

## A reply to "The record: The SWP and Respect"

by Andy Newman - 12th November 2007

The contribution from the SWP's Central Committee *The record: The Socialist Workers Party and Respect* about the debate in respect is welcome, as an attempt to develop a substantive political argument; although it is unfortunate that they frame the discussion in terms of a non-existent witch-hunt, which raises the temperature unnecessarily.

Part of the difficulty of the debate is that the two sides do not seem to share the same frame of reference of what it is about. For those critical of the SWP, the organisational relationship between the SWP and Respect is how they perceive the political problem; whereas for the SWP such criticism is taken to be symptomatic of a deeper underlying political differences. Let us see if we can make sense of both points of view.

In reply we need to first consider the political context in which we are seeking to build a broad party.

### THE CONTEXT

It is worth looking at the degree to which social democracy has vacated the political landscape, because occupying this space is the task that Respect has set itself. Any analysis of the possibility of creating a viable left alternative should start with looking at the Labour Party. Left candidate for the Deputy Leadership, Jon Cruddas MP, has explained:

"Since Labour won the 1997 election, it has shed 4.5 million voters, the vast bulk of whom fall into four main groups.

- The manual working class, which has seen well-paid jobs exported to low-wage economies
- Public-service workers, who resent private-sector penetration and government "reforms"
- Black and ethnic minorities, who have reacted against the Iraq war and ministerial racist scapegoating
- Urban intellectuals who have switched, largely to the Liberal Democrats, over the war.

A recent YouGov poll revealed that 15 million people self-identified as Labour voters, but one-third of them said that they would not vote Labour under present circumstances. "

In addition, the Party has lost 200000 members since 1997.

The New Labour project has been utterly triumphant, as evidenced by the failure of John McDonnell's left leadership challenge to get on the ballot paper, or gain the support of a single major union. The neo-liberal right within Labour have irreversibly and structurally embedded their

victory into the party's DNA. The rules and constitution have been changed to eliminate the levers that the left used to exercise influence; the conference is a meaningless rally; the social composition of the membership has shifted hugely towards managerial types; the neo-liberal and imperialist policies mean no activists under 30 would look at the party as anything remotely progressive. Ward meetings are sparse and poorly attended, and the party apparatus is an empty shell in most of the country. Milbank prevents left candidates being selected and what is more the reduced powers of local authorities have removed the base from which the left has in the past built support from the bottom up.

The union link now exists more in form than in content. Whereas in the past union branches used to send delegates to GC meetings in each CLP this practice has almost disappeared, lay activists and even full timers are much, much less likely to be LP members than they ever were before. The only concession won by the affiliated unions was the sop of the Warwick agreement before the election, none of which policies have been implemented. And now they have relinquished their right to pose policy motions to conference.

The aspect of hope in the situation is that the Labour Party may have irrevocably been won for the right, but the political views of its electoral base have not followed and are now to the left of it. And some unions articulate political opposition to PFI, private equity and inequality.

As long as the Labour Party relies upon union funding, and active support from trade union officials during elections, the Labour Party will remain organically connected to the Labour movement. The Unions wish to have influence over government, and will not abandon the Labour Party, as there is no other viable option for them to pursue.

But what is very interesting is the degree to which the unions now find themselves in the position of directly being the ideological opponents of neo-liberalism without the intermediate role of the Labour Party. We see this for example with the GMB's campaign over Private equity, or the RMT's campaign for public ownership of the railways. What is lacking is a pluralist and inclusive political movement that can pick up these ideological challenges posed by the unions, and relate them to the wider general public.

So the Labour Party has a broadly progressive electoral constituency, and historical links with the trade union infrastructure, but it is in continued antagonism with both of these elements. Nevertheless, although the Party no longer articulates the aspirations of these support groups, they do provide a constraint upon it, and mediate the transformation of the Labour Party, so that it appears less dramatic than it is. But that

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constraint is definitely more one of form than substance.

