

I.B.103

A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP.

McInnes

The zombie oracle.

In mid-October 1983 I was unlucky enough to present a few resolutions to the National Committee....an assortment of rather bored and turgid individuals. To my surprise, I discovered that these proposals did not mean what I said they meant. For information about their secret significance, I and the others present were required to consult the Oracle, in the form of 'Comrade Kinneil' a particularly zombie-like individual who keeps breaking down because he refuses to be a human being. The Oracle duely reinterpreted my proposals. One or two suggestions from less timid N.C. members that implied that these resolutions might in fact mean what I said they meant were carefully ignored by the moral majority, in case the lethal brands of sterile thought which masquerade as 'post-war trotskyism' be disturbed by a breath of fresh air, real life and new ideas.

The problem ingeneral.

Ideas are not examined by our national leadership for their useful components; they are caricatured and opposed...if they deviate too far from the peculiarly distorted approximations of 'marxism' peddled by the two factions which exist as the political basis for this ramshackle little group. Any freshness, novelty, experience and understanding enjoyed by the membership is prevented from surfacing by the routinely manipulative, boring and uninspired methadology of the London-based clique. Meanwhile, the Oxford based faction have been consistantly outsmarted as unwilling partners in the competitive petty power politics which their rivals in London think is post war trotskyism. And whilst this is all going on, disillusion spreads among the rest of the membership. Comrades with years of experience leave. Local work suffers. National direction flounders.,

Is there any solution?

I CONCLUDE THAT OUR ONLY HOPE OF SURVIVAL as an effective political force lies in the creation of a NEW TYPE of leadership working on the basis of a different set of political methods. We have to be organised in a different and more effective manner. I do not consider that those whodominate in the leadership and who are the cause of so many of our problems are at all capable of providing a solution. I have come to this conclusion as a result of my own experiences in ICL and WSL some of which I will now outline.

Why I began to wonder.

About six months previous to the fusion, I had sent copies of a document about working with black activists to the ICL leadership asking that this be produced as an internal bulletin. This was my first attempt at an I.B. and it was never produced. No one told me why. Letters of enquiry went unanswered. Eventually I got someone to admit 'we didn't really understand what it was all about.' This did not seem to be a very democratic attitude.

At the fusion conference.

Wishing to ensure that the fusion took place on an adequate basis as regards the fight against racism, I worked with a member of the old NSL to produce an amendment to our founding document which would at least give a simplified exposition of some of the issues involved. At this point I had my first taste of the bizarre behaviour of Comrade Carolan who led me into a small room where he attempted to threaten and cajole me into withdrawing this amendment. Thankfully, I had already reached beyond the point where I could accept that this sort of sharp practice was a rational form of leadership. Instead I put forward the amendment which was accepted as part of our founding platform.

After the fusion.

I had hoped that this policy might be a starting point for us to confront the issues involved in a practical way. So I went to London in order to speak to the members of the branch covering an area where these issues were particularly relevant. I gave an explanation of my understanding of the situation, involving connections between state racism and various labour movement personalities whose dubious practices acted to diffuse the fightback amongst black youth. The two leading comrades at this meeting got very hot under the collar, then went on to claim that such an abusive reaction was quite justified because they thought I was incapable of making an independent judgement about the person who was the source of my information. They said it was highly unlikely that figures in the local labour movement could be involved in 'those sorts of things'. Apart from all this, they did not discuss the political questions involved. Finally, one of them promised to examine the situation himself and contact me. He failed to do either.

Continuing saga of indifference.

Following this episode, I wrote another document touching on the same questions, couching this one in terms that even the most diehard pedant on the E.C. should have understood. But we received no internal documents for over a year following the fusion. When they finally produced my document with bits chopped off and pages upside down, neither of the comrades who had so hotly denied my allegations about their cherished bretherin in the local labour movement breathed a word of reply. My subsequent attempts to raise these issues continued to be met with stony indifference. I also made vainglorious attempts to involve myself in the anti-racism commission but this was organised by a member of the old WSL with a bureaucratic attitude as destructive and exclusive as the EX-ICL wretches. Needless to say my attempts to get the E.C. to take up this question bore no results. All this had led me to believe that WSL's claims to 'democratic'-centralism were a fantasy. Other events have confirmed this belief.

'Broad groups'. No discussion.

In Autumn '82, the Edinburgh branch passed a resolution about the practice of the broad groups. This resolution called for wide-ranging discussion throughout the membership on HOW WE SHOULD PROCEED WITH THE BROAD GROUPS TURN calling also for discussion on the best way to deal with the witchhunt and to make a more effective intervention in current industrial struggles. My own view at that time was that we might go further with the turn, by making the national association of broad groups much more democratic and centralised. I felt we would then be in a position to transform our own organisation through convergence with the broad groups, into an open one which could exist without secrecy in the labour movement and thus attract many more activists. Our resolution was meant to get this and other opinions aired fully at ground level. It was becoming clear that the turn had not been fully completed because of the problems arising out of the fusion. The unevenness of the results meant that real discussion amongst the membership was vital, before my own or other strategies could be feasible. At that stage both halves of the leadership seemed unaware of this fact. But the non-ICL leadership never even had the benefit of considering this Edinburgh resolution. Although it was received by Comrade Hill it was never taken to the E.C. let alone the N.C. THUS WE, THE MEMBERSHIP, WERE NEVER DEMOCRATICALLY INVOLVED IN THE BASIC STRATEGY OF THE FUSED ORGANISATION.

