

There is no doubt some surprise amongst BF members about the urgency with which the debate about Socialist Unity (SU) is being conducted in BF - we are being told that this urgency is essential, that if we don't get things right for the first SU conference on Nov 19th, we may never be able to straighten things up etc. My own feeling is that whatever our position, we should not expect too much from the November conference and not crush it with programmes, organisational structures etc. My own assessment of SU nationally is that as a whole things are fragile and that what is important in November is to have a good discussion, to let the independents talk and to see how we go forward on the basis of the strengths and weaknesses that the conference makes apparent. But in any case, whatever happens at the conference, BF will have to assess the proposal of PT's that SU becomes a political organisation with membership etc. I disagree with this proposal and will argue that SU should remain an electoral front; it will be difficult enough to make this work.

Revolutionaries at elections

At a European level, the participation of the post-68 revolutionary left in elections is a recent phenomena. It started in Italy with the creation of the revolutionary slate 'Proletarian Democracy' and was followed by the participation of the revolutionary left in elections in France and Spain. In all these countries, revolutionaries felt that as the Communist Party moves swiftly to the right, there was a space to be filled by revolutionaries in an electoral campaign. In the creation of the electoral slates, a great amount of unity was achieved by the groups - groups with very different politics like Lotta Continua and PDUP or LCR (4th International) and OCT (close to BF) were able to work together. Of course during the campaigns there was plenty of friction between the groups and political differences is probably the main reason for the slates not continuing to exist after the elections. Even in those areas in France where the revolutionary slate 'All Power to the Workers' got 15% of the vote, there was no chance of the unity continuing after the elections. And why should it be any different for SU? After all, at a programme level, all that BF and the IMG is arguing for is a very minimal action programme that most of the revolutionary left could agree on, there is even hope of getting the SWP involved in SU; but this is not a sufficient programme on which to base a revolutionary organisation even of some low profile type. And there will not be the political unity between the different forces that make up SU to get a higher level of agreement. Certainly, there is the problem of the independents who will be drawn into a SU campaign and want to continue working as a collective - there are many ways forward for them, either they can join on of the organisations involved in SU or they can set themselves up as a SU collective or a socialist collective in the same way that there is a socialist alliance in Hull, a socialist grouping in Newcastle, a revolutionary federation in Tameside.etc - surely we don't need to build a new organisation for these independents, many of whom are independents just because they don't want to be in an organisation.

We must always remember that electoral campaigns/electoral politics are not a good terrain for revolutionaries to fight on - we are participating in a game whose rules we don't believe in and it is always easy for the bourgeois political forces to point this out. In fact the great weakness of 'Proletarian Democracy' and the slates in Spain was that they did not have an alternative to the demand for a Socialist Party/Communist Party coalition and militant voters felt that if this was the case it was better to vote for the SP or the CP. Another example of the problems facing revolutionaries in elections came during the Ladywood by-election. There is no doubt that the anti-NF 'riot' lost SU votes, but it was correct for the SU comrades to get involved in the organising of the pocket which led into the 'riot'. Our first priority was to help build the power of the black community in the area; whatever effect that had on the number of SU votes. If we take vote getting too

seriously we will end up like the CP. And we have to be disciplined in the amount of priority and time we give to our SU work, all foreign comrades I have talked to say that in elections run-ins, the organisation abandons all its other work and just concentrates on the elections. This would be a political mistake for BF to do and it is more than likely to happen if we try to create a political organisation out of an electoral front, since SU will be seen by the activists involved as election orientated.

SU and the building of the struggle at the base

Our original conception of SU was that of class struggle candidates supported by local grass root organisations; black groups, shop steward committees, womens groups etc. And that should remain our conception (even if it is difficult to fight for it with IMG). And I very much doubt that militants from these grass root groups will feel the need to join another organisation (e.g. SU). Our primary political project is the building of the class struggle at the base and I would see the building of SU as an organisation as a diversion to this. SU groups should be a forum for political activists (like cuts committees). In any case, as a political organisation SU will be seen as an IMG (or a BF&IMG) front very much like the ASL or the SSL (Asian and Scottish Socialist Leagues) and independents will be very wary of it.

SU and the BF project.

There is no doubt that the project is in need of redefinition and re-discussion. Even so, until the organisation decides otherwise, we remain committed to the building of a new organisation around the 'mass politics tendency' and I do not see the building of SU as a political organisation as a contribution to this project. Building SU in this way is a contribution to the project of a ~~long~~ fusion in the long-term with IMG but this is clearly not the same project as the 'mass politics tendency' one. In the same way, joining in Socialist Challenge was a step in the way to the IMG; and these steps should not be taken unless it is clear that this is what a majority of BF wants.

SU and the IMG

As JT points out in his article in the August Bulletin, there are a lot of problems in working with the IMG inside SU (and outside). And unless there is a very substantial numbers of independents that gets involved with SU - there is a great danger that it becomes (seen) as an IMG front and there are many reasons why that would be unsatisfactory;

- IMG's line on the Labour Party
- their often manipulative attitude to grass roots struggles
- their overstress on elections as opposed to long term work in industry, in the community.
- their preference for IMG candidates as opposed to class struggle candidates.

Of course, the position that I am putting forward of keeping SU as an electoral front is for the present period - until the conference. It is possible (though not likely) that so much political energy is generated at the conference as to make it clear that another approach is needed. At present, unless we give time to SU and its supporters to grow slowly there is every danger that it dies a premature death.

PROPOSALS

1. That SU be an electoral front.
2. That independents involved be encouraged to set up groups like the alliance in Hull.
3. That SU candidates be adopted as soon as possible so that they can make a political intervention in their constituency.
4. That an action programme be adopted at the conference that is the basis on which SU campaigns are set up.
5. That every attempt be made to involve local militants in SU.

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