

Socialist Workers Party Pre-conference Bulletin 2

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Photos: Burmese monks on the march against the military junta, Glasgow social care workers strike (pic by Duncan Brown); and celebrations in Venezuela after Chavez election victory

Pay, Brown, and the fight in the unions ● Respect in Preston ● Birmingham – setting the record straight ● Tower Hamlets ● Women and the SWP ● Getting the branch right – how not to be adrift at sea ● Ah, the British Left – what do we do to ourselves ● Rebuilding central London branch ● Kingston – if you can build a branch here, you can build it anywhere ● We need a new recruitment style ● Breaking the circle ● Respect – what's gone wrong? ● What a mess ● Respect on the rocks? ● The workplace, the united front and the party ● Respect – what is going wrong? ● **Our work in UCU – a balance sheet ● Political trade unionism, Respect and the organised working class ● So near and yet so far ● The post strike and sales of Socialist Worker ● LGBT work ● Role of observers at delegate meetings ● National Committee proposal ● The party and democracy**

Contents

Pay, Brown, and the fight in the unions Central Committee	3
Respect in Preston Michael Lavalette, Preston	6
Birmingham – setting the record straight Helen Salmon, Pete Jackson (SWP district organisers for the West Midlands) Rosemary Cragg, Doug Morgan, Alistair Wingate, Nick Burke, Matt Raine, Helga Bastianello (all above from Birmingham SWP district committee) Simon Howard (Birmingham University SWSS)	7
Tower Hamlets Shaun Doherty, Paul McGarr and John McLoughlin, East London District	9
Women and the SWP Judith Orr, Central Committee	12
Getting the branch right – how not to be adrift at sea Fero Firat, Gareth Jenkins, Despina Karayianni, Tash Shifrin, Sasha Simic, Mike Simons, Diana Swingler, Hackney District	13
Ah, the British Left – what do we do to ourselves Mark Steel, South London District	14
Rebuilding central London branch Dan Mayer and Luke Stobart, central London District	16
Kingston – if you can build a branch here, you can build it anywhere Simon Byrne, West London District	18
We need a new recruitment style Chris Newlove, Middlesbrough.	18
Breaking the circle Adam Marks, central London District.	18
Respect – what’s gone wrong? Nick Wall, Merseyside District	19
What a mess Paul Holborow and Jan Nielsen, South London District	22
Respect on the rocks? Simon Hester, North London District and Julie Waterson, Hackney District	24
The workplace, the united front and the party Rachel Kendall and Paul Vernell, Bristol District	25
Respect – what is going wrong? Rebecca Lewis and Tom Jenkins, Merseyside District	26
Our work in UCU – a balance sheet Howard Miles, UCU Fraction	27
Political trade unionism, Respect and the organised working class Sean Vernell, North London District	29
So near and yet so far Judy Cox, East London District	31
The post strike and sales of Socialist Worker Yuri Prasad, Socialist Worker.	32
LGBT work Colin Wilson, Hackney District	32
Role of observers at delegate meetings Roderick Cobley, Waltham Forest District	33
National Committee proposal Tom Ramplin, Reading; Tim Nelson, Bristol and Greg Wilton, Exeter	34
The party and democracy Lindsey German, Central Committee	35

the former being committed to socialism through revolution and the latter relying on electoral politics. Why were shadowy businessmen with sexist attitudes allowed to gain positions inside Respect, and why all of a sudden are these people intolerable and are being used to justify the analysis of a 'left-right' split? Was this really such a chasm which we could not resolve? Were earlier compromises the correct move? Why was the membership of the Party not aware of such differences, until breaking point? It is true that a certain degree of distance must be kept from the media and that the finer details of Tower Hamlets Respect are not of immediate concern to areas where Respect has little current presence, but to expect that comrades join in a campaign against witch-hunting inside Respect, without any prior knowledge of such a crisis over a matter of huge importance, is too much to ask. Given the sharp turn that the Party has made, the leadership must explain all of the decisions that have been made during the crisis so that wrong decisions can be learnt from.

Party democracy

The democratic structures of the SWP between conferences need reviewing. This was exemplified at a branch meeting in Liverpool discussing the Respect crisis, where comrades whose opinions that ran counter to or questioned the CC position were treated either with contempt or in a patronising manner.

Comrades were accused of believing information contained on sectarian websites over that of Party members. One of the reasons why "Socialist Unity" was a good source of information was due to the lack of information and discussion within the party around the Respect crisis. Not all members receive Party Notes or general e-mails, and even those that do were not given enough information. The letters page in the paper contained no discussion of the crisis (the one Editorial in the paper gave the general analysis of the situation but this would surely have been insubstantial and a shock to those not following the debate.) It is insulting to be told in a branch meeting that a disagreement with the leadership means "you've been reading too many sectarian blogs haven't you?" This clearly stifled discussion within the branch as independent opinion was denounced as being ignorant. This is a situation that is not acceptable. In the current political climate we should be confident of our ability to recruit and retain new members. Both new and old members alike must feel their contributions are valued and that they are an integral part of our organisation. We must not forget that all members and contacts are 'gold dust'. The resignation of Jerry Hicks from the SWP is a real blow. That he left the Party without voicing his criti-

cisms through pre-conference bulletins and conference is disappointing, however many of his questions urgently need answering. Trust must be restored over the coming months.

**Rebecca Lewis and
Tom Jenkins,
Merseyside District**

OUR WORK IN UCU - A BALANCE SHEET

Comrades' experiences in the University and College Union may prove useful in discussing how we apply our strategy of political trade unionism in a range of other unions where we have members and some influence. What follows is an account of our work over the year since our last Party Conference.

UCU Left

Much has happened in UCU in the past year. A year ago UCU Left had just been formed, a rank and file organisation uniting SWP members with non-SWP activists from the two former unions (UCU is a merger of Natfhe and AUT). That merger created a union of around 115,000 members, making it a much more significant union than either of its predecessors and also the largest post-16 education union in the world. Most of UCU Left's leading activists had in fact developed inside Natfhe where a small rank and file organisation had existed for a number of years.

Our aim was to launch an organisation which would have the energy, enthusiasm, active members and political depth which was lacking in the old Natfhe Rank and File, and also develop the networks and organisational weight which was lacking in the AUT despite the excellent work being undertaken by a handful of comrades. A core of comrades from both unions recognised that the only way to successfully pursue that initiative was to start from the radicalisation and energy of the social movements which had developed since 1999 in the form of the anti-capitalist movement and later the anti-war movement. We needed to explicitly link that to the deep anger and distrust of Blair and New Labour for its warmongering, pandering to racism and its unashamed adoption of the neo-liberal economic agenda. How that agenda is impacting

on education means we are well placed to position ourselves as the real defenders of education and educational principles.

UCU Left now has a website www.uculeft.org which carries reports, downloadable leaflets and resources, briefing and background papers and so on.

The attacks on post-16 education

New Labour's agenda has led to widespread injection of market principles into education from top to bottom. For more than a decade Further and Higher Education have been war zones. Staff are supposed to perceive students as customers; courses are to be demand-led (ie business- and industry-dominated) and strictly subject to market criteria; curricula are to be dominated by the skills agenda.

You can now read document after formal document in which the government-friendly wonks who write them have studiously avoided any mention at all of 'education' or the personal development of students. The privatisation of juicy courses is a constant and increasing threat. In educational institutions workloads have rocketed, holidays have been cut, conditions undermined and a culture of bullying and gung-ho managerialism is dominant.

All this pummels the hearts of teachers and lecturers: when socialist teachers argue that the principles of education must be defended, and that the only people who are going to do that are us, our students and our communities, this strikes a chord with the bulk of lecturers. That is one reason why the Manifesto for Further Education, initiated by our comrades in UCU's London Region, has been met with enthusiasm: it sets out what we are for as well as what we are against. When we talk about linking our fights to the fights which have recently broken out in other sectors, this also strikes a chord.

We have been able to demonstrate this in practice, for example, through the success of the 'Education Is Not For Sale' conference that attracted 200 lecturers, and the two UCU Left conferences in November last year and June this year which attracted significant numbers of lecturers beyond the usual ranks of the Left. These successes were crucial in demonstrating to other activists the viability of the strategy of political trade unionism in contrast to a narrow syndicalist and economic focus directed in practice at so-called 'bread and butter' issues. We hope to continue to develop this initiative by organising a similar conference jointly with STA (NUT broad left) members in Spring 2008. It's also worth reporting that at the first National Congress of UCU in May about one third of all the delegates attended the UCU fringe meeting.

NEC elections

A year ago we were about to launch an electoral challenge to the Right's domination of the previous unions' elected bodies. That challenge turned out to be very successful. Despite the worryingly low turnout in the election which illustrated the size of the gap that exists between the rank and file members and UCU's leadership, UCU Left supporters won about half the NEC seats and a clear majority in the Further Education sector. The new NEC took office in June of this year. A comrade won the Vice Presidency and will become President next year.

However, the Left did not win the General Secretary post. After discussion UCU Left had supported Roger Klein for General Secretary against the AUT General Secretary, Sally Hunt. He would likely have beaten Sally Hunt had it not been for the ultra-left candidacy of a left NEC member who refused to stand down and consequently split the 'progressive' vote. Because of that the Left lost the general secretaryship of an important 'awkward squad' union. There are lessons here for the future and for other unions.

The SWP and the Left more generally currently has a very significant number of comrades on the UCU NEC. One of the problems we have had to grapple with since then is that the UCU Left is now in a majority on one of the two leading elected lay bodies (the Further Education Committee) in the union. (This is a good problem to have, of course!) Within the lay leadership of UCU we are having to learn the art of genuine leadership in a significant united front. That means learning how to maintain and strengthen alliances; knowing who the real enemy is; learning how to respond to 'events' collectively, quickly, democratically but effectively; in short learning the art of politically embracing your comrades and allies while keeping your enemies at fist distance.

While this is not easy and on occasions we have certainly been too slow or not sufficiently proactive, on key issues so far we have managed to maintain the unity of UCU Left and carry our shared strategy forward. This has been most notable since our first UCU Congress in May in terms of the so-called Israeli boycott issue but also in relation to the FE pay offer.

The boycott issue

The union and some of our comrades in higher education in particular have been subject to a vicious bullying campaign since Motion 30 was passed at the May Congress calling for a debate in our branches on the feasibility and desirability of a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. Literally tens of thousands of hostile emails have been received by UCU, and the Press has been almost universally virulent against the decision. Comrades

have been vilified as anti-semitic and anti-democratic. It became a truly international issue – condemnations were trotted out in Parliament by MPs who appeared not to have read the motion and the government sent Battling Bill Rammell, an education minister, to Tel Aviv to reassure the Israeli government that the Labour government still uncritically loved them and would oppose what UCU had done.

In all this we were keen to ensure that, whereas the SWP does have a line on such a boycott, UCU Left should not have one since it is not the focus of its activities as a rank and file group and it could split the organisation from the word go.

This proved to be the right approach. It enabled us to hold UCU Left together through a difficult recent period where elements of the leadership have tried to bury the proposed tour of Israeli and Palestinian academics. Our approach helped us to forge a common position on the Left and work out a way of focusing political efforts in support of Palestinian resistance.

Further Education pay

Another recent example of the value of a Left majority on the NEC and the importance of building a broad, non-sectarian united front on the basis outlined earlier was the Further Education Special Pay Conference on 6 October.

The Further Education Committee (composed of those NEC members who work in FE) took a decision in July, contrary to the advice of fulltime officials, to reject an offer of 2.55% from our employers. Clearly, being below the RPI rate, this would amount to a pay cut. Rather than allow the officials and the Right to simply accept the offer or to ballot members during the summer when people are isolated and atomised, UCU Left supporters took a gamble on finding a way to promote democratic discussion and demonstrate our commitment to developing genuine accountability in the union.

We organised a consultation exercise in the college branches for September, with an unprecedented branch delegate pay conference for early October. The consultation exercise was successful in that nearly 70% of FE branches responded (a lot more than had sent delegates to the first UCU Annual Congress in June) but it also demonstrated considerable unevenness in both the organisation and the levels of confidence in branches. A small majority of branches reported wanting to accept the offer, but the figures also suggested more members had voted to reject the offer than accept it.

Consideration of these figures at the 6th October Pay Conference (to which nearly 100 branches sent delegates) and at an NEC meeting the day before was, well lively! UCU Left supporters had to fight

hard to win a political position of opposition to the pay offer. Yet ultimately the vote at the conference showed a clear majority to reject the offer and to ballot members in the colleges with a recommendation to support strike action alongside other public sector unions in the fight against Brown's public sector pay freeze.

Most tellingly, several delegates who had been pro-acceptance at the beginning of the conference got up at the end and reported that they had changed their minds after hearing the debates and arguments – real democracy in action.

Of course, that ballot has yet to be won. The extent to which it will be possible to win it will depend on the extent to which college lecturers can be convinced that fighting over pay is a way to build a national focus, so increasing members' confidence and making them feel part of a national union and a movement of opposition to Brown, as well as explicitly making the political link to the defence of FE. Having the potential to generate a campaign alongside other public sector workers, most notably the NUT, will be extremely important in winning a Yes vote.

The importance of Fraction organisation

We have organised a series of local and national Fraction meetings over the year. These have been absolutely crucial in developing a collective strategy and enabling us to intervene as effectively as possible within UCU Left and more widely in the union. At times there have been real arguments and disagreements about strategy and tactics, particularly about the so-called boycott issue, but comrades have operated in a principled democratic centralist way and sought to implement majority decisions.

We have had to be sensitive within UCU Left because it is not a democratic centralist organisation and this has involved us in ongoing discussion, debate and firm but comradely political arguments to be able to present a united front within the union.

Having the beginnings of Fraction organisation has been a major step forward for our political operation and this needs developing. Every party member in every UCU branch needs to feel part of the UCU Fraction and to see their workplace and union activity as central to their activity as socialists. We need a bigger and more representative Fraction committee, probably organised on a regional basis.

Outside of our ranks we need to drive forward the development of UCU Left as a genuine membership organisation with local groups based in the regions, colleges and university branches. These groups are crucial to the reorganisation and reinvigoration of the weaker branches and to the development of genuine democracy

and accountability in the union. Our comrades have also been central to initiating an Activists' Guide in UCU, currently in production by Head Office, which will be an indispensable tool in this process.

What can we conclude from our involvement in UCU this year?

1. It is possible (and necessary) to start building effective rank and file organisation in the unions as long as the starting point is a shared understanding between ourselves and other activists which flows from a focus on the broad political issues of opposition to war and neo-liberalism, defence of public services, opposition to racism and Islamophobia and a shared commitment to building genuine democracy and accountability in a fighting union.

2. We have to know when to work with the union officials and leaderships and when to oppose them. Ritual denunciation of a leadership at every turn is politically silly. When Sally Hunt wrote a good letter to the Guardian supporting the POA and denouncing Brown's pay freeze we featured that in our leaflets. When she sought to undermine the so-called boycott motion we criticised her and organised against her.

3. We have to be able to compromise with our allies but remain uncompromising towards our enemies. '80% agreement' is just that – sometimes we have to agree to disagree over policy; occasionally we have to take a step back in order to preserve an alliance. We have to be able to see the political wood for the trees.

4. As things are beginning to shift in terms of the levels of class struggle, our opportunities in the unions and workplaces are improving. That means every comrade in a workplace needs to be a part of the union, fight for shop steward, rep and leadership roles and seek to build a political network around them. We can begin to build such networks through relating to the broader political issues, through solidarity work like taking collection sheets round, by selling our publications.

5. We need to develop effective Fraction organisation as a matter of urgency in unions where we have significant numbers of members. We need regular caucuses at national, regional and local levels which will develop capable and experienced leaderships.

6. We need to strongly promote Respect initiatives like OFFU in whatever unions we can while recognising that promotion of Respect and recruitment to it cannot be

a substitute for building broad-based rank and file organisations which, if they really are genuinely broad-based, will include members of other organisations or Labour or no organisation.

Howard Miles, UCU Fraction

POLITICAL TRADE UNIONISM, RESPECT AND THE ORGANISED WORKING CLASS

The recent spate of national disputes involving CWU, PCS, RMT and local disputes like the energetic dispute of low paid cleaners at SOAS; the victorious Metronet tube workers dispute and the successful schools campaign in Edinburgh raise the question: are we seeing a revival of working class militancy?

This contribution is premised on the belief that these headline disputes are a reflection of a wider development of workplace militancy and attempt to offer some insights into how we should relate and deepen this development through highlighting some examples.

Lessons from the past; the fire this time round

The boom period of the 50s and 60s built up a strong stewards' organisation, fighting for economic issues, which in turn built strong sectional workplace organisation. This led to the ability of key groups of workers to act independently from their Trade Union leaders.