Any attempt to build a pluralist and inclusive opposition to New Labour must recognise that the processes of change within the Labour party, the tension between New Labour's neo-liberalism and the trade unions, and the increasing age profile of Labour's electoral support, are causing a protracted period of decomposition of the Labour Party. But it is going to be a long process.

The three challenges for the left outside the Labour Party are to somehow connect with the Labour Party's electoral base, which is broadly to the left of the Labour Party itself; to create a natural pole of attraction for activists; and to create a credible vehicle to provide political representation for the trade unions. What is more, we have to be able to do this while still maintaining a creative dialogue with those activists still in the Labour party.

These objectives flow from the composition and traditions of the British labour movement, and the current state of left politics in England. Unless and until a "tipping point" is reached where an electoral alternative to Labour can credibly win elections, then Labour's electoral base will stay largely intact, decaying slowly.

In particular we need to recognise that the space vacated by the Labour Party cannot be filled by the revolutionary left groups, whether operating as a United Front (of a special type?) or not. What is missing is a social democratic party, and any such party must involve the creative energies and enthusiasm of thousands of activists who have their own ideas independent of the control of any central committee.

But neither can it mean a recreation of Labourism, because to succeed any new political formation must go beyond these three tasks. We also need to recognise the degree to which society has changed.

### THE CHANGE IN SOCIETY.

In December 2006 trade union membership stood at just 28.4% of the workforce, and this includes the membership of staff associations. What is more, the general level of class consciousness and trade union experience has sharply declined so that even when unions do recruit members they struggle to find workplace representatives.

If a new mass party is to be built then the trade unions do have the prestige, personnel and finance to make a huge difference. The role of socialists is to encourage the unions to put the value of their special relationship with the Labour party to the test, and draw the necessary conclusions. But this will be a long process, and the social base of organised labour is probably no longer sufficient to sustain a mass progressive party.

In 2005, the Labour Party received just 9,562,122 votes (35% of those who voted, compared to 49% in 1945) and socialist parties to the left of labour received merely around 120000 votes.

Organisations to the left of labour barely reach 10000 members, even if we include the Green Party.

Increasingly the three main parties seem indistinguishable, which plays a large part in increasing cynicism, and decreasing electoral participation. But the converging political consensus in the Westminster bubble of politics is a betrayal of the ideological divergence in society at large.

As Salma Yaqoob has written

"The broad constituency in favour of peace, equality and social justice is growing. On many issues it is even a majority in society. Millions of people are against war, against privatising and running down the welfare state, against racism, and for greater equality. There is an opportunity to be a voice for these millions, and to offer an electoral alternative to the parties of war and injustice.

"The challenge for Respect is to be able to work with, and be a voice for, this growing broad progressive constituency. This constituency includes people who remain tied to Labour or other parties such as the Greens. We have to work patiently to build up our vote at a local level. But we also have to be part (and almost certainly a minority part) of a much wider network of alliances."

There does need to be a socialist strand within respect, because Respect stands for a break from neo-liberalism and imperialism. But the advantage of Respect is that it does not only orient on the minority of the working class who are in trade unions or who are class conscious. This is an important constituency, but it is not the only progressive constituency.

Thirty years ago Eric Hobsbawm remarked that the "common style of proletarian life" no longer existed, which of course has an impact on the viability of building a mass party based on those who self-identify as working class. There is considerable lifestyle divergence today, and much less conformity. Any broad progressive project needs to be permissive and tolerant of people from very different social, cultural and religious backgrounds, rather than regarding the specific sub-cultures of the political left and trade unionism as normative.

We need to be building bridges to those campaigning against racism, against sexism, against homophobia, in defence of the environment, against ID cards, in defence of asylum seekers. Working within communities, defending their services and campaigning against cut-backs. It means building practical solidarity with progressives in other countries, and learning

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from their experiences, and recognising that the English left has more to learn than to teach.

The big and exciting opportunity to pull the whole political context to the left involves collaborative working within this rainbow coalition. It means working with people we may find we have strong disagreements with, but if we are prepared to listen to them, then they will be prepared to listen to us. This requires a democratic internal party structure for Respect because rules need to exist to empower people to participate. We cannot build a successful coalition if we privilege one political group with disproportionate influence.

