

PART III by Kinnell

The crucial political defining element of the faction is on the question of the party.

The faction leaders have always made a lot of 'the worker leadership'. The problem is that this term does not refer to a system of measures for helping workers to become educated Marxists and political leaders - 'worker-intellectuals' as Gramsci put it. It is a term of self-praise applied by two people to themselves. They define themselves as 'the leadership' not by virtue of cogency of political argument, breadth of knowledge, or practical function, but simply by virtue of being who they are - as 'symbolic workers' so to speak.

A real system of measures to make the League more of a workers' organisation would run in the opposite direction to what the faction wants. It would require that issues for general debate were carefully chosen and debated with plenty of time - not a hectic series of 'scandals'. It would require a businesslike centralised leadership. It would require "political culture" where young comrades could develop their ideas in an atmosphere free of biblical denunciations of heresy (and this latter is also pretty important for women comrades).

It also requires a "political culture" where there are some standards and norms, so that new workers are not greeted by cynical jibes against the organisation when they enter a branch - where they are educated in a spirit of responsibility not cynicism.

In short, it requires the opposite of what feminists have called 'the tyranny of structurelessness', where a demagogic formal democracy allows politics to be decided not by rational argument, but by the prestige, oratory or self-given talismanic qualities of individuals.

Lenin wrote:

"This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. But they take part not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and advance that knowledge." (What is to be Done?)

The same Lenin was concerned to build a workers' party. But that was not done by lionising a coterie of 'symbolic workers', but by organising to develop workers as 'socialist theoreticians'. It meant internal education; a businesslike regime, with structured discussions where the issues could be understood by all, and definite decisions made to be implemented by an authoritative leadership.

Leadership by celebrities

James P. Cannon wrote of the pre-1914 Socialist Party in America:

"Lawyers, doctors, teachers, preachers, writers, professors - people of this kind who lived their real lives in another world and gave an evening, or at most two evenings, a week of their time to the socialist movement for the good of their souls - they were the outstanding leaders of the pre-war Socialist Party.

"They decided things. They laid down the law. They were the speakers on ceremonial occasions; they posed for their photographs and gave interviews to the newspapers...

"As for the party functionaries, the people who devoted all their time to the daily work and routine of the party, they were simply regarded as flunkys to be loaded with the disagreeable tasks, poorly paid and blamed if anything went wrong ...