The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, a CP led organisation, managed to organise a successful strike of 600,000 workers against the Labour government's attempt to introduce draconian Trade Union laws. The Miners had their greatest victory in 1972 at the battle of Saltley Gates when their union was led by a right wing General Secretary.

The SWP uses the term "downturn" to describe a period of defeat for the organised labour movement after the victorious industrial militancy of the early 1970s.

It is worth remembering that one of the

reasons why such a powerful movement could seemingly be so easily disarmed with the arrival of a Labour government in 1974 was the political allegiances of the stewards who led that movement. If they were not actual members of the Communist Party or Labour Party they were influenced by them. They sold the Social Contract (wage freeze) within the trade union movement, which began the process of leading militants being incorporated into the Trade Union bureaucracy laying the basis for the defeats of the 1980s.

The dominance of the Labour Party and the CP was still very powerful and a Respect type organisation would not have been able to attract Labour and CP members. Today it is different as shown by the RMT London regions 10 to 0 vote to back Lindsey German against Livingstone for London Mayor; at the UCU conference over a third of delegates turned up to the Respect fringe meeting including the joint General Secretary while 6 leading NEC members turned up to the Respect meeting at the NUT conference. Respect can become the home for key trade unionists betrayed by 10 years of New Labour.

The defeats of the 80s may linger in the minds of a generation of trade unionists that hold much of the TU organisation together at the local and national level. However this experience is not shared by a younger generation of activists. The experience of not winning is a more useful starting point to explain the lack of belief amongst many workers today about their ability to change things – although, as a consequence of campaigning at a local level, this is beginning to change.

We have argued that the trade union movement will not revive in the same way that it did in the 60s and 70s; strong workplace organisation will still be central if organised labour is to be able to inflict serious defeat on the employers. However this will not be built, as it was in the boom years, simply by agitating around economic demands over a prolonged period of time.

By developing an approach that starts with the political and social movements that have evolved since 1999 combined with an understanding that unexpected 'leaps' in the situation will fast forward the rebuilding of workplace organisation, we can begin to get our approach right.

We have started to apply a method described as Political Trade Unionism, which has struck a chord with activists. There is however still a tendency to leave trade union work to the 'experts'. If we are going to put Respect and the SWP at the heart of the organised working class, we have to place ourselves at the centre of the emergence of workplace militants and organise those workers who do not yet have any organisation.

What do we mean by political trade unionism?

The term political trade unionism is an attempt to describe a way of working that unites the economic concerns of the working class with the wider social movements against war and neo-liberalism when attempting to build workplace organisation.

Too often political trade unionism is mistakenly understood to mean simply arguing against racism, homophobia and sexism and for Socialism – we take it for granted that socialists do this in any period.

The war has been and still is the central mobilising campaign and the main issue that has mortally wounded Blair and threatens to do so to Brown. It therefore has to be a central part of building workplace organisation. Those comrades who have been successful at doing so describe how their agitation around the war has made it easy to recruit non-union members into the union and get them involved. However organising around the war is not all we mean by political trade unionism.

The history of the British working class is one where there has been a false division between politics and economics; trade unions fight for the economic gains for the working class and their political interests are furthered by the Labour Party. Both trade union leaders and Labour MPs consciously separate the two fights. For many workers this false division was accepted as the way things were achieved - social reforms came with parliamentary representation and pay and conditions came from workplace organisation.

The task of revolutionaries has always been to try and connect these two struggles together – linking the economic power of the working class to the struggle for social reforms. The impact of neo-liberalism over the past 25 years, for many workers, has started to erode this divide with the marketisation of every aspect of life as well as the inability and unwillingness of social democracy to deliver reforms for the working class.

Saying what we are for as well as what we are against

For example in the public sector professionalism was always seen as the terrain of the right – nurses or teachers echoing management arguments that they could not take strike action because it would hurt patients or students. However the impact of the market has meant that people working in the “liberal professions” have been straight jacketed from fulfilling their professional duties; a teacher cannot teach, a social worker cannot care and a nurse cannot heal – making ‘professionalism’ a terrain for the left.

Where activists have managed to come up with initiatives that harness this frustration and anger they have been very successful at building strong trade union and workplace organisation. The anti-academies campaign is a good example of a united front built around the political issue of privatisation of schools. Schoolteachers in Bristol have developed themed learning weeks that have re-connected students’ interest in education by making the curriculum relevant. It has also engaged a wider layer of teachers into trade union activity. In the FE sector the Manifesto for Further Education has provided a vision, which is attractive to new and longstanding activists. The STA’s Education for Liberation (200), UCU Left’s Education Not For Sale (200) and Radical Social Work (300) conferences have all been great successes and are good examples of what political trade unionism means. Karen Reissman has made central to her inspiring and powerful campaign against victimisation, the way in which marketisation within the health service damages the care received by the most vulnerable within our society.

The left have the most effective ideas about how to run schools, hospitals or how workers’ skills can be best utilised – our ideas can become the ‘common sense ideas’ amongst wide layers of workers and show that there is an alternative to the market.

It can be more difficult to apply this method in industries that are run directly for profit. Although huge swathes of these industries are ex-public sector, such as transport where the arguments easily move from resistance to the neo-liberal model of business to questions of greater control over work and the services that are supplied. Even where the industries are not ex-public sector, the frustration with greater pay inequality within a company and the neo-liberal ideological push to disregard experience over cheapness and subservience, help create an atmosphere in which alternative models of organising production can help frame greater workplace resistance.

This approach is not, as some of the left have argued, a simple propagandist one which avoids taking up the bread and butter issues concerning the working class. It allows activists to relate to the working class in a fresh way. It provides a frame in which those attempting to resist the employers’ attacks can locate their own particular grievances in a wider totality thus strengthening their ability to fight. Rosa Luxemburg in her path breaking analysis on the relationship between politics and economics explains how the political struggles feed into economic ones, which in turn feed back into the political. It is this analysis that we need to bear in mind when we approach the issue of how to rebuild workplace organisation.

Break up of national bargaining and the rebuilding of workplace organisation

Neo-liberalism has encouraged employers to break free from nationally negotiated deals and push through higher rates of productivity. Ironically the privatisation and deregulation of key sectors in the 80s and 90s has led workers to start to strengthen their workplace organisations in response to these attacks.

There are many examples from striking bus workers in North London who during the course of their dispute over pay moved on to campaign over deregulation and have started to develop networks across the city; NUT members have won a number of battles over performance management issues, many of which are going to ballot as part of their campaign; in local government over the Single Status campaign. The Birmingham UNISON comrades’ description of how the attempt to create unity over men and women’s pay was achieved was inspiring; Comrades in the HE sector organising to defend national bargaining around the frame-work issue and in FE several years of local battles over pay and conditions has created a new layer of activists who have been central to these campaigns. In London recent campaigns over redundancies and ESOL have shown this development.

‘Anarchy of the market leads to tyranny in the workplace’

Alongside these attacks has come more bullying managers, workloads spiralling out of control, casualisation, stress related illnesses rocketing - all making peoples’ working lives an extremely unpleasant experience and therefore fertile ground for workplace organisation.

We need to have a three pronged approach: firstly we need to continue to build Organising For Fighting Unions as an organisation that attempts to pull together significant networks of militants which can start to deliver the kind of solidarity action that can win. Secondly we need to position Respect at the centre of these networks as an organisation that gives political expression to the concerns, in the electoral arena, of all those attempting to resist the neo liberal assault in the workplace. The third prong, deepening the influence of the rank and file politics of the SWP through applying political trade unionism, can only happen by putting into practice the first two. This means that all members of the SWP need to make building in their workplace a central part of what they do. This requires:

- All members to join an appropriate Trade Union.

- All members to stand for steward positions.
- Where appropriate members should stand for branch, regional, national positions and conferences.
- All members to attend and build their local branch union meetings and regional meetings.
- All members to attend their SWP union fraction meetings.
- Getting members delegated to their Local Trade Councils.
- Each district to set up a local OFFU network.
- All members to seek opportunities to start and expand the selling of Socialist Worker in their workplace.
- Each SWP branch to organise one or two sales outside strategically important workplaces.
- Organise in the run up to General/GLA/council elections workplace meeting with Respect candidates.
- Organise in the run up to General/GLA/council elections in the colleges/workplaces voter registration campaigns.