### THE UNITED FRONT OF A SPECIAL TYPE

Although the SWP are rarely explicit that they see their role in Respect as privileged, it is inherent in their theory of a united front of a special type.

In the SWP Central Committee's submission to the party's Pre-conference Internal Bulletin #1, they write:

"In the SWP's answer to the SSP some years ago we criticised their "definition of the united front" as limited to "single issue campaigns of limited duration (i.e. the kind of campaigns that have been most common on the British Left in recent years)". We argued: "this is far too narrow a definition. Indeed, in the work most commonly associated with systematically elaborating the idea of the United Front, Trotsky's writing on fascism in the 1930s, we find an altogether broader approach.

"the trade unions are, for instance, described as 'the rudimentary form of the united front in the economic struggle because they unite revolutionaries and reformists in common struggle over wages and conditions. Trade Unions are of course neither single issue nor temporary organisations. Moreover Trotsky describes the soviets themselves as united fronts: 'The soviet is the highest form of the united front'....

...

"It seems that if, at one extreme, the trade unions and, at the other extreme, the soviets can be described as united fronts we are not making any great theoretical innovation in describing the 'new broad parties' as a united front of a special type."

It is not clear what the SWP really means. Even if we accept the relevance of Trotsky's writing on this, all they have established is that there is a precedent for this terminology. But for a theory to be accepted as useful, it must have more than precedent, it must also be consistent with other broadly accepted theories, it must explain the known facts, and it must be useful as a guide to action.

### INCONSISTENT THEORY

Firstly, whatever incidental remarks Trotsky may have made about the united front being applicable to soviets and trade unions, the main thrust of his writing was concerned with the strategy that

communists should adopt in campaigning alongside social democrats over concrete and specific issues, under the assumption that mass social democratic organisations already existed. The political context of the current broad party projects, the SSP, Respect, die Linke, Rifondazione, the Australian Socialist Alliance, et al, is that they are seeking to occupy a social and political space within the workers movement which has been vacated by traditional social democracy. And as such, one of the necessary pre-conditions of Trotsky's united front is missing.

The specific example given by the SWP, that of trade unions, shows how extending the united front analogy to a broad party remains problematic. Within trade unions, Marxists work alongside other militants, either within broad lefts or rank and file networks, with the aim of taking forward the whole workforce and solving together with the other activists the problems that arise, as they arise. Marxists in the trade union movement do not seek to organise workers outwith the mass organisations. Therefore, should we accept the idea from the SWP that trade unions are united fronts, then the closest analogy to how Marxists work in trade unions would not be the SWP's relationship with Respect, but would instead be the idea of working as a platform within a broad party. The SWP's current theory and practice of working in trade unions is inconsistent with their theoretical approach to broad parties.

Thirdly, the examples given by the SWP Central Committee document of successful united fronts they have been involved in, the first Anti-Nazi league, and the Stop the War Coalition, are clearly not relevant to the question of broad parties. It is understood in any narrowly focussed campaign that the participants are only united over the specific issues of the campaign, and may therefore be politically active over other issues in other organisations. That is not true of political parties, where it is clearly expected that the primary focus of a member's political activity should not involve building another political party!

### DOESN'T EXPLAIN THE FACTS

Three years ago I criticised the SWP's understanding of Respect. Callinicos had described the process thus:

"In many ways Respect had begun to crystallise as a distinct political entity before its actual formation, on the basis of a common approach to key questions that developed in practice among actors from very different backgrounds within the StWC. ... four main forces that came together to form Respect. The first was symbolized by a person, George Galloway, representing those longstanding Labour Party members whose disgust with the Blair government was so absolute that they were prepared to break with their old party. The second was constituted by those elements of the far left that were not blinded by sectarianism and therefore recognised the historic opportunity

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offered by the anti-war movement. Chief among these was the SWP, but it also included other elements of the SA, and individuals like the great film director Ken Loach. The third consisted of a variety of ‘ethnic community’ activists and intellectuals—most prominently from a Muslim background, but also involving many in Turkish and Kurdish organisations. Finally, there were significant numbers of trade unionists—on the extreme left of the awkward squad, Mark Serwotka of the Public and Commercial Services Union and, much more equivocally, Bob Crow of the RMT, along with many local officials and rank and file activists, particularly in the RMT and the FBU.”

