnerable, so long as the small millionaire minority who are today the ruling class - running the state by a thousand threads and connections whatever the government, Tory, New Labour, or Lib-Dem - retain power. But to counterpose revolution to reform is to counterpose an idea for the future to the actual struggle in the present.

The way to the overthrow of the ruling class, that is, socialist revolution, is to assist, promote, and champion the battle for reforms in such a way as to maximise the development of solidarity.

Past Labour governments - or at least the 1945-51 one - pushed a little against the power of the ruling class. They introduced reforms, like the Health Service, under pressure transmitted through the channels - delegates, committees, conferences - which then linked even the topmost ranks of the Labour Party to the working-class base.

This New Labour government is different. Blair openly declares himself "pro-business" and pro-profit. He is shutting down the channels giving the organised working class (in the trade unions) any leverage over Labour. He has already shut down many of them. He has surrounded himself with a veritable "party within a party" - a political machine with hundreds of spin-doctors and advisers, largely funded by big business and the state, and mostly staffed by people who have no links at all to the labour movement (and quite a few of them turncoat Stalinists).

Politics is central. The right to vote, limited though its power is by the entrenched interests that control the permanent, unelected state machine and the media, is a working-class asset hard won by over a century of struggle. Blair is effectively taking away that right to vote by telling workers: you can vote for us, pink Tories, or them, blue Tories. There is no choice on key issues like the health service, anti-union laws, or jobs.

To quietly accept that, by saying "we'll vote for Blair, but then fight him by trade-union and community action, issue by issue", or "we won't bother to vote at all", is like having a military plan which starts by allowing the enemy to fortify the commanding heights of the battlefield at leisure and without a fight, and then starts a guerrilla resistance.

We propose to every working-class activist who wants to do something about politics, rather than leaving it to Blair, that they join with us in a **fight for a workers' government**. We should form a common front to fight in the trade unions, in the Labour Party, on the streets and at the ballot boxes for working-class political representation. We aim for a government of a Labour Party reclaimed by its working-class activists and purged of the Blair machine, or of a new workers' party based on the trade unions, which would push through such measures as:

- Full trade union rights by law, including the right to picket effectively and to take solidarity action;
- The restoration of the National Health Service; state-of-the-art health care for all, free at the point of need;
- Reversing privatisation and rebuilding public services, under democratic workers' and community control;
- A decent minimum wage for all;
- Equality in education opportunities and free education for all to university level;
- Taxation of the rich, and expropriation of the big banks and financial institutions which dominate economic life through the "casino economy" of high finance, to acquire the resources to establish jobs and welfare for all.

For consistent democracy!

Socialism means solidarity, but solidarity in diversity - a more collectivist society, but also, at the same time, a more individualist one, one that gives individuals a better chance to develop in their own ways. The labour movement, too, has to organise solidarity in diversity. It has to bind together young and old, women and men, black and white, immigrant and native, gay and straight, skilled and unskilled, blue-collar and white-collar, workers of one nation and workers of another.

How can this paradox be solved? How can we avoid diversity becoming division? The answer is consistent democracy.

Democracy is essential to socialism. The working class can only reshape society, and regulate economic life, collectively, and therefore democratically. Anything less means, sooner or later, an elite separating out from the working class and in time becoming a different class, or an appendage of a different class. Capitalism allows some political democracy, in theory at least, while keeping the economic core of society firmly under the dictatorship of the boss. Socialism means full democracy, both political and economic.

Democracy - meaning equal rights for all, and the **greatest freedom for every minority** compatible with the rights of the majority - is also the necessary basis for solidarity-with-diversity. Women; black people; and lesbians, gays and bisexuals, cannot be united with men, white people, and straights by telling them to forget about their particular identity or the particular forms of discrimination and oppression they face. Solidarity must enlist all the energies of rebellion from the whole range of the working class, rather than stifling some and promoting only those battles favoured by a preordained leading group. Mutual respect and solidarity-in-diversity now must prefigure respect and solidarity in the society we fight for.

Consistent democracy can unite workers of different nationalities. The **right to self-determination of every nation**; autonomy for every region which wants it because of special circumstances; full equal rights at the individual or collective level for languages and cultures - that is a programme which allows the working class of every nationality to appeal to the workers of others with the assurance that they will tolerate no imposition on themselves, but equally will seek no privilege over the other.

On that basis, for example, we advocate uniting workers in Ireland around a programme for a free federal united Ireland with regional autonomy for the Protestant (British-Irish) minority, and uniting workers in Israel and Palestine around a programme which supports the Palestinian Arabs in their fight for a proper independent state where they are the majority, but also recognises the right of the Israeli Jews to self-determination where they are the majority.

Socialism based on consistent democracy is the only possible sort of working-class socialism. Socialism is the opposite of Stalinism. Stalinist ideas crippled and corrupted revolutionary movements for many decades. A big overhang of Stalinist ideas remains. To fight for solidarity today we must clear that away and restore the genuine ideas of democratic socialism that were buried for decades under Stalinist mud, blood and lies.

Organise for solidarity

Even anti-Stalinists often think that a revolutionary organisation must have a single "party line" and not allow its members to dissent or debate in public, or in the organisation's newspapers and magazines, or anywhere except in carefully marked off discussion periods. In fact, **that is a Stalinist idea.**

Yes, an effective socialist organisation is necessary. Strikes, union organisation, campaigns, even revolutionary upheavals, will happen without it. But the politics of those movements will depend on what ideas the workers find already to hand. History shows us huge and militant workers' movements rallying to racist, religious, nationalist, or even (in Eastern Europe and Russia in 1989-91) free-market liberal ideas when there was no socialist alternative embodied in sufficiently effective and credible organisation.

Both workers newly involved, and long-time activists, can learn immense amounts very fast in big struggles. The struggle itself points us towards solidarity. But the political ideas needed to win socialism cannot all just be improvised on the hoof. And lessons will be un-learned unless we ensure otherwise. Socialist organisation is necessary as **the memory of the working class** - as a structure which allows activists to learn from history and from each others' experience. The class struggle has to be fought not just on the fronts of economics and politics, but also of ideas and theories.

There are many organisations proclaiming the goal of socialism. In our view many of them could best be **united in a single organisation**, with an open, democratic regime. But that cannot be done overnight or at our behest. What, then, should the new activist do, in the face of this often confusing variety?

The same as you would do faced with a choice of schools of healing when you have a stubborn sickness. Offered conventional treatment, acupuncture, osteopathy, herbal medicine, or faith healing, you would not say: "Why don't they all get together on the question of cures?" You would investigate, read, check them out. The same with politics: **examine the programmes** of the different organisations, check what they say against common sense and basic Marxist theory, see whether what they do in practice corresponds to what they say in words.

We are for the unity of the revolutionary working-class left in a single organisation, one that is tightly-knit enough to carry out agreed activities promptly and unitedly, but also one that insists on full freedom for minorities to organise and debate, including in the public press.

Right now, **we organise ourselves** in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on those democratic lines. We have our own ideas to bring into all our activities, and we're out to recruit - we make no apology for that - but we intervene not as a sect trying to carry "the party line" by force of hectoring and bluster, but as thinking, critical-minded activists concerned to build the broad movement.

If you disagree, debate and discuss with us. If you agree, join us.