More and more demoralisation.

Many ex-ICL members received the final insult when we were summoned at the last minute with unprecedented and frantic phone calls and expected to listlessly support the thoroughly inadequate Hill/Carolan/Parkinson motions which concerned all these key questions which we were not allowed to discuss earlier. The net effect of the various devious practices which are supposedly valid for the leadership of a 'post-war Trotskyist' organisation, has been to gut the movement of almost all enthusiasm and flexible thinking. Members become isolated. Many become cynical even those who do not question the manipulative and revolting practices of the leading tricksters.

Anarchy begins in the centre.

I know the well-tried methods used to demoralise members who are not in agreement with the leading clique's politically laundered priorities. I don't presume they need to conspire. I assume they just do it, without a second thought. Because they know best..... how to wreck the contributions of anyone who challenges their ideological dominance. Apart from 'losing' resolutions to the National Committee and putting certain letters and articles to the paper into the dustbin and their various attempts to mentally intimidate people... there is their complete lack of any interest in any approach to any question which falls outside their thoroughly myopic point of view. Habitually they prioritise what THEY think are important points, even if this means abusing other people and only emphasising decisions which THEY think are right. In these ways they flout the basic democratic principles which are the hallmark of a healthy socialist organisation.

Prejudice rife within the membership.

Just before the second stage of our last conference, I found myself with a number of people who had, like myself, been members of the former ICL.... only to find myself involved in a mental kung-fu exercise with a crowd of bigoted individuals who were attempting to slag off the sum total of ex-wSL members as 'politically stupid'. These people, on the other hand, regarded their own rather inadequate abstractions as 'truth', in a similar manner to the way that their religious equivalents regard their own peculiar brands of pedantry. There was only one person amongst them who was capable of relating to ideas I was putting forward with the respect which comes when one thinks ideas through for oneself. Beneath the rationalisation, angry outbursts and patronising phrases, the others were as conditioned to reflex prejudice as people who take their views straight from the pages of 'the SUN'.

Why such degeneration?

Why have so many ex-ICL members ended in such a state of political fossilisation? I have eventually come to the conclusion through my own experience of these comrades that there is a fault underlying the whole method of thought and action which we inherited from my old group. It is the zombie mentality, fed by arrogance, which always assumes the speaker to be 'CORRECT'. This is an arrogance which can only lead to increasing ignorance because those whose brains are programmed in this way are seldom able to admit that they JUST COULD BE WRONG....(unless they are with a superior within the robot hierarchy at the top of which are the three ultimate arbiters of truth). You will very often find their arrogance disguised by an apparently self-effacing disinterest in the person's own faults or merits. In fact they only find interest in themselves or other people if they are relegated into an entirely separate 'personal' sphere or else serve some political expediency. It is not difficult for people to feel this false consciousness. I contend that such people are not to be trusted because their motives and actions are not assessed on the basis of a complete appraisal of situations. They are too inflexible to be effective.

Can the WSL be regenerated?

It is a strange and wonderful thing that there are still a few members left within an organisation which functions in such a self-destructive way. How many of these members can still believe that the bureaucratic and cynical manipulation of the leadership could possibly be the basis for the creation of a revolutionary political party? Who in their senses could place hope in the limited thinking of either the faction or the clique as the sole basis for the creation of much more than a catastrophe. Yet, amongst their ideas are fundamental principles which we could develop into programme and practice adequate for today. Amongst our remaining members are some extremely talented and experienced individuals. There is a lot of evidence of very effective trade union interventions by members who were in the old WSL and by some of the ex-ICL comrades. The pre-fusion record of the ICL within the MO still stands as exemplary in many ways. Within the abysmally presented SW are a number of imaginative and practical contributions. I believe that all this creativity may still be drawn on...so long as a majority of the membership are prepared to challenge the bigotted and oppressive members within the failed leadership of this organisation.

A new leadership is required.

I believe that reorganisation along rational and realistic lines can only occur under a fresh leadership who are not concerned with stifling debate and maintaining positions as a dominant clique. I do not think this leadership need all share exactly the same point of view. But they must be capable of working together in a mature and comradely manner to develop an appraisal of the world as it is in 1984. This requires an ability to examine facts and situations as they actually arise, and to take account of the real changes in society, technology and the economy. I would say that we need a leadership who are able to see the world as a whole rather than artificially fragmenting it into different 'issues'. It is most important that the entire membership are able to take part in this development of perspectives. I believe we can usefully rid ourselves of that robot mentality which requires one or other section of the leadership to do our thinking for us. That way the individual experience and ideas of comrades throughout the organisation will come to the fore and we could rapidly become a magnet within the left of the labour movement.

And a fresh approach.

The aim of these changes would be a less dogmatic and a more realistic approach to political action and a spirit of understanding where we work together on a national level because we want to and not in favour of any clique. For this we need a leadership who are able to take into account personal and local considerations as well as our overall strategic aims. There are members in the branches, and a few on the N.C. and perhaps even the E.C. who have the abilities which we are so sorely in need of. I commit myself to working with such people for the creation of a genuinely non-sectarian internationalist group which will flourish over future years and lay the basis for the creation of a mass organisation. I shall, so long as I have a vote and a voice within this organisation, continue to oppose oppressive methods, and thus I will maintain my belief that we will never be able to create socialism whilst politics and humanity are seen as being on opposite sides of the universe.

For a fresh approach.

And some fresh faces.

Jim McInnis.

Edinburgh.

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