This was always overblown. Galloway proved to be the exception not the rule, and he was not followed by others from the Labour Party. Very few socialists outside the SWP joined or have stayed in Respect, and the SWP has actively worked to thwart rival currents within Respect. The appeal to trade unionists was if anything less than the Socialist Alliance enjoyed. But the big success was a genuine and historic breakthrough among some inner city working class communities with a high proportion of Muslims, where the anti-war vote from Muslims tipped the balance towards Respect being electable.

Former Respect national executive member, John Nicholson described Respect at the outset as: “It is a coalition of the Socialist Workers Party (certainly not convincing all its own members) and sections of the “Muslim Community” (some excellent local anti-war campaigners and some significant members of the Muslim Association of Britain), together with one individual, George Galloway MP.”

Since then, the significance of Galloway has increased, as he won his historic election victory, faced down the US senate, and despite the wobble with Big Brother, has generally managed to use his media profile to good effect. What is more the Muslim support for Respect has moved from being a potentiality, to actually delivering an electoral base. The defence of Shadwell ward in a by-election earlier this year was utterly crucial in demonstrating the robustness of the electoral base.

What is more, although Respect’s conferences have proven to be unnecessarily confrontational events, Respect has developed a broad range of policies consistent with being a left social-democratic party - transcending the limitation hoped for by Alex Callinicos that its programme would remain of “relatively minimal, meaning that Respect is a pluralistic organisation in which diverse viewpoints coexist”

So, the actually existing Respect is very uneven. In Birmingham, East London and Preston it has built an electoral base, and in those few areas has modest but significant membership. In the rest of the country, Respect is largely the SWP, plus a few

individuals. It has also had a programmatic development consistent with a political party.

To describe this as a “united front” of any sort, is simply mystification.

### NOT A GUIDE FOR ACTION

The reason that the SWP prefer the formulation “united front of a special type” is that it is an ex post facto theoretical justification for their preferred practice - which is trying to build two organisations in parallel, the SWP and Respect. But when relating to wider campaigns, and in the unions, they wear their SWP hat. On demonstrations they carry Socialist Worker placards, they sell their own newspaper (Socialist Worker) and have blocked launching a Respect paper. They seek to recruit to the SWP, not Respect. They have also blocked Respect moving towards becoming a political party under the control of its own membership, viewing Respect as a coalition, allowing the SWP to act independently.

Maintenance of the SWP as a separate organisation from Respect, while the SWP also seek to be the main political axis within Respect was always going to be problematic.

Alex Callinicos described the SWP’s approach to Respect in his article REGROUPMENT AND THE SOCIALIST LEFT TODAY”, [IST bulletin #2,] “in such broad coalitions it is essential for revolutionaries to retain independent organisation in order to combine building the coalition with the objective that gives this work its meaning—the construction of a mass revolutionary party.”

This is why Respect had to remain a coalition: “a federal organisation that individuals can join and to which organisations can affiliate while preserving their autonomy. The programme, while principled, is relatively minimal, meaning that Respect is a pluralistic organisation in which diverse viewpoints coexist. This structure is critical if the existing forces within Respect are to have the breathing space they need to work together.”

The need for there to be an organizational separation between revolutionaries and reformists is the constant theme of the SWP. Most clearly stated by John Rees: “Genuine unity in action depends on separation on matters of principle such as reform and revolution. We cannot properly determine those immediate issues on which we can unite unless we also properly, and organisationally, separate over matters of principle.”

John Rees expressed his view of the SWP’s role very clearly: “In this project the socialists in Respect, who have the clearest understanding of the general situation in which we operate and the greatest organisational ability to create the alliances, have a crucial role to play. Where they

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are capable of engaging and leading the wider forces, Respect will succeed. If they fail, Respect will fail. There is too much at stake to allow this to happen, and too much to be won not to succeed."

