

A QUESTION OF METHOD.

It is often admitted that the breakdown of our fused group relates to differences of method, rather than programme, to the way we organise ourselves and work with others. In this document I argue that the breakdown of the fusion has not been inevitable, and still need not be, if we apply ourselves to the question of method.

In my earlier document 'a question of Leadership' I itemised a number of the current leadership's methods including the way they prioritise irrespective of decisions taken, 'lose' resolutions to the N.C. from branches which are 'out of favour', fail to print letters to the paper which they disagree with whilst not giving any explanation to the comrades concerned and generally attempt to marginalise and discredit political thinking which seriously challenges their own assumptions. My concrete examples are all drawn from things that have occurred in relation to me personally. So far they have not been answered. Comrade Kinneil has, however, stated that he considers that such blemishes merely consist of a judgement that he and his close associates are 'disagreeable people'. I guess he is misrepresenting the analysis

in the document in order to avoid facing up to its implications. For I do not dislike Kinneil or Hill or Carolan, I actually quite like Kinneil and Carolan and have a certain respect for Hill, that I object to is not them as people but their political actions as regards the internal workings of this organisation. I cannot accept as Kinneil appears to, that such methods lie within an unimportant realm earmarked 'personal' and therefore disassociated from political significance.

Carolan has recently stressed the need for political honesty and hardhitting arguments. However the method of argument used by himself and his followers serves to OBSCURE the issues at stake if ever they wish to deride their opponents. At these times political discussion with them is not discussion at all but what can best be described as 'small-left-group-oneupmanship'. This was a method which I thought we had left behind after we took the 'broad groups turn'. A method we learned to apply in the broader movement was connected with listening to and relating to the positive aspects of the political thinking of other left-wing people and relating our own ideas through the mutual respect which was thus built up.

I realise that Carolan thinks different criteria apply within our own organisation. However, I would suggest that comrades who accept this point of view should pause to ask themselves what positive value lies in the hatchet methods of the small left groups. We abandoned these methods for good reasons within the Labour Movement so that we could ally with those ^{with} whom we had major political differences. What is the use of doing that if our own group contains a diametrically opposite approach where winning through mental combat is all the rage. Is it not of the utmost importance that mutual respect and a genuine willingness to clarify ideas is the basis of the political relationship of the organisation we are seeking to build within the labour movement? Instead we encounter a series of methods designed to deride opponents and distort and belittle their political ideas. When Carolan and his followers do not want to understand an argument they listen until they find some minor point which they can pick holes in. In this manner they may draw the arguments away from all the questions which they are unable to answer. Those of us who suggest that such methods fail to clarify political issues are portrayed as 'soft' and they themselves maybe even believe that their own wretched style of operation consists of 'hardhitting arguments'.

ANOTHER RELATED PRACTICE IS CHARACTER 'ASSASSINATION'. Within this system one or two aspects of a comrade's politics or record are ripped from the circumstances around them, distorted, and turned into a CHARACTERISATION. This is the method of "THE SUN". The results of such practices are far from the HONEST POLITICS which Carolan lays claim to. They are rooted not in a will to uncover the truth but on the contrary a DEEP FEAR OF BEING PROVED WRONG which means they need to prove they're right at all times. There are other advocates of the 'majority position' who will agree IN PRIVATE that the Carolan methods are personally abusive and therefore politically oppressive and confusing. However these people tolerate and therefore become a party to his actions and those of his more diehard camp followers for the reason that they believe his general perspectives are so important. They FAIL TO SEE THAT THESE TWO ASPECTS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT and that they are INTERLINKED. It should however be clear by now that the effective breakdown of the organisation was not unconnected with the use of these rather unscrupulous techniques ... and that the breakdown of an organisation makes any general perspective held by its members almost unuseable.

