

Hi folks,

I circulate this merely to the planning committee for now. With a little encouragement I will also submit it to the listserve.

At our meeting on Tuesday evening we got into a discussion about the party-building panel and its composition. I pledged to submit an outline of the perspective I plan to present, as a way of alleviating fears expressed that the session could become dominated by efforts to dump on those who are presently engaged in organization-building projects. When I sat down to write that outline, I discovered an article already written some months ago, and submitted to the conference listserve, that addresses the most relevant points. That article is attached FYI. I'm not upset with comrades for forgetting about this contribution. I had forgotten about it too. I resubmit it now, with the following notes:

1) In the article I say: “ ‘programmatically homogeneous’ came to include not only questions that were genuinely programmatic, but simply strategic, or even tactical.” And I conclude, in relation to this: “But most of the time the idea of one, and only one ‘correct program’ is a distortion of how revolutionary thought and action actually relate to the world at large.”

If I had this to rewrite now, I would make a distinction I did not at the time: “Programmatically homogeneous” ought to relate *strictly* to genuine questions of program, not to those judgments that are essentially strategic—such as “the turn” or “SDS vs.. SMC.” We do not and cannot strive for *strategic* homogeneity without sacrificing the diversity of thought which is the lifeblood of any revolutionary organization.

I do describe the genuine programmatic questions around which we should be striving for homogeneity, but without making this distinction between programmatic homogeneity and strategic homogeneity as explicit as I should have: “What we can say is that every successful pathway that leads in a revolutionary direction will share certain key features: attempting to promote an insurrectionary upsurge of the working class, alliance-building between the working class and other social layers that have an interest in overthrowing capitalism, the development of a leadership capable of charting a road to power, etc.”

2) The article says: “Today most revolutionaries in the USA are still building factions, for the most part in the name of building parties (though in the case of Solidarity, the group I belong to, in the name of rejecting party-building until there is a sufficient mass base to support a party-building project).”

There are a few things to note here, including the protest at our CC meeting that the ISO does not conceive of what it is doing as a “party-building” process. If pushed, many of the other groups would say something similar. Still, there is a sharp divide between the kinds of organizations that are presently being built (cohering those who agree not just on basic programmatic principles, but also on certain elements of analysis, strategy, and even on tactical matters) and the broader party-building conception I am calling for.

I would also, today, acknowledge that my article was too focused on the present *organizations*, not sufficiently on those who remain unaffiliated, many of them precisely because they are alienated from all of these attempts to build organizations. This may, in fact, be the majority of those we can potentially tap to engage, or re-engage, in a revolutionary party-building project in the USA.

3) I have the utmost respect for comrades (such as those in the ISO) who have continued to struggle to build an organization in the old style. I do feel that there is something missing in their present approach, but I will not dump on that approach. I consider their efforts to be a legitimate *part* of what we have to do. Comrades with strong opinions on specific elements of analysis, strategic, and even tactical manners *can and should* build factions. It is both appropriate and necessary. We simply cannot do so with the illusion that by doing this we will, somehow, magically, arrive at the party-building stage without paying conscious attention to overcoming the factional divide that we are simultaneously generating. We have to consciously work to prepare the party-building stage and *stop* doing things as part of our faction-building process that make it impossible (or at least qualitatively more difficult) to bridge the gap that exists between organizations (factions).

4) This leads me to something else that was left out of the original article. We had a mantra in the SWP that I now disagree with: “People have the right to form tendencies and factions, that’s a democratic principle. But it’s a bad thing for the party when it happens.” As soon as you put the second sentence into that statement the democratic principle you are attempting to affirm vanishes in a puff of smoke. If people are seen as having done something bad for the party when they form organized currents then the fact that they have a formal right to do so is meaningless. That right can never be exercised, because anyone who exercises it will instantly be branded as a disrupter of the unity that everyone considers so necessary.

The alternative is to understand the dialectic of achieving unity by truly exploring our diversity. The formation of tendencies and factions, when they are objectively needed, is a *good* thing that should be welcomed by the party as a whole. It can lead to the proper kind of discussion and therefore to a higher level of unity. A unity achieved by avoiding this kind of debate is not worth having.

Thus I mean it when I say that I have the utmost respect for those who continue to build factions on the left in the USA today. What they are doing *is* useful and necessary—so long as it doesn’t become an obstacle to actually building the broader collaborations we must develop in order to create a genuine revolutionary party some time down the road. The problem is that *as presently conceived* these faction-building projects *do* constitute an obstacle to the prospect of a broader unity. This is what we need to overcome.

5) I hope it is clear that what I’m suggesting is not conceived of as an alternative to “the Leninist Model.” It is a different conception of how we get from here to there. I am rejecting the idea that in order to get to a Leninist party in the future we start by creating a miniature scale model of the Leninist organization (as we conceive it), with the expectation that this scale model will grow into the real thing. Instead, the task is to

develop a set of relationships among revolutionaries that can become the foundation for actually beginning to build a Leninist Party worthy of the name.

I will assert that this describes the “Bolshevik Model” as it was actually practiced during Lenin’s time. This was never a “homogeneous cadre” in the sense that the SWP (and most other “Leninist” groups) use that term. Genuine Bolshevism always was, and must always be, a cauldron of discussion, debate, and dynamic disagreement. If we cannot incorporate this aspect of Bolshevism into our conception of “Leninist party-building” then all the rest is doomed.