

The weekly *Solidarity* needs you!

The broad mix of articles in the weekly *Solidarity* will be as in the past.

Longer educational and background articles and history of past struggles will still be included. As will reviews, theory and political commentary. We encourage AWL members to write in all these areas. If you have an idea for a “feature” article or have a specialised interest which you would like to write about please contact us to discuss your plans.

But we will also be asking leftists with specialist labour movement knowledge and writers from other countries to write columns.

We’ll try to cater for less experienced and younger readers.

And we want shorter comments on the politics and ideology of the ruling class attacks. We need detailed ongoing knowledge of the class struggle as it happens. This is the particular area where every AWL member, sympathiser and reader can help and this briefing will tell you how.

A. How you can help the weekly: some ideas

1. Feedback

We produce *Solidarity* to give a compact, self-contained, up-to-the-minute and AWL-particular view of what is important in the class struggle but we can’t do that without gathering a lot of detailed information. Every comrade should read and think about what is good about each issue of *Solidarity* and what is not so good. Was there anything you disagreed with or thought needed further explanation? Send us a quick email with your thoughts, submit a little letter for publication, or write an article to plug the gap.

Discuss the paper collectively in your AWL branch or fraction. What does your branch/fraction need from the paper to help it function and make a better impact on your readers?

Tell us what your regular readers think about *Solidarity*. Encourage them to write short letters. If they have specialist knowledge or a particular interest (an involvement in a particular campaign for example) ask them to write for the paper. If they say yes, put them in touch to discuss concrete plans.

2. Gathering stories, making reports, helping create an overview

Send in reports of local demonstrations, campaigns, public meetings, local cuts and stories from the local paper.

Don’t think that an article has to be an essay or have a minimum quota of socialist political ideas! One hundred word reports are often fine.

We want to know what you find most interesting about these events and stories. This will contribute to the AWL’s overview of the class struggle. Some examples:

Pat Y sent in a report from the Norwich march against the cuts (4.12.10). His report noted that the demonstration was 2,000 strong. This is big for Norwich! The *Solidarity* team now knows that we should keep an eye on the size of local demonstrations.

Pat M sent in a report of a public meeting in Northampton (December). He noted that a further public meeting is to be held with Mark Serwotka speaking. The *Solidarity* team thinks... should we help prepare our intervention for these Serwotka meetings?

Don’t worry also if you don’t have time to write a “finished report”. Email some notes or a link to a report on the internet.

We will not be able to use every “finished report” in the paper. But we do promise to read and process everything sent in. And we may use summaries of information sent in; we can post longer “round-ups” of local news on the website.

3. Interviews

Every time you attend a demonstration or large meeting, action or picket line try to do short interviews for

the paper. These interviews could be with “strangers”. If you sell a copy of the paper on a demonstration, talk to the buyer, ask her or him why they are on the demonstration and what they think of it. Or you could approach people holding placards from specific campaigns or banners from particular unions/areas.

Or with union officials and activists. You are the best person to write reports, and do picket line interviews with local union people, rather than someone in the AWL office. It is a good way of establishing relationships and developing solidarity with a dispute.

Or with AWL contacts. Interviewing contacts (and maybe taking a picture of that person) if they are involved in a campaign/group/action is another way to develop political relationships with the paper and the AWL.

Get the name (with accurate spelling) and union position (if relevant) of the person whom you interview.

4. Unions

Every AWL union fraction will now be producing a bulletin. *Solidarity* will gain from that because we will use some of the material generated! But there other union coverage for the paper will not be included in those bulletins.

- Meta- and micro-issues: e.g. levels of and effects of redundancies in local areas

Local disputes (see above).

- Political issues e.g. discussions in anti-cuts campaigns about mobilising local unions.

- Snippets from your union journal that seem interesting or important.

If you see or are aware something of this sort please send in a report or article. Again don't worry too much if you cannot write a polished article, send the information to us in note-form or as links to websites.

5. Letters

It is our policy to give space in our paper to debate about AWL policy. In the weekly we should make room for other kinds of letters which could, for example, take up small points of disagreement, express thoughts which have been prompted by an article, or expand and update on articles that have already been published. These letters may or may not “intersect” with debate published on our website.