**Sean Vernell,
North London District**

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

Political debates and witch hunts

Arguments in Respect were inevitable but I have always been inspired by how little dispute there has been about Respect's core principles in Tower Hamlets. There have been arguments about candidates, selection processes and the personnel on committees but no arguments about Respect's policies on equality, trade unionism, peace and justice. Under any other circumstances we would be celebrating what we have achieved in Tower Hamlets Respect, in which the SWP is now a small minority. Instead, the party acts as if it and its close friends are the only true Respect and the vast majority are not real members. This attitude is patronising, arrogant and untrue.

There have been heated arguments in Tower Hamlets Respect, but to characterise this as a 'witch hunt' against socialists, a phrase which conjures up images of McCarthyism, is an insult to socialists and activists from around the world who do face real witch hunts from the state, the media or the bosses. Real witch hunts

mean militants are sacked, activists are imprisoned, lives are ruined by media smears. The Respect petition circulated by the SWP talks of a 'campaign of vilification against the left'. George Galloway has had ample opportunity to vilify the SWP in the national media but has not done so. In fact, the only national media to refer to the argument in Respect so far is Socialist Worker.

Party Notes, 22 October, talks of George Galloway 'going on the rampage' and trying to 'smash up SWP delegations going to Respect conference' and talks of Galloway launching a 'vicious assault' on the SWP. This inflammatory language, which implies physical violence and intimidation, is not an accurate description of Galloway's behaviour. This language is contradicted by his entirely rational and effective performance on Question Time and can only strengthen our political opponents. It is entirely right to criticise undemocratic practices in Respect, but it is not right for the party to resort to the same practices. In Tower Hamlets we have not distinguished ourselves by our commitment to democracy and inclusiveness. On the contrary, we are stooping to the very tactics we criticise.

Democracy - until someone disagrees

The fact that there are arguments going on in Respect is no reason to suspend or curtail party democracy. Disgracefully, Rob Hoveman, Kevin Ovenden and Nick Wrack were expelled before anyone had the chance to read their articles in the IB, still less discuss them. They were expelled so quickly not because they collaborated with the security services, scabbed on workers' struggles or leaked damaging stories to the gutter press. They were expelled because of an argument between members of Respect, who agree on everything that really matters, like opposing the war, privatisation and New Labour, but disagree on procedural issues like interview procedures, membership drives and conference delegation entitlements. This is no basis for expulsions that have damaged the party's reputation in the movement.

Party Notes, 22 October, argues that a statement circulated to some SWP comrades opposing the expulsions is undemocratic because it was not discussed in branch meetings or aggregates. It is in the SWP's constitution that in the pre-conference period comrades are free to write articles and form factions. Both these involve approaching comrades outside branch meetings and aggregates. Comrades do not have to approach their branches or districts before writing articles or supporting articles or statements written for publication in the IB.

In this period, we are also entitled to

criticise aspects of the SWP's work and to analyse the success or otherwise of party events such as Marxism. For example, on July 15, 2006 Socialist Worker reported that, 'Some 4,100 activists gathered to discuss and debate a huge range of political issues' at Marxism 2006. However, in the first IB a CC document reads, 'Marxism 2007 was a great success. Over 4,100 people attended the event, up over 400 on last year'. The size of Marxism is one indicator of the standing of the party and we are entitled to ask which is correct.

In the first IB Martin Smith states that the membership of the SWP is 5,938. The membership of Respect is around 2,500. If every comrade had joined Respect and recruited one other person from work or the local area or from amongst their friends, we would not only have quadrupled the size of Respect, we would have established the hegemony of socialists within Respect organically instead of trying to impose it through bureaucratic manoeuvres. We could have got more SWP members elected to influential positions, as demonstrated by the RMT's support for Lindsey German's mayoral campaign. Instead we are retreating back to the sectarian ghetto. Many comrades have given time, money and energy to building first the Socialist Alliance and then Respect. They are entitled to ask how it all went so wrong and to get some answers - and the cry that George Galloway started it simply will not do.

**Judy Cox,
East London District**

NB Judy Cox claims in this article "In fact, the only national media to refer to the argument in Respect so far is Socialist Worker". This is simply not true. Some weeks ago Newsnight ran a piece on George Galloway's document - "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times". Since the document was released (in late August) there have been numerous articles in almost every left wing newspaper and the debate is all over the internet.

The first time Socialist Worker put an article citing its differences with George Galloway was the edition dated 27 October 2007.

**Martin Smith,
National Secretary**