The "United Front of a Special Type" involves a two tier membership, where the SWP build their own organisation, but seek to play the decisive political role in guiding Respect. As John Rees admitted, the SWP believe there is too much at stake for them to fail to be the leading force within Respect, so other members of Respect who see it as their main political project must rotate around the SWP's agenda. Non-SWP members of Respect believe that building Respect is worth doing in its own terms, and is not only worth doing as a step towards "the construction of a mass revolutionary party". Fundamentally the SWP has a different agenda to other Respect members.

The Socialist Alliance also foundered on the rocks of the united front of a special type. As Alex Callinicos described the process

"In the absence of a substantial ex-Labour presence, the SA suffered from a structural imbalance, given that the SWP greatly outweighs the rest of the British far left combined. When, as we usually tried, we applied a self-denying ordinance, we were still, like the elephant in the room, a looming presence. When we asserted ourselves, however democratically, we caused resentment. The Socialist Party and a few well-known 'independents' cited 'SWP dominance' when they walked out of the Alliance. Usually they had their own reasons for leaving, but in truth the SWP did dominate the SA—not by intention, but by default, in the absence of sufficiently strong participation by forces from a reformist background."

What is revealing here is how static and schematic Callinicos's views are of the living, working relationships on the left. Why should the SWP need to be counterbalanced by "forces from a reformist background". Was reform or revolution a practical issue in Britain over the last few years and I missed it? Surely the issues facing the Socialist Alliance were all essentially non-revolutionary, and reformists and revolutionaries alike were faced with trying to relate to the class struggle. In fact the Socialist Alliance did have some significant allegiance from people from the Labour Party, but they did not foresee the need to self-organise themselves as a counterbalance to an SWP playing not only by different rules, but a different game.

When Callinicos talks about the SWP asserting itself he is describing exactly the same process as Mike Maquese has: "a block of SWP members who have arrived with a pre-determined line and set of priorities".

As I wrote in 2004: "If the SWP doesn't change its method of operation within Respect I have no

doubt that the project will fail. It may do well enough to continue in a bureaucratic form until the next election, and George Galloway may even get elected in East London. Nevertheless no stable structure can be built on the basis being advocated by Alex Callinicos." Tragically I have been proven correct.

The United Front of a Special Type has not been a successful guide to working, because it has ended in failure - as judged by the SWP's own terms of reference. Not once but now twice. As Lady Bracknell said: "To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness"

### A FAILURE IN THEIR OWN TERMS

The SWP's position is most starkly put in Alex Callinicos's letter to the SWP's sister organisations in the International Socialist Tendency. It concludes:

"There is no doubt that the crisis in Respect is a major reverse for the process of left realignment in Britain. Nevertheless, the SWP remains strongly committed to this process, both in Britain and on an international scale. "

If the "SWP remains strongly committed to this process, both in Britain and on an international scale.", then where do they go from here?

In those parts of the country where Respect is largely them and a few others, then that in itself represents a failure of the SWP to build Respect. In these areas, the non-SWP members of Respect will be confused, and may stay with the SWP. But at a national level, the SWP has lost all its allies, from the political left, from the trade unions, and from the anti-war Muslims, and they have lost Galloway.

They have also lost considerable political capital, respect and trust, and may not be welcome in future left regroupment projects unless they change. So if they really do have a strategic objective of left regroupment, and building a broad electoral alternative to Labour, they are in a terrible position. If they cling to the united front of a special type formula, then it will be of a very special type - only with themselves!

### THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY

Given that the space that Respect fills is that vacated by social democracy, then the majority of its support and membership will come from those who wish to create a left social democratic party. The battle for Marxists within such a party is to prioritise class struggle, and always promote the independent interests of the working class.

Much is made by the SWP of the need for separate revolutionary organisation, but this fails in two ways. Firstly, as we see with the awful role of leading SWP member Jane Loftus in the recent postal dispute, being a revolutionary in formal

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terms is no guarantee of someone being even a decent militant.

Secondly, it is only through the process of fighting for reforms that the issue of finally removing the obstacle of ruling class resistance comes up. The opportunity for removing forever the power of the capitalist class arises as the culmination of the process of uncompromising reform; and therefore a mass class struggle party dedicated to such uncompromising reform is a more fruitful path than recruiting ones and twos (or even tens and twenties) to a stand alone revolutionary group. It will be the mass party that eventually settles accounts with capitalism, and the place for Marxists is within it. Creating a new left social democratic party includes within it the potential to win that party to class struggle.

There is an alternative way of working to the SWP's model. The best description I have read of the way Marxists should work in broad parties is from Murray Smith:

"I am convinced that the role of revolutionary Marxists today is to build broad socialist parties while defending their own Marxist positions within them, with the aim, not of building a revolutionary faction with an 'entrist' perspective, but of taking forward the whole party and solving together with the whole party the problems that arise, as they arise."

There is a weakness in Murray's understanding though, because he has taken a particular feature of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the dissolving of the leadership faction into the structures of the broad party, and taken that to be a necessary feature.

Arguably a new and pluralist political formation will take a time before it develops its own mechanisms for training and educating activist, and the pre-existing socialist groups have a valuable role both in developing individuals, and in facilitating debate through generating alternative policy suggestions. Such platforms could continue to organise and produce publications, provided the public face they present is building the broad party. Indeed some flexibility can be allowed even then, and in Australia the DSP are committed to building through the Socialist Alliance, but still have an independent youth group, due to the different tempo of politics with students and young workers.

Organised platforms can militate against politics rotating around cliques and intrigues. But to be productive the platforms have to strategically subordinate themselves to the building of the broad party.

The tragedy is that the political experience and organisational ability of the SWP are indeed extremely valuable within Respect, but the precondition that comes as the price of their

participation is too high to pay. As long as the SWP believe that they are uniquely gifted, in John Rees's words, with "the clearest understanding of the general situation in which we operate and the greatest organisational ability to create the alliances", and as long as they believe that the stakes are too high for their views not to prevail, then they will never allow non-SWP members of Respect to participate in full ownership of the project.

### THE PULL OF ELECTORALISM.

The SWP say that problems started after the elections:

"The successful candidates were all from a Muslim background, despite the substantial white working class vote for Respect and the mere couple of hundred votes that stopped non-Muslim candidates winning in Tower Hamlets. This led to opponents of Respect to spread the idea that it was a "Muslim party". The other problem was that electoral success led to something familiar to people who had been active in the past in the Labour Party but completely new to the non-Labour left-opportunist electoral politics began to dominate Respect.

"There were even cases when people said that if they could not be Respect candidates they would stand for other political parties - and one of the Respect councillors in Tower Hamlets did switch over to Labour after being elected.

"For such people their model of politics was that increasingly used by the Labour Party in ethnically and religiously mixed inner city areas - promising favours to people who posed as the "community leaders" of particular ethnic or religious groupings if they would use their influence to deliver votes. This is what is known as Tammany Hall politics in US cities, or "vote bloc" or "communal" politics when practiced by all the pro-capitalist parties in the Indian subcontinent. It is something the left has always tried to resist."

Now there are a number of things to be said here.

Firstly, the SWP have made a great deal of the fact that of the two councillors elected in Tower Hamlets, one resigned in disillusionment, and one switched to New Labour. But, it was inherent in the way that Respect was launched and built that it was not the product of a long period of prior cooperation, trust building and convergence, the negative side of which was that some fall out was inevitable. But resignations and defections, particularly from opposition groups, is the daily coin of every political party in almost every council in the country.

Secondly, even in the areas where Respect does have an electoral base they are still the opposition group, not the party of power, so real opportunists will choose Labour not Respect.

Thirdly, in choosing a candidate with particular village or tribal connections to help get the vote, this is no different in principle from selecting Jerry

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Hicks to stand in Lockleaze in Bristol. Part of the reason he was able to get a good vote has been his personal and family roots in the area. In electoral politics the individual candidates matter. In the particular case of the Shadwell by-election it was vital to choose the most electable candidate, as in some ways the viability of the whole Respect project hung on that election. This is only a question of seeking a level playing field with the other parties. There is no question of Respect actually seeking to represent only sectional interests in the council chamber, so the charge is at best mischievous.

In the case of Birmingham, a huge mountain is being made out of a molehill, in terms of all the candidates this year being Pakistani men. The fact that their sitting councillor and most high profile spokesperson is a woman, that last year there were four women candidates, and the fact that women were encouraged to put themselves forward this year, shows this is just a blip.

But the most important evidence that the charge of electoralism is misplaced, is that it has not manifested itself in policy terms at all. The SWP argues that the emphasis on electable candidates represents "a fundamental shift of sections of Respect away from the minimal agreed principles on which it had been founded - a shift towards putting electability above every other principle, a shift which could only pull Respect to the right." Yet breakaway councillor Oli Rahman conceded that there are no policy differences on national and international issues, and there have been no significant differences on local issues either.

For the SWP to present this as a left/right issue over whether or not people like them being revolutionaries, is absurd because revolution is not on the political agenda. Over the actual issues that are confronting respect there has been no left/right polarisation, and people join Respect and stand as candidates for Respect knowing it is a radical left wing party.

### WHERE NEXT?

The debate about who did what and said what, and the mechanics of the split have been done to death. It is the nature of faction fights that the temperature gets raised, and seemingly trivial events are blown out of all proportion.

But we are now in a position where it is clear that the SWP's way of working is not acceptable to a significant section of Respect's membership, including the MP, most councillors and a majority of non-SWP national committee members.

Accusations and counter-accusations surround the 17th November conferences. But at this stage no-one is listening, we are just exchanging abuse. Let us stop it.

It is hard to see how the SWP can persevere with their Respect, without any significant non-SWP

allies, and with the loss of political capital. The loss of the SWP members is also a blow for Respect renewal.

And neither of the actually existing Respects has sufficient appeal to the rest of the socialist left and to trade unionists. This is partly because the way Respect was launched and built in its first months excluded many former activists from the Socialist Alliance. There are others who have objections to the SWP, or Galloway, or both.

But any successful left regroupment project must engage with the actually existing activists. They are vital both for their political experience, but also their ability to develop rooted campaigns around practical issues in trade unions, workplaces and communities.

In parallel with, and overlapping with, Respect but not in competition with it, we need to develop socialist unity. This can also embrace practical cooperation with left activists from the Labour party and Green Party. Our objective should be to unite without preconditions, but to promote debate, practical cooperation and convergence. We need to build bridges to other socialist groups and individuals, even if they don't share our immediate vision.

Respect Renewal will emerge with most of the political capital from the respect project, the very significant assets of Galloway and Yaqoob, and the electoral base.

It needs to set itself three tasks:

- i) Moving to a more traditional party model of organisation, with membership, scheduled meetings, and accountability.
- ii) Recognising that on the basis of its strongholds and elected positions it can be a major player in building bridges, in a patient long term way, with other progressive forces, including those in the Labour Party (most obviously the supporters of Ken Livingston), the Greens, Plaid Cymru and others.
- iii) Opening a renewed dialogue over cooperation with the political left and trade union militants, without any preconditions.

### TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Finally, a lot of damage has been done through the Russian Doll model of working. Hundreds perhaps thousands of activists have been alienated by the way the left groups have regarded individuals as expendable cannon fodder. The current crisis in respect had its prequel in the Socialist Alliance, and few of the SA activists remained in Respect.

Some of the same methods we have seen recently from the SWP in Respect, were used in the Socialist Alliance. Some of the individuals who are now critical of those methods used them in the past. It is not enough simply to let bygones be bygones. We also need a process of forgiveness and honesty about what the far left in this country have done to each other.

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If we are prepared to be that brave, we will win back many of the friends and comrades who have become cynical and disillusioned.