B: How you can help: guidance

1. General information about writing articles

Don't worry if you are not yet confident about your grammar, punctuation and style. Don't worry if you do not yet feel "fluent" in expressing socialist ideas. Not every article has to explain the labour theory of value or the class nature of the capitalist state! Write an article that sounds like you care which makes one or two of the most important points.

The weekly paper will give more comrades more practice in writing. Soon you will feel ready to write something more substantial about a subject which interests you, e.g. a news article, an article on a subject which has been researched, or been the subject of a talk you have given to an AWL meeting. The rules set out here are for writing for *Solidarity*. They are equally valid for writing for our website, except the absolute word limits do not apply.

2. Some basic dos and don'ts

a. Keep it short

There are just three rules of any report or news article or interview for the paper. Keep it short, keep it short and keep it short.

The following word limits are a guide.

Mini-interviews (e.g. from demonstrations) 50-100 words; simple industrial reports: 2-400 words; conference reports/disputes: 500 words; simple letters: 3-400 words; discussion letters: 7-800 words; reviews: 6-700 words; news reports: 5-600 words; features (one page): 1600 words; longer (e.g. long discussion piece, history, 2 pages): 3,000 words.

It is a good idea to stick to the word count because you may not want the cuts editorial staff will need to make! If you really think you need more space, discuss what you want to do before you send in your article. We will continue to publish longer "magazine" articles in *Solidarity*, on the website and elsewhere. Ideas for and offering do such articles are always very welcome but always discuss them in advance.

Keep your sentences short. Only very good writers can get away with writing long sentences.

Keep your paragraphs short. Especially in short articles. This helps to make your article more readable.

When doing a mini-interview (e.g. on a demonstration) do not write down a "verbatim" interview. A summary of what was most important and most interesting in your conversation is best.

b. Accuracy and completeness

i. Always explain at least once who you are writing about. For instance, in a report on a Unison conference, the first time you introduce the subject, you would say something like, "At the conference of the local government and health workers' union, Unison, held on 6 June..."

ii. Never say "Last week's Unison conference". Always say "Unison conference on 6 June...". By the time the article is published "last week" may have become "the week before last".

iii. Always check names are correctly spelt.

iv. Never use an abbreviation because you can't be bothered to type something out in full. E.g. LP for Labour Party.

v. Always provide a contact address (especially website addresses) and phone number for campaigns; always provide solidarity information.

vi. Always check dates and facts.

c. Getting down to it

i. The first paragraph.

Start with the most interesting fact or point of interest. For instance if you were writing about a group of workers winning a strike, you might start with that fact, rather than some background information.

A bland first paragraph:

“Lecturers at Hackney Community College have taken strike action over planned redundancies.”

A better first paragraph:

“A strike by lecturers at Hackney Community College has forced bosses to postpone redundancy notices.”

ii. Industrial reports.

Your report should be understandable to the general reader as well as activists in your own trade union.

Phrases like “staff side”, “booking on” and the names of internal union committees should always be explained.

If a dispute report is about pay always say what the current pay is, what the demand is, what is employer’s offer is (i.e. be comprehensive). Don’t mix figures with percentages. Get a description of the work conditions even if this is not part of the dispute. The workplace involved in a dispute: where is it? is it part of a bigger company and which one?

If a report is about a conferences or a general union issue you may want to explain who is involved on the “left” and what are the political arguments in the union.

Try to get quotes and short interviews from union members or strikers. You can use their words to explain part of the story. It is much better if you, the reporter, rather than the office, ring up or speak to the people involved. Find out as much as you can about the issue before you speak to your interviewee, but don’t worry if you can’t find out everything or feel you don’t have a perfect grasp of the issues. No one will expect *you* to be the expert. On the other hand if you have an opinion about the course of the dispute, it is good to get into a dialogue with the person you are interviewing.

If the dispute or issue continues, if it is “sold out”, or ends well, send in an update. Recap very briefly (but not in the first paragraph!) on the issues so far.

iii. Short letters.

In general we would like comrades to commission letters from readers. A good rule of thumb is as for any “letter’s page”. Letters should be about one thing.

One opinion: “X failed to convince me that...”

One fact: “X did not to mention...”

One point of information: “Readers may be interested to know that there is a similar event next year...”.

In general we prefer not to receive a lot of back-slapping praise because letters should be interesting!

iv. Reviews and other “opinion” articles.