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Within the short life of the democratic-centralist faction I have found an entirely different attitude amongst comrades --, where one can expect one's contribution to be listened to without derision, even when strong disagreement emerges... and yet issues are still sorted out and clarified. Comrades from very different political traditions are able to discuss differences and come to conclusions without animosity and intimidation....without fear of being marginalised and stereotyped for holding alternative approaches or proposing different ideas. The existence of people within this organisation on a national level with whom ideas can be clarified and political thought developed....itself clarifies for me what sort of an organisation this one could be. For within that sort of political atmosphere effective centralised initiatives again become plausible and thoughtful and if necessary forceful leadership becomes desirable. For leadership to really get results there must be respect for the individual contribution of every comrade in the organisation and comradely guidance from that leadership if they judge any comrade to be mistaken in their political actions: Those who are incapable of leading in this way should not be elected to leading bodies, or else we will encounter repetitions of all the problems we are familiar with. Expulsions or no expulsions the leadership style of Carolan and his followers, relying as it does so heavily on anti-socialist methods to deal with dissidents, will conflict with the stated desire of that leadership to reach into the labour movement in a non-sectarian manner. For any successes in this direction would lead to more comrades coming into the organisation who think for themselves and are not prepared to be stifled.

Carolan and Kinneil fail to understand how similar are their hierarchical and domineering attitudes to the attitudes of many others who hold power within Capitalist society. The conditions for this failure of understanding is presumably, their lack of day to day experience of workplace, union branch etc. I was recently sacked and reinstated. In many ways the tone and inaccurate one sidedness of my departmental bosses' unsuccessful reports at my appeal were similar to the Carolan 'leadership's' patronising, one-sided and blinkered attitude to those who they judge to be 'disruptive'. Along with the obvious differences there are many common factors in the exercise of power by various elites and particularly if those elites think their power is threatened. Similarities I have encountered in workplace and union power structures are....manipulation, attempts to marginalise 'dissident' elements, patronising or heavy-handed attitudes, a contempt for the observable truth of any situation and often..... when the pressure builds up....extreme nervousness, uncontrolled outbursts etc. The actions and attitudes of Carolan and Kinneil and Hill in their intense need to hold onto personal power fall into this category.

At conference a year before the fusion I raised the problem of making the ICL into an organisation which working class people would feel able to join and take part in and build. I identified a complacency among some of the leadership and a hierarchical set of attitudes which prevented younger and less experienced comrades taking initiative and developing their ideas. Too often leadership in left groups can become a cosy concept concealing the means by which comrades who are older, whiter, maler and generally more self confident and in-the-know may establish their positions at the expense of those who have reasons for being less confident as a result of their own oppression. Thus the attitudes which are dominant within Capitalist society reproduce themselves in contorted and semi-disguised forms within the organisations which are supposed to be fighting against capitalism. Our organisation has been no exception.

The 'broad groups' turn was destroyed by the failure of the fusion...BY THE INABILITY OF THE COMBINED LEADERSHIP TO DRAW THE ORGANISATION TOGETHER AT MEMBERSHIP LEVEL, their mistaken belief that they could sort it all out themselves behind closed doors while we waited month after month for democratic internal discussion, and by the extraordinary lack of democratic political discussion which accompanied the sudden rush to get majority positions on the key questions at last April's conference. But even if there had been no fusion and the Broad groups turn had developed further....I hold that related problems would still have come, because of the contradiction between the ex-ICL leadership's non-sectarian intentions in the labour movement and their own sectarian methods of leadership internally..... and the CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THEIR FIGHT FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THEIR OWN REFUSAL TO BE PRACTICALLY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MEMBERS OF THEIR OWN ORGANISATION except WHEN IT SUITS THEMSELVES. The hierarchical conformist attitude which cannot respect the freshness and experience of new recruits would almost certainly have stopped the organisation from braking out of its small group mentality.

FRESH METHODS of discussion and education, of expectation and delegation are crucial if we are to escape from sectarianism and turn our organisation into the nucleus of a future revolutionary party. As marxist thinkers we need to relate to the changes about us brought about by new knowledge, new technology, new methods by the ruling class and new conditions for working class people and new development in the way the working class and oppressed people of the world can fight back. It is most important that every member is encouraged to contribute her or his unique experience to the discussion of the points at question. Any harking back to the exclusive traditions of either pre-fusion organisation would, I believe, be mistaken. I still believe that what we said when we fused...about drawing on the strengths of the two former traditions still applies...even if only a minority still seem prepared to do so. However, even that is not enough, for if we learn to listen better to the knowledge of those around us in the class struggle new approaches will emerge.

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