

Proposal for reform of the website team

Max L. This motion is slightly amended, in section 3, from the version in the online bulletin.

1) Our website needs some help

rs21's website has recently undergone a redesign to become more attractive and more browsable. This is a welcome development – a more appealing site greatly improves our ability to propagate and advertise our ideas.

Nonetheless, we continue to have severe problems in populating the site with fresh, thought-provoking, high-quality content. At the time of writing, we have published 11 pieces in the last month (of which one was republished from the magazine), and 25 in the last 2 months – not an awful performance on the face of things, but neither a particularly healthy one given that our present approach to commissioning is to be relaxed about what we publish, editing lightly and soliciting content of very varied types and subject matter.

Moreover, it has proven impossible to implement any consistent commissioning strategy:

- The idea of giving the website a “spine” of core topics, agreed some 8 months ago at the June 2017 National Meeting, has not been implemented. Meetings of the website team identified four “spine” themes – the nature of work; race and migration; gender and sexuality; and the debate over reform or revolution – but we have not yet been able to perceptibly alter the site's content to highlight these.
- Despite attempts to counter-act this tendency, the gender balance and racial diversity of our pool of authors has often been very poor indeed: of the 25 pieces published over the last 2 months, only 3 were authored by women or non-binary people.
- The site alternates between periods of lively activity and stretches of time in which very little is published, due to its dependence on the commissioning efforts of one or two key volunteers whose availability is naturally intermittent.

2) The problem is structural

Put simply, running rs21's website is more work than we can reasonably expect anybody to invest on a purely unpaid basis. Various individuals have burnt themselves out investing huge amounts of energy into the site over the last four years. The reality is that maintaining a slick and accessible nationwide socialist news and commentary website is not a project we can fairly assign to a few comrades donating their time and effort on a volunteer basis.

3) A suggested solution

For this reason, I believe that rs21 needs to transition to employing a paid, part-time editor or editorial assistant for the site. Many sites of comparable scope and ambition employ at least one person full-time; for rs21, that is not a financial option, but employing a part-timer is a possibility. That being the case, I suggest:

- That this National Meeting should preliminarily endorse, in principle, the idea of creating a paid part-time website editorial position, to work 10 hours per week.
- That this post should not interfere with the ability of the incumbent Editor (Amy G) to serve out her elected term. The new post could co-exist with the current one, which would be focussed on political leadership and guidance. My understanding is that Amy lacks the time to spend 10 hours a week on the site, but if that were to change, she would also be eligible to stand for election to the new post.
- That it would be beneficial to begin reforming the website sooner than at the next National Meeting. If this motion is passed, the SG should hold further democratic consultations to see if this idea has support from members; if so, it should then hold an online vote on creating the position; and then, if the outcome is positive, an online election to fill the post. This process would also allow more members who have trouble making it to National Meetings to express their views.

4) Practicalities and finances

The cost of employing somebody for 10 hours per week, at the same hourly wage as the full-timer, would come to £375 per calendar month. I note the following:

- We have now been able to arrange free National Meeting venues twice consecutively and hope to continue doing so. Previously National Meetings have often cost several hundred pounds to hold; on one occasion, a venue bill reached £1600.
- If – as presently appears to be possible, for separate reasons – we cease to publish a regular magazine, that will also free up some additional funding, assuming the magazine is not replaced by another publication making a similar or larger loss.
- We could finance the new post on a trial basis for two or three months leading up to the June NM. If members noted an improvement in the website, many might then find it worth earmarking some additional subs money to keep the post going.
- If this motion is passed, the SG will collaborate with the Treasurer to explore possibilities for financing the new post; the SG will have the right to veto the new post's implementation if no secure financial solution can be found.

[Note: The Treasurer found that it was not financially viable at that time.]