

Socialists and the

MASS ORGANISATIONS

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ABOUT THE DOCUMENT

THIS IS THE SECOND VERSION of the document *Socialists and the Mass Organisations*, first published in January 2014. In the last 18 months since the first version came out, some major events have taken place that strongly confirm the main message of the document. This version has been amended to reflect input from comrades across the world and in order to reflect recent political events such as the election of Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the Labour Party in United Kingdom.

The Network would like to present our gratitude to comrades across the world that has contributed to the development of the document. We also want to press that this is a living document, meant to be amended in order to make it relevant.

ABOUT THE SOCIALIST NETWORK

THE SOCIALIST NETWORK was founded in 2012 and consists of the organisations Socialist Expression in Cyprus and Greece, Socialistiska Nätverket in Sweden and Revolutionary Struggle in Pakistan, as well as individual members in a range of other countries European countries and the US. We are organised as a network so that every individual member and group who participates retains their autonomy. Our purpose is not to be a substitute to the labour movement. On the contrary, we strive to unify, learn from, and contribute to it. An individual or a group can either join a group that is a part of The Socialist Network or join the Network directly.

Don't hesitate to visit us at socialistnetwork.org or facebook.com/TheSocialistNetwork.

PREFACE

THIS TEXT deals with the question of how socialists should relate to the mass organisations of working people. It argues that socialists need to be active wherever working people are. That means that we should work in all their organisations, including both social democratic and broad left parties, striving to democratise and energise them, uniting them together in a positive struggle to defend our conditions and to transform society along democratic socialist lines. This text should be seen as a living document that will change over time to reflect the experience of events and from discussions around the world. If you would like to comment on this document or to write to us about anything else please send us an email to: coordinatingcommittee@socialistnetwork.org or visit our Facebook page at facebook.com/TheSocialistNetwork.

The need for a credible alternative

In this time of a continuing international capitalist crisis with horrendous implications for the majority of humanity, the Left needs to urgently develop its theoretical understanding in order to move forward. For example, the last quarter of the 20th Century saw the collapse of both Stalinism and social democratic 'reformism'. Since then the Great Economic Recession of 2008 has caused a deep crisis in capitalism, a systematic fall in living standards and a major rise in public discontent. With the failure of the existing system and the old Left alternatives to it, a major question hangs over the planet: *what should capitalism be replaced with?*

In The Socialist Network we believe that this is the main question that needs answering. Not with a few slogans or a shopping list of demands but a serious and credible programme for transforming society. A Manifesto that uncovers the potential of a new society that has already been built up within capitalism today, explains the barriers that are preventing it from being realised, and outlines how this can be done. We, in The Socialist Network are working on this in a democratic, collaborative and open manner. And we are striving to express ourselves in terms that can appeal to the overwhelming majority of society. We invite you to join with us in this work.

INTRODUCTION

SINCE THE DAWN OF CAPITALISM, working people have always needed mass organisations to defend and advance their interests. By mass organisations we mean movements and bodies that seek to improve the lives of the vast majority and are open to a wide range of people to join and support. In most countries it was a long and difficult struggle to establish the basic democratic rights of assembly, speech, media and so on in order to allow these mass organisations to develop and operate. And there are still many countries languishing under dictatorships where such organisations are suppressed.

Let us begin by examining the various progressive political movements in society and their current limitations. In this way we can better understand where and how socialist should work.

The Traditional Mass Organisations

The traditional mass organisations of working people, the trade unions and the large social democratic parties, were originally founded on the basis of replacing capitalism with a socialist society, on international solidarity and so on. However, after many decades of political and organisational decline the traditional organisations of the working class in most countries have forgotten what they set out to do in their founding Aims and Objects, and as a result have lost their direction.

These organisations, especially the social democratic and labour parties, are too often led by people who have embraced the myth that there is no alternative to capitalism, that there is no possibility of creating a different form of society based on common ownership and real democracy. Thus they see no other way than to make the current capitalist system work better despite its inherent greed, exploitation and inequality and its chaotic economic life, unemployment, war and environmental degradation. Believing in no alternative to capitalism, most of the leaders have gone along with the reactionary policies of neo-liberalism and are willing to see the living standards of working people and their gains in welfare drastically cut back, all in the vain hope of restoring capitalism to its more healthy days. This toleration of capitalism, warts and all, is not just represented in the leadership of many of these mass organisations but is also reflected among large layers of the population. Partly, this is because other alternatives to capitalism that once existed are now widely seen as failures. For example, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc has convinced many people that there is no viable alternative to capitalism.

Similarly, the 'reformist' alternative of gradual nationalisation and social welfare offered by social democracy in the West has lost credibility and been rolled back, not just by right-wing capitalist parties but by the social democrats themselves. Meanwhile, the insistent and increasingly sophisticated propaganda of the capitalist media and the public relations industry has reinforced illusions in the existing system.

Even when such illusions are deeply shaken such as we saw in the Great Recession of 2008-9 and the continuing international economic crisis, the absence of a credible alternative from the socialist movement has left the vast majority confused - even willing to accept cuts in their living standards and welfare services in the desperate hope of a return to "better times". Having abandoned any idea of replacing capitalism, the social democratic party leaderships have been competing with the liberal and conservative parties for who can run the capitalist system more efficiently with more or less humanity at the margins. For many of the social democratic leaders politics has become more of a rewarding career than an opportunity to improve people's lives. A desire for the fruits of government office has too often led these leaders to willingly participate in the cutting back of the living standards and welfare services of the majority of the population. The founders of social democracy would be turning in their graves to see this flagrant abandonment of the original principles of the movement.

Now that capitalism has moved into an era of virtually unrestricted global competition it is driving us in a relentless race to the bottom. The removal of limits on the movement of capital, the cheap cost of transportation of goods, and dramatically improved means of communication have together given the capitalists an unparalleled opportunity to shift production to cheaper wage economies around the world. Social democratic governments have accepted these new capitalist trends and shown themselves willing to preside over stagnation or decline in living standards for the majority while the rich grow richer by the day.

This has been accompanied by most social democratic leaders increasingly accepting the need to privatise the public sector while 'restructuring' the employment market so that workers rights are abandoned and cheap flexible labour becomes the norm, all in the name of supposedly increasing efficiency and national competitive advantage. Thus, ideology and principle has been largely removed from mainstream politics which more and more resemble a game of musical chairs, with politicians competing with each other for who can win elections on the most effective mix of promises and popular slogans pre-tested in focus groups.

Increasing the public's cynicism about social democracy is the image of so many social democratic ministers socialising with the wealthy and wooing the barons of big business. Not that such a

degeneration has gone by without resistance from many ordinary members of the social democratic movement. But hand in hand with the embracing of capitalism has gone a significant reduction of party democracy and a tendency in many parties towards an increasing centralization of power in the hands of the social democratic leaders and away from the Party's ranks. This has been reinforced by the leadership's monopoly of internal Party communication and their use of the capitalist media to undermine and marginalise those who argue for a socialist alternative.

The Mass Broad Left Parties

The embracing of capitalist ideology by almost all of the social democratic parties has created a large political space on the left of the political spectrum. Hundreds of millions feel their lives inexorably deteriorating in an increasingly brutal capitalist world and are left wondering who to turn to, and who to support. In some countries, sizeable parties to the left of Social Democracy have emerged, often with some past connection to the mass communist movement. Such mass broad left parties include *Die Linke* in Germany, *Vänsterpartiet* in Sweden, *Izquierda Unida* in Spain, the *Socialistische Partij* in Holland, *Podemos* in Spain and *Syriza* in Greece. In some other countries, broad left parties emerged out of a different background such as the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* in Brazil and the *African National Congress* in South Africa.

Many of the mass broad left parties have been able to achieve a significant presence in their local councils and national parliaments. In some cases, they have been able to win elections and form governments, promising radical change in favour of working people.

However, where such broad left parties have won national elections such as in Brazil and South Africa, we have seen them bow to the pressures of the existing system and embrace capitalism as the only show in town, implementing pro-capitalist policies with all their unequal and insecure consequences.

Even in those mass broad left Parties who have not entered national governments we often see an unnecessary level of timidity with a reluctance to advance a programme for the transformation of society. Instead, these parties have generally limited their activity to defensive campaigns and to calls for the implementation of a list of modest demands, which worthy as they undoubtedly are, offer no obvious answer to the deep crisis we are facing.

Moreover, many of these mass broad left parties face problems of internal democracy, plus the dilemma of how to relate to their larger social democratic rivals.

The Small Groups of the Revolutionary Left

One possible alternative to the mass parties of social democracy and the broad left parties are the many revolutionary socialist organisations, members of which are usually found on demonstrations or in city centres organising petitions and selling socialist papers. However, such organisations are usually relatively small in numbers and limited in influence. They tend to be fundamentalist and dogmatic in their thinking, using the writings of long-dead socialists like religious texts. As a result the approach and language that many of these groups use and the shrill way in which they address the public usually alienates the majority of people.

Another major limitation of many of the revolutionary socialist organisations is the sectarian way that they relate to the mass organisations, standing apart from them and denouncing their leaders, or seeking to feed off and dominate them. Each revolutionary socialist group tends to see itself as the vanguard of the working class, the kernel of the mass revolutionary party which will lead the people in the overthrow of capitalism. From that perspective all other socialist groups or currents in the movement are seen as obstructions and rivals to be overcome. Internally, such groups tend to be highly centralised and bureaucratic, unwilling to tolerate dissent and splintering over and over again. No wonder that these groups of the revolutionary left are usually so marginalised and ineffective.

Single Issue Campaigns & Protest Movements

The inevitable result of all these shortcomings in the Left political movement is that there now exists a massive political vacuum - the majority of people in the world are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with capitalism, but they can't see any alternative to it nor any political movement capable of solving their problems. While we see millions willing to come out on street protests and general strikes to give expression to their discontent, this desire for change is not being generally translated into the growth of traditional left-wing parties. Instead, many people have expressed their discontent through a multiplicity of single issue campaigns, along with non-party protest movements. Thus we see increasingly popular organisations like Greenpeace and Amnesty International on one side, and on the other sit-down protests such as the Occupy movement - the international protest campaign against social and economic inequality which started in New York in 2011 and spread to nearly a thousand cities across the world. Similar movements also emerged such as the Indignados in Spain and the Gezi Park occupation in Turkey.

Indeed, many people, the youth in particular, have adopted an openly 'anti-party' attitude. So disillusioned are they in the existing political institutions and the corrupt and remote hierarchies that they see in them, they are wary of joining any permanent political organisations, preferring to participate in spontaneous campaigns without any party label.

With this anti-organisational mood today many people who want to be active and to change society say that they don't need an organisation. Instead they think that we can just have a social movement where we can participate in this and that activity, have this or that meeting, in the street or in the square. The development of social media like Facebook and Twitter has encouraged and facilitated this trend, giving people an individual voice and allowing them to join non-party political networks of all kinds. And to shift allegiances between them as they wish. This anarchistic-style reaction to the corruption and unprincipled nature of the mainstream parties is also reflected in an aversion to electoral politics and even to the idea of agreeing on a programme for change.

On the other side, there is a healthy rejection of the sectarian behaviour of the revolutionary left-wing groups and their attempts to come in and dominate popular campaigns. For these reasons, neither the "establishment" social democrats or the organised revolutionary left were welcome in the Occupy movement. This rejection of organised politics was taken to the extreme with the rigid application of 'rule through consensus' (where everyone has to agree for a decision to be taken) which sadly prevented the movement from coming out with a meaningful programme. A programme that could convert the massive popularity of the Occupy movement into effective action in the mainstream of society, including the battle in the media and the electoral process.

These single-issue campaigns and protest movements along with the social media networks have a very important role to play in mobilising fresh layers and raising awareness about specific issues. But protest and campaigning can only take the struggle so far. The positive rejection of opportunism and careerism on the one hand, and sectarianism on the other, should not have to lead on to the rejection of organisation and policy altogether. If it does, then nothing will come out of all the protests in the world. In fact, it will achieve entirely the opposite - protests seemingly without end and the disruption and chaos they can bring will eventually result in increasingly popular support for an authoritarian solution to bring back order and stability. This was a key element in the propaganda made by Mussolini and Hitler in their rise to power. We can't just keep on campaigning against things. We have to also campaign for things. That is why we need to develop a programme for transforming society, and to create the right form of organisations to achieve it.

THE MASS POLITICAL MOVEMENT THAT IS NEEDED TODAY

A POLITICAL MOVEMENT SHOULD NOT EXIST FOR ITS OWN SAKE. It has to have a purpose. So what should be the purpose of a mass political movement that is on our side?

First of all it should set out to defend and protect the exploited and oppressed. Under capitalism this means the overwhelming majority of people whether we talk of workers and poor farmers, women and youth, small business people and the middle layers of society, ethnic and sexual minorities, and so on.

The victims of the short-sighted greed of capitalism also include the planet itself along with the rest of animal life. All are being ripped off by the super-rich, the less than 1% of society that dominates the economy, politics and the media and so on. They continue to grow wealthier while we are subject to cutbacks, loss of living standards and environmental degradation. Against this global onslaught we see a wide range of responses, with strikes, demonstrations and struggles of all kinds. We need a mass political movement that supports these struggles, unites them and champions their cause.

But defensive struggles in a system in terminal decline can only take us so far. They are of limited use without a plan for replacing this failing system with something radically better. For this we need a mass political movement that is committed to the democratic socialist transformation of society, a society where the majority own and control the economy, the media, public services and so on. A society that is democratic from top to bottom, actively involving the people in the running of society, work and leisure.

However, having a broad goal is not enough. In the old days of social democracy it too paid lip service to the replacement of capitalism with a socialist society. But this remained a vague aim which seemed to be pushed back more and more into the distance until it all but disappeared. If a mass political movement is serious about abolishing capitalism in order to solve the main problems of humanity, then it has to develop a meaningful and realistic set of proposals for replacing capitalism with a viable alternative way of organising society. Proposals that the majority of people can understand and support. Such a programme cannot be developed by a handful of people but must come out of the widest discussion and consultation with working people across the world. For each country's problems are interlinked with those of the planet as a whole. Just as capitalism is global and international, an effective mass political movement against it can't see itself as purely a single national movement. It must be consciously international from the start.

Last but not least, developing a real programme for the transformation of society must be followed by serious and consistent action to achieve it.

The need for democracy inside our movement

Just as we need the maximum of democracy inside society, we need the fullest democracy inside our own movement. The two are not just connected but must go hand in hand. Working people have a naturally democratic instinct which grows organically from their experience in carrying out collective tasks together. In the same way, they know that majority control is in their interests as opposed to domination by unrepresentative minorities.

From the early days of capitalism a basic form of democracy was developed within the traditional organisations of the labour movement with regular meetings at local and national level, reports and elections, financial control, delegate conferences and so on. But this level of accountability has proved itself to be inadequate to the task of supporting working people and transforming society.

Democracy above all should be about providing the opportunity for people to discuss through the choices available to them, and on that basis to make decisions. In this regard our movement has failed to provide healthy forums in which working people can discuss how to move forward together. We need genuine arenas of discussion and debate where we can develop ideas and policies, and choose the representatives that our movement needs. Places where we can work together to change society.

The following are some proposals to achieve such a democratic agenda:

Transparency and the right to publicly disagree: One of the most basic requirements we need in our movement is real transparency at all levels. How can people choose the best policies and leaders if they are not provided with all the information they need to make those choices?

This means bringing to an end any rule that seeks to prevent disclosure and debate. Such undemocratic rules exist in many if not most areas of society. Where it is used to hide differences within an organisation it is often called maintaining 'collective responsibility'. This is a way to prevent minorities in the leadership from talking about the differences that exist. In this way, disputes within the leadership are kept hidden from the membership rather than being openly expressed. In such a situation, how are the members supposed to participate and reach a decision if there is not a public

discussion of differences? Such rules drastically inhibit the right of the rank and file members to know what is going on in their organisations and to make the choices that would naturally flow from that information. This rule is even applied at lower levels of the organisation where speaking out can lead to members being disciplined for 'bringing the organisation into disrepute'.

On the socialist left this rule forbidding minorities to speak is often extended to include the whole membership of the organisation under the title of 'democratic centralism'. Under this rule any member who expresses a point of view that is contrary to the policy of the majority of the organisation (as interpreted by the leadership) can be disciplined and expelled. In this way working people as a whole are denied the right to know, comment on and thereby participate in too many of the debates of the Left. Equally bad is that any group of members which significantly disagrees with the majority line is thrown out. Thus we see socialist left groups splitting again and again, a feature of the revolutionary left which makes it a laughing stock in the broad population. Meanwhile, the continuous development of online communication is more and more undermining these ludicrous rules of secrecy and making them redundant and unenforceable.

The right of platform: Another basic requirement of democracy is the right of people to organise for their point of view. Without such a right working people are denied the chance to hear alternatives and to make a meaningful choice over policy and leadership. Yet there exists in many sections of the movement rules against the right of groups of members to set up and campaign for a different platform of ideas.

A major reason for this is that the right-wing of the labour movement think that they have a natural right to the leadership of the movement and regard anyone who wants to challenge them as unrepresentative of working people. In this they are greatly assisted by the capitalist media. However, there is the unfortunate fact that the right-wing have to win elections in order to maintain their positions, elections in which they can always be defeated by candidates more representative of the interests of the membership. Past experience has shown that the commitment of the right-wing to democracy is only skin deep. That they fear open debate on an equal footing. All too often they will try to prevent defeat with organisational measures against their opponents.

In contrast, we need a mass movement that encourages the maximum of debate and choice. We have nothing to fear from the open and free flow of ideas and information, and everything to gain from it. In this way, the members will have the best chance to decide on the policies, strategies and leadership they need and society will better understand why they have made such decisions. This principle is needed in all the mass organisations of working people so that different trends of opinion have the right to form platforms and openly argue and mobilise for them. Naturally, accompanying

such a right is the responsibility of such platforms to abide by democratic rules of conduct and debate in order to ensure a respectful hearing for different viewpoints and through this a positive and united outcome.

The right to elect and recall representatives and officials: In too many cases the leaders of our movement and our public representatives act in ways that do not serve our interests and ignore democratic processes. Such officials and public representatives are encouraged by capitalist society to look down on the rank and file members as ignorant or irrelevant.

To counter this, the rules of our movement need to ensure that all full-time representatives and officials are periodically elected by and answerable to the members they serve. Similarly, we need our public representatives to be democratically selected by the membership, not parachuted into an area or onto an election list by the movement's leadership. When an official or representative acts against the interest of working people, or disgraces the movement the membership needs to have the right to recall and replace them.

Above all, we need to ensure that all those who are active in the mass movement and in direct contact with working people are directing our organisations, not the full-time staff or a privileged layer of public representatives.

An end to patronage: In the standard parliamentary democracy, the leaders of political parties hold the power to appoint a whole layer of party officials. This tends to create an upward-looking career structure within these parties, where allegiance is owed to the leaders and not to the movement.

This is made ten times worse if they succeed in becoming prime ministers or presidents with the power to appoint ministers and thousand of public officials. This power of patronage, of appointment from above, is a major force undermining democracy inside and outside the elected chambers. It inevitably tends to create ministers who bow and scrape to the leader who appoints them. Further on down the ladder it encourages members of parliaments and legislatures to follow the leader's line in the hope of future promotion to a ministry position.

Ironically, the elected members often complain that they have no real power and that all the decisions are taken by the leader and the ministers. Yet it is the members of parliament who agree to yield their powers to the leader and thereby create what is in effect 'an elective dictatorship'. Our movement must be committed to bringing this undemocratic system of patronage and the careerism it fosters to an end and replacing it with the democratic election of all important positions by all those who are affected by them.

Representatives of working people on a representative salary: In too many cases, elected office on behalf of the social democratic parties has now become a comfortable career for people from a relatively privileged background. All too often they come straight from the right university or through family connections into politician's offices and then into leading political careers. The last thirty years in particular has seen the rise of a new 'political class'. In this situation a future in politics is no longer seen as a way to take action to solve humanity's ills but more as a comfortable career path towards power and reward. These young party officials, having little real-life experience and certainly no background in the struggles of working people, are fast-tracked into national politics and then into ministerial office.

As a result working people are being less and less represented in parliaments and congresses.

This is made especially worse by the payment of increasingly exorbitant salaries and expenses to publicly elected officials, a trend that is all too often attracting 'self-servers' rather than those dedicated to serving the public. As if this wasn't bad enough, we see an ever increasing tendency for our public representatives to accept payments from big business either in the form of consultancies, lobbying favours, job offers and outright bribery. The higher an official goes and the more power they get to influence the outcome of commercial decisions in favour of this or that company, the greater the potential for corruption. Safeguards do exist but these are increasingly avoided with offers of lucrative employment after leaving office so that companies can gain access to their inside information, experience and contacts. A pattern has emerged of social democratic ministers taking a circular route from ministerial office into big business when in opposition, and then back again into ministerial office when their party is returned to power. Such obvious conflicts of interest represent a serious undermining of democracy and the trust of the public.

In all the movements claiming to represent working people we have to make a break from this cosseted world, of a political life separate from and divorced from the lives of working people. We need a full range of working people in parliament on reasonable salaries, not political opportunists who make a lucrative career out of public service. To this end we should aim to create representative selection procedures for choosing our public candidates, procedures that favour the choice of working people from all walks of life.

We need a movement that insists that our elected representatives only take reasonable salaries and expenses that combined together are at a level near to the incomes of the ordinary people that elect them. And returns the balance to the movement. A movement that demands that our elected representatives refuse as a matter of principle all business consultancies and lobbying arrangements, or subsequent offers of related employment.

A Code of Conduct that upholds members rights: Mass organisations also need to uphold the rights of their members and protect them from abuse. We have seen too many cases of sexual exploitation and denial of justice in the social democratic and socialist movements. While no movement can be perfect, it is clear that we have to do far better in our efforts to educate members and leaders to treat each other with respect and to provide the proper procedures for members to complain when they have been abused. To this end we need a clear Code of Conduct that upholds members' rights and encourages all to behave in a positive and constructive manner. This also applies to the way that we debate with each other. Denunciation and vicious mudslinging only serves to obstruct political debate and embitter relations between members. We need to create a climate of tolerance and respect in which debate can flourish and differences encouraged rather than stifled.

OTHER ISSUES FACING SOCIALISTS IN THE MASS ORGANISATIONS

THE IDEA THAT 'UNITY IS STRENGTH', that in division lies defeat, was the guiding principle behind the building of the trade unions and the old social democratic parties. The understanding that we are weak when we act as individuals in the face of wealth and power is a rational and powerful concept that pervades all aspects of people's struggles and organisation.

Some socialists reject this desire for unity as "naive" and insist on splitting again and again over one 'principle' or another. This has done great damage to the socialist movement and encouraged a purist approach to political organisation. In contrast, working people correctly see that one united movement has a far greater chance of succeeding than one divided up into a series of competing groups. In The Socialist Network we completely agree with this and are wholly committed to campaigning for united action between all mass organisations of working people irrespective of what leadership or programme currently exists in these organisations. This includes campaigning in both the social democratic and mass broad left parties for a common programme for the democratic socialist transformation of society; a united front in elections and so on.

Of course unity cannot always be achieved and certainly 'not at all costs'. But it should be our aim and something to be worked hard for rather than something easily discarded for what appears as short-term advantage.

Looking further forward, wherever possible we believe that the best possible formation is one united political movement for working people. One that provides a democratic forum in which all the different ideas and strategies for changing society can be debated and decided upon. To this end, where there already exists more than one mass workers party in a country we favour their unification as long as the democratic proposals that we have previously outlined are agreed by both sides. This is our long-term aim for the labour movement and we will support every effort towards this end.

Turning to the Mass Organisations in Times of Crisis

When events bring people into struggle they usually follow large movements rather than small groups. Similarly, they tend to listen to those who hold positions of authority rather than unknown individuals. Traditionally, working people, although they have suffered many disappointments at the hands of their historical mass organisations, still tend to look to them for a lead. This has normally

been reflected in a rise in membership, in votes, in officially endorsed demonstrations and strikes, and so on. If the aroused membership in such situations can find leaders from within these organisations who are willing to give voice to their demands they can move forward very quickly.

If however, all they see is an unresponsive brick wall, or leaders who make promises they don't intend to carry out, they can easily lapse back into demoralisation and apathy. In extreme circumstances, where the overwhelming majority of working people feel betrayed, they can turn their backs on a mass organisation and turn to an alternative. We saw this in the case of PASOK in Greece which had promised in the elections to oppose austerity measures and promptly introduced them when elected. No party has a blank cheque from the population. That said, this was a highly unusual example which has been rarely repeated in the last century or more. In most cases, working people tend to turn again and again to their mass organisations

This is why it is so necessary to work patiently and consistently within these mass organisations, so that as the struggle rises a genuine and effective alternative already embedded within the movement can arise. The more possible it is for socialists to achieve positions of authority in the mass organisations in advance of crises the more successful such struggles will be when they break out.

We also recognise the need to develop additional organisations for the struggle as it develops. Where there are no trade unions we should help set them up. Where this is no mass party we should do the same. Similarly with tenants bodies, pressure groups etc.

One of the great advantages of online communication is that it is now much easier to launch relevant campaigns and participate in those that have been formed by others. The key is to approach such initiatives in a positive spirit, not trying to dominate them but to genuinely assist their development, helping to connect them to the broader struggle and the overall need to transform society.

Renewing the Existing Mass Organisations

Unfortunately, there are strong tendencies in all organisations towards bureaucracy, particularly as they become large and powerful and the chain of connection between members and officials become more distant. This is made much worse within a capitalist society, where officials and leaders of mass organisations become immersed in a lifestyle of better salaries, status and privileges. Many of these officials and leaders end up seeing their role more as 'negotiators' between working people and the system's representatives, rather than fighters for our interests. For these leaders, struggles and strikes often become an unwelcome distraction which disturbs the daily routine of meetings and tasks that form the basis of their 'profession'. As such these leaders often become important barriers to struggles undertaken by their members, to the extent that they seek to prevent such struggles taking place.

It is for this reason that history shows us that there are recurring battles by the rank and file, especially during times of struggle, to renew the democratic life of their organisations.

However, some socialists react to the problem of the bureaucratisation of the mass organisations by writing them off and urging working people to leave them and build something new. While, in some extreme situations there may be no alternative but to help launch alternative organisations, all too often this approach only ends up by dividing and weakening the overall movement while leaving the majority of members in the old organisation under the influence of the undemocratic leaders.

It is usually far easier for working people to work to change their existing mass organisations that have been built up over long periods and with much sacrifice, than it is to create new rival ones that have to start from scratch and operate in competition with their former bodies. With this in mind, we in The Socialist Network think that it is much better for socialists to encourage and assist the members of the mass organisations to democratically transform their existing organisations so that they are capable of defending the interests of their members.

To this end, we particularly welcome the new online communication channels which for the first time are beginning to link all members together. Thus, instead of the old monopoly on information and communication held by the central offices of each organisation, it is increasingly possible for all members to talk to each other directly. This holds incredible potential for the extension of democratic participation and for reducing the negative effects of bureaucracy.

Challenging the Existing Leadership in a Positive Way

Moreover, we believe that it is a mistake to bellow out denunciation of the existing leadership of mass organisations rather than approaching the problem of reluctant or even hostile leaders with measured and effective criticism. Condemning leaders with phrases such as ‘enemies of the movement’, ‘traitors’, ‘betrayers’, ‘capitalist agents’ etc. may make the accuser feel better but usually has the opposite effect to that intended. Such personal attacks tend to create sympathy for the leadership and create barriers between the members and the critics of the leadership. Indeed, such an approach misses the point that the existing leaders are not seen by the rank and file as the enemy but as part of the movement, as being on their side and trying to make the best of a difficult situation.

Effective criticism can only be achieved with solid, accurate and well-thought out arguments delivered free of personal rancour and insults. Whether or not this or that individual leader is corrupt or hostile to the interests of the movement is not the key issue. Our starting point must be to find the most effective way to convince the membership of the need for a better policy, to help the membership make the leadership carry out that policy, or to change the leadership for a better one if needed.

Another common mistake is to be on the lookout for ways to confront the bureaucracy of the movement irrespective of whether the rank and file is behind such a challenge. Indeed, some socialists seem to see it as a badge of revolutionary courage to look for confrontations with the leadership, sometimes launching adventures in order to confront and provoke them. However, all this usually does is provide a useful pretext for the officials of the movement to take disciplinary action against such socialists, to which of course they respond with claims of ‘victimisation’. Instead of such pointless and self-defeating tactics, we should support campaigns to democratise the movement step by step, in line with the membership’s consciousness.

The tendency to work for reforms rather than overthrowing the whole system

In general, human beings strive for as happy and pleasant life as possible within their existing circumstances, and where possible avoid doing things whose outcomes are unknown or uncertain. As such, it is not surprising that for most people working for improvements within the existing system under which they live is their first option.

It is true that in the course of personal and collective struggle significant numbers of people can become conscious of the need for a new system of society. But for the majority it is only when the

system has demonstrated (usually many times!) that it cannot deliver reforms, cannot even retain past gains, that they will come to see the need to radically change society. Such, abnormal situations of crisis only come along every now and then.

We should also bear in mind that people develop at different speeds, and that most will not move from having illusions in capitalism one day to adopting a socialist consciousness the next. In 'normal' times struggles centre around campaigns to defend existing gains and for step-by-step improvements. In such times, we believe that it is necessary for socialists to be the best fighters for such gains and improvements, while at the same time showing how they can best be secured through the democratic socialist transformation of society.

While securing reforms is important, past experience has shown that what has been won today can be taken back at a later time. The massive onslaught that is now going on against the welfare state in the advanced countries is testament to this.

However, even when the mass movement accepts the need for the replacement of capitalism with a democratic socialist society, the fight for reforms within capitalism can all too easily become an end in itself, with the aim of transforming society as a whole relegated to celebratory speeches and pious resolutions. This tendency towards 'reformism' appears in all mass organisations to one extent or another. This is clear within the social democratic parties and trade unions. But we have also seen that the pressures of 'reformism' afflict the mass broad left parties and their leaderships. As the broad left parties gain bigger votes and sizeable parliamentary representation they too come under heavy pressure from the capitalist media and bourgeois society to moderate their policies.

Of course, just as a hermit in a cave can be separated from the temptations of the world, it is easy to avoid 'reformism' by isolating oneself from the mass movement which includes people of all persuasions, illusions of all kinds, and elected representatives who believe in the capitalist system. More difficult but ultimately more worthwhile is the task of working patiently within the mass organisations, raising alternatives to reformism and the invasive influence of capitalist thinking. To do this requires both confidence in democratic socialist ideas and the ability to express them effectively.

Indeed, if we are really secure in our arguments then why should we fear to argue for them in any arena? Socialists should not be afraid of 'reformism' in any of its varieties or regard it as some kind of contagious disease that one will catch through regular contact. On the contrary, we should challenge it on its own ground and demonstrate through consistent work and patient argument that the democratic socialist transformation of society is not only possible but absolutely necessary. In this

way, socialists will both remain in touch with the broader layers of the population, and have a better understanding of their needs and opinions.

WHERE SHOULD SOCIALISTS WORK POLITICALLY?

WHILE, THERE IS A GENERAL CONSENSUS AMONG SOCIALISTS on the need to be active inside trade unions, there is great controversy about whether socialists should join mass political parties, and if so which ones. In our view, socialists should be willing to join any of the mass organisations that are relevant to them. And where possible participate in the active life of such organisations with the positive aim of helping them to make gains for working people – assisting the members in building them up, bringing them under democratic control, uniting them together in action, and encouraging them to support a democratic socialist alternative. We see this as an unconditional approach for socialists which should not be dependent on the particular policies or leadership of mass organisations at any particular time.

In this context, we believe that socialists who join social democratic or broad left parties should be equally supported and assisted in their efforts. We think that this is the only approach that is capable of advancing the long-term interests of working people.

Social Democracy

It is wholly understandable why socialists and many working people have become disillusioned with the social democratic parties. These parties have increasingly come to be seen as part of the established 'political game' with all its cynical manipulation, corruption and betrayal of promises. Yet, tens of millions of working people continue to vote for the social democratic parties. Principally they do so because they fear that the main alternative – the open business parties of the centre and the right – will implement far worse policies than the social democrats. And such a fear is not misplaced as we have seen in too many countries.

Even where there exists a mass broad left party offering a more radical alternative to social democracy such as in Germany, Spain, Sweden, Holland, France and so on, masses of working people continue to vote for social democracy. They do so sometimes because they are not convinced by the broad left alternative, and sometimes because they feel that only the social democrats are capable of preventing the more reactionary parties coming to power.

In such a situation it is all too easy to look at the social democratic parties in a simplistic, undialectical way, ignoring the wider processes in society that affect these parties. It is important to remember that society and everything within it changes continuously. The social democratic parties have themselves been changing, shifting to the right over the last four decades along with society as a whole. If we restrict ourselves to only looking at how these parties operate today, it becomes very difficult to imagine how these parties could change, shifting back to the left as the crisis of capitalism lengthens and as it radicalises the social base in the population on which the social democratic parties rely.

Some socialists now describe the social democratic parties as 'bourgeois' parties, arguing that they have altered their class character and become versions of the American Democratic Party. Of course, some of the social democratic leaders have tried to take their parties in this direction. But actually completing the process is easier said than done. Despite appearances on the surface, we think that that social democracy has not fundamentally changed its original nature and contradictions.

From the opposite direction, it would be making the same mistake to believe that the American Democratic Party can be transformed into a party of working people.

In reality, the class struggle continues to run through social democracy just as it has done ever since it became a significant power within capitalist society in the early decades of the last century. None of the factors that help drag most social democratic leaders away from their roots and the members are new: the seductions of government office, bribery by corporations and rich individuals, intimidation and flattery of the mass media, manipulation by intelligence agencies etc. It has just been taken much further than previously.

Ironically, all these means of incorporating the workers' leaders into the capitalist system are actually a sign of the weakness of the system and point to the objective strength of working people and their organisations. The ruling elite in the advanced societies know that if the leadership of social democracy was to go out and campaign for democratic socialism in a popular and consistent way, it could gain mass support and unleash huge social forces that could imperil the whole system. It is capitalism's Achilles Heel, a possibility that they fear and seek to prevent.

It was no accident that Margaret Thatcher, the champion of the neo-liberal movement, when asked what was her greatest success, did not reply that it was in winning the Falklands War, or privatising public industries, defeating the trade unions and so forth. Instead she said that her most important victory was in convincing the Labour Party to abandon its support for a socialist alternative. Such is

the understanding among the capitalists of the potential power of social democracy to bring down the capitalist system, and the need to prevent social democracy moving in this direction.

However, the capitalists don't hold all the cards. The social democratic parties are not sealed off from the trends of society. The ongoing crisis of international capitalism opens up the possibility of the mass radicalisation of working people and offers possibilities for the growth of a strong left-wing inside the ranks of these parties. We can see this already with the recent success of Jeremy Corbyn, a long-standing and committed socialist, in winning the leadership of Britain's Labour Party. As soon as Jeremy managed to squeeze through the Labour Party's undemocratic nomination system and get onto the leadership ballot there was an explosion of support across Britain. At last the anti-austerity majority who had had their views suppressed by the capitalist mass media found a way to make their voices heard. And the importance of the internet and social media as an alternative to the right-wing media became clear. Unprecedented numbers turned out to hear Jeremy speak and cheered his message against the cuts in living standards and public services. The Labour Party found itself flooded with new members and even the majority of the existing membership ended up supporting the new left alternative.

In the first version of this pamphlet we had written that: "Of course, right now the idea of winning a left-wing majority in the social democratic parties might sound far-fetched or impossible." However, just 18 months later our prediction was not only confirmed but in a far more dramatic way than we could have ever imagined. Of course, the victory of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party is only the first step in transforming the Party into the kind of democratic campaigning movement we need. It will take considerable time and effort to change the rest of the party but it is a tremendous step in the right direction.

Jeremy's victory also has implications for other social democratic parties elsewhere. Up until this new change in the leadership, Labour had become one of the most right-wing and tightly controlled social democratic parties in the world. Under Tony Blair the Party had abolished its socialist clause, introduced a neo-liberal agenda in which the wealthy were encouraged to "get filthy rich" and become a subservient voice piece for the Americans. The Labour Party holds an important position in the Socialist International as one of its most successful members. Its new role as a platform for the left-wing anti-austerity movement can be expected to have a significant impact across Europe and beyond.

Of course, the British situation is not exactly comparable to that in other countries. For one thing, its peculiar electoral system has always prevented the emergence of mass left-wing alternatives. Thus the growing public discontent with the economic results of the austerity programme was first

reflected in England in the rise of the UK Independence Party, and in Scotland by the growing success of the Scottish National Party. But once a chance was given for a choice within the British labour movement through the Labour Party's leadership election, the genie well and truly leapt out of the bottle.

There are other differences between British social democracy and its foreign counterparts including its organic connection to the trade union movement. But all of these differences, important as they are, should only be seen as incidental factors influencing the detailed course of events, not its overall direction. More fundamental is the rising discontent of the mass of people in the advanced and less advanced countries alike. And the groundbreaking opportunity that online communication now offers us to go around the barrier of the mass media and get our side of the story across.

The massive support now building up for Bernie Sanders in the campaign for the American Democratic Presidential nomination is yet another example of the way that radical moods are surfacing across the world and how social media can break through the wall of censorship imposed by the capitalist mass media.

If we lift up our sights we can envision a future period when through events and experience, and the potential of modern online communication, more and more people will see through the capitalist propaganda and recognise the need for a radical change in direction. Such a widespread change of consciousness among working people as a whole will inevitably be reflected inside international social democracy as it has in Britain, with leaders rising to the top to voice these radical moods.

The aim of socialists now must be one of preparing for and helping to achieve such a change, encouraging those members in social democracy who want to fight back and reclaim their parties. Helping them to organise together a growing movement for a democratic socialist alternative. In this way we are making the road clearer and easier to travel down so that working people's efforts to transform society are successful.

New Mass Parties

There are many socialists who have been arguing in favour of setting up new mass parties in order to give voice to a left which is undemocratically excluded from political life by the capitalist media and the social democratic leadership. We deeply sympathise with this desire for the freedom to offer a left-wing alternative to the population, especially in a period dominated by right-wing ideas and savage attacks on the living conditions of the majority. We also completely understand the disgust felt by many at the state of the existing labour movement. But before taking the step of leaving social democracy in favour of building a new broad left party we urge socialists to bear in mind that the

social democratic movement belongs as much to us as it does to the current leaderships, even more so. After all, the founding socialist traditions of the trade unions and social democracy are far more in tune with our views than with those who have embraced capitalism and now dominate the leadership. It is our movement and we should not allow all the generations of hard work to build it up to be lost. Moreover, if we abandon the struggle within the traditional workers parties we will leave them under the leadership of people who use the prestige and historically progressive image of such parties to advance their own interests rather than those of working people. This plays into the hands of the ruling class that uses these leaders to block the anger and discontent of the oppressed and exploited.

In setting up new broad left parties socialists will inevitably focus on the radical minority in society. But this risks giving up on the majority of working people who have shown again and again a willingness to support the social democratic parties.

Some on the left believe that they can make a fresh start by leaving social democratic 'reformism' behind. But there is no magic line that divides social democracy, its leaders and ideology, from the rest of the population. The influence of 'reformist' thinking runs right through the middle of all the other organisations of working people including the trade unions, campaigning groups and community organisations of all kinds. Reformist social democrats and those who think like them are active in all areas of society and just creating a new left-wing movement doesn't solve this problem.

Socialists should understand that the battle for the future will be played out in all the organisations of working people. Leaving the social democratic parties is a departure from one of the most important and most significant arenas of the class struggle, an arena where the intervention of conscious socialists can make a decisive difference as the radicalisation of working people intensifies.

Broad Left Parties

Notwithstanding what we have said above about the need to stay and fight in social democracy, in some countries sizeable parties to the left of social democracy are already in existence and can't be ignored or excluded. There is undoubtedly a certain base in the population for the broad left parties. Such parties can play a very valuable role in the struggle to transform society, and we in The Socialist Network believe that socialists should do everything we can to assist them.

In very rare cases where social democracy has been dramatically discredited, such as in Greece, a broad left party like SYRIZA can even become the main party of working people. But this is more the exception than the norm. In most cases it is very difficult for a broad left party to compete with its much larger social democratic rival. This is a serious problem - for a broad left party to be taken

seriously by working people it needs to demonstrate first of all an ability to achieve significant representation in parliament and at local council level.

A second vital condition for success is the need for unity on the left. We have already seen the disastrous results in Scotland and Ireland when a broad left party splits. Here the question of party democracy is key. In some broad left parties effective internal democracy with competing political platforms are banned. In some of the newer broad left parties such rights exist but are subverted by factions who are more interested in developing their own forces than the party as a whole, and are ready whenever they deem the time is right to split the party. In such case the broad left parties desperately need an effective model of democracy and a democratic culture to ensure its implementation.

Last, but definitely not least, for a broad left party to succeed it cannot just be a more radical version of social democracy with a list of more militant social and economic demands. With the decisive issues now posed by the world capitalist crisis a broad left party needs to be able to develop a credible alternative to capitalism and convincingly explain how a democratic socialist society could effectively solve the problems of working people.

Unfortunately, the broad left parties have not yet risen to this challenge as we have recently seen in Greece. There SYRIZA was unable to turn the severe crisis and its incredible electoral success into the occasion of a radical transformation of Greek society. Instead, it ended up rapidly bowing its head before the capitalist powers. And as such it is in danger of being transformed into the very social democratic party it sought to replace.

Broad Left Parties and Social Democracy

Even if a broad left party was to get everything right, it would still reach a point where party members and their voters came to realise that in many countries they cannot achieve majorities in national elections without linking up with social democracy. Working people are very practical and they want to see their votes delivering meaningful change and improvement in their lives. To this end, they will not just keep casting their votes for movements that they see as having no hope of success.

On the other hand, most of the social democratic parties are seeing their core vote in serious decline as a result of their unwillingness to break with the neo-liberal consensus and offer a lead against the attacks on the living standards and welfare benefits of working people. Thus the social democrats too are finding it more and more difficult to form governments on their own.

In this context, the need for electoral pacts and potential coalition governments between left parties and social democracy present themselves – ‘red-red coalitions’ as they have been called. This poses afresh the problem of how broad left parties should relate to the social democratic parties. The left within social democracy is generally sympathetic to the idea of such red-red arrangements while the right-wing opposes them. Thus we saw in Germany the Social Democratic Party refuse to join a coalition with Die Linke, the broad left party, and the Greens. Instead they preferred to join a Grand Coalition with the class enemy in the shape of Angela Merkel’s Christian Democrats.

A similar choice now faces the Socialist Party in Portugal. The possibility of red-red coalitions between social democracy and the broad left parties then often hangs on the struggle for power between the left and right within social democracy. In this way, the development of a strong left-wing movement within social democracy is as important for the broad left parties as it is for their social democratic rivals.

Similarly, in the day-to-day struggles to defend working people’s economic and social conditions, members of broad left parties should be willing to join hands with anyone willing to fight back. If they are members of social democracy they should be welcomed as this can only increase the strength and appeal of such campaigns.

HOW TO WORK IN THE MASS ORGANISATIONS?

IT IS ONE THING TO AGREE IN PRINCIPLE that we must work in the mass movements but quite another to carry it out in an effective and positive fashion. Most importantly, we have to learn from past mistakes.

Separation from the mass movement: Repeated experience has shown that the continuing approach of most socialist groups in seeking to create separate revolutionary parties has failed. In attempting to do so, socialists mistakenly believe that they are emulating the experience of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution. However, they have forgotten that it was only through striving for and winning the majority in Russian social democracy that the Bolsheviks were able to win a decisive majority of the Russian workers and lead them on to victory in 1917, a victory that for a time inspired socialists throughout the world. The alternative strategy of trying to create revolutionary socialist parties in opposition to the existing mass workers parties only ends up dividing the movement and separating socialist from the majority of the oppressed.

In The Socialist Network we argue that where existing mass movements exist, what is needed is not to break away from them but to stay and help to transform them into the organisations that working people need to defend themselves and advance their interests. To this end, we see it as necessary to help build up a large and well-organised democratic socialist wing within them, a platform that seeks to win a majority for its ideas and through that to assist working people to decisively transform society. This means working not as a short-term 'tactic' but in a long-term positive way within trade unions, community organisations, pressure groups and both the social democratic and broad left parties. It means seeking to democratise and unify these mass organisations in the struggle for a new society. And where mass organisations do not yet exist and are necessary we should help to establish them.

Entrism: In line with this positive approach towards active work in the existing mass organisations, we reject the tactic of "Entrism". This tactic is used by socialist groups who wish to operate inside a mass workers party with the aim of building up their own forces and then splitting away at a later stage in order to form what they think will be a mass revolutionary party. Entrism is inherently pessimistic in that it assumes that reformism will always dominate the existing mass workers parties and that the ideas of socialism cannot become the majority in them. We don't accept this defeatist view. Moreover, Entrism is a parasitic policy towards the workers parties that obviously can't be revealed to the members of the party without causing a hostile reaction, and therefore demands secrecy and denial. While Entrism is motivated by the desire to win more people to socialist ideas, in practice it inevitably becomes a self-interested and inward-looking approach towards the mass movement, and opens up those who practice it to charges of disloyalty and dishonesty.

United Fronts within the movement: An important part of regenerating the mass movement is the need to transform its programme, practice and leadership. Anyone who supports this goal should be encouraged to participate in a united front to change these mass organisations. Where such united broad left oppositions already exist they need to be strengthened. Where they don't exist, socialists should help in forming and building them. This is absolutely vital in the struggle for new policies and new leadership in the mass movement.

Freedom to choose: Most socialist groups demand that their members follow a single line. This is also applied to the orientation of their work in the movement. Thus one group will see it to their advantage to opt for work inside social democracy, another within a broad left party, while another for independent work outside all existing parties. Then at a later stage the leadership of such groups may decide they can gain more by switching their orientation. This is why they call such decisions 'tactical'. We reject such an unprincipled, inconsistent and sectarian approach to the organisations of

working people. Quite apart from the damage such methods do to the mass organisations, they also damage the socialists who carry them out. Rather than creating cadres - thinking and creative activists - it is a recipe for creating 'followers' who are willing to be directed like pawns in a tactical political game.

Clearly, there are many divisions between socialists over where to work in the labour movement and society generally. There should be no problem in that. People should have the freedom to choose to work in the areas that interest and inspire them. The main thing is to be willing to participate in broad work in a non-sectarian manner.

In this regard, a socialist movement should be there to serve its members, not the other way around. It should be seeking to help individual socialists work in the mass organisations of their choice, sharing advice, passing on skills, helping to co-ordinate and so on. Thus these comrades can become local leaders in their own right and the reach of socialist ideas and tactics will be that much greater. In this way we can be like thousands of small cogs turning the larger wheels of broader movements and society generally.

CONCLUSION

To CONCLUDE, we in The Socialist Network believe that socialists need to be active wherever working people are. That means that we should work in all their organisations, including both social democratic and broad left parties, striving to democratise and energise them, uniting them together in a positive struggle to defend our conditions and extend them. In this we are only taking forward the natural instincts of working people for unity and effective action.

Central to this, the labour movement needs to revive its historic aim to end capitalism and achieve the democratic socialist transformation of society. This aim cannot be just in words, but must become an integral part of its day-to-day thinking and practice.

To this end, The Socialist Network is prepared to cooperate with anybody who is willing to undertake this vital task of rebuilding and renewing the movement. We urge anyone who agrees with our general approach or wishes to discuss it in more detail, to get in touch and develop further discussions with us.

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The Socialist Network,

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