In general reviews are less about facts and more about your ideas and opinions. But if you are reviewing a book or factual TV programme you may decide to convey a lot of the information you have read or seen to create an informative article.

Your opinions don’t have to be directly political but you should try to substantiate them.

On the other hand if there are political points to be made you should make them.

You will probably be writing a review about something you like or know about. But is still worth researching or re-researching what you are writing about, to help you process your ideas.

d. Longer articles.

Try to “unlearn” all you were taught in school about writing essays and so on. Schools teach a puffed-up, turgid style of writing, and give low marks to clear, crisp prose. “Not deep enough”, the teachers tend to say. For the paper, writing should be clear and simple.

Here is a short guide:

i. Make notes about what you want to say, the facts you wish to include and the ideas you want to convey.

ii. Make a list of headings for each “part” of your article and arrange them in the order you think most logical. If the article is an historical narrative your job will be easier as you will probably end up with a chronological structure of events and dates.

iii. Write an introductory paragraph summarising what you will be saying in your article. Your article, the subjects and order, should “flow” out of your introductory paragraph. But avoid a long-winded essay style.

Essay style:

“In this article I will be critically examining whether the President of Venezuela Hugo Chavez has embraced socialist theory and practice. I will then review the experience of his “Bolivarian revolution” over the last five years. Finally I will critically discuss the responses of the international left to the Chavez government.”

A better, crisper, more accessible and interesting paragraph would be: “Has Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela, embraced socialism? Is his “Bolivarian revolution” about to grow over into socialist revolution? Many think so. They are wrong.”

There is hardly ever any need for “running commentary” — e.g. “now I will go on to explain”; “I have dealt with x, now I will turn to y.”

iv. Edit your article. The purpose of editing is to ensure you use as few words as possible to make your point and to make those words clear and understandable.

After writing, read your work, on a printed-out “hard copy”. It is easier to spot mistakes and omissions by reading a printed page than a computer screen. Cut out repetition and flabby wording (see below). Cut out the less important points. Rewrite the sentences that don’t make sense. Make the changes. Print it out again. Read your article again. Does it still make sense and is it the right number of words? Edit it again.

Now check your facts and amend as necessary.

Give up and send it in before you get too bored/frustrated.

v. Help us by thinking about illustrations we could use with your article.

e. Some other general style points.

i. It is very easy to repeat yourself. Don’t use the same adjective or noun in the same sentence. If something is “outrageous” in the first half of your sentence don’t make something else also “outrageous” in the second half. Make it “abominable” instead. Try not to use the same adjectives and verbs throughout your article.

ii. Try not to over use adjectives like massive, savage, brutal, huge and outrageous. Tenser is often punchier. “£9 billion of cuts” loses, rather than gains impact, by having a tired adjective added to it: “savage” or “huge”. Find other ways than hackneyed adjectives to express emotion. But don’t be afraid to be passionate about your subject.

iii. Don’t use the vague words we use to punctuate speech. e.g. “Clearly”, as in “Clearly, the cuts are going to be huge.” Keep down the use of adverts. Often adverbs like “really”, “generally”, “massively” (and worst of all “shockingly”) make sentences soggy rather than stronger.

iv. References. If you use a quote from a book, cite the title and author of the book but don’t bother with the publisher, edition or page number(s).

If your information has been gleaned from newspapers, BBC website etc., best check where the BBC or the newspaper got their information from, and whether they have garbled it (they often do), and state the original source.

f. More practical information

The paper is finished on Tuesday night and printed on Wednesday morning.

The copy deadline for all articles is the Friday before publication except for last minute reports and news

which can be submitted up to noon on the following Monday. Please stick to this deadline. Comrades often ask what is the “real deadline” and what is the “absolute deadline”. There is no such thing! If an event is happening on Monday night or daytime Tuesday we need make separate and special arrangements to cover and report on these events and that should be done in discussion with the paper staff.

Email articles to: solidarity@workersliberty.org

Please send longer articles as attachments. We can cope with all versions of Word or Open Office, but .doc files are easier than .docx.

Send in pictures as illustrations if you can. Email pictures in jpeg format as attachments. We can also use PDFs as illustrations. Or provide links to high resolution pictures from the internet.

You can also post pictures to us from newspapers, magazines and books to us.

Our new address is AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, 59 Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

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Appendix: George Orwell's six rules of clear English

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Taken from George Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language'

(http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit)