

How to deal with the SWP



Some advice for libertarian activists on working in campaigns alongside the Socialist Workers Party.

As non hierarchical organisers a great deal of the time we can avoid and shun the SWP. However there come moments, such as these, that we will be forced into working with them in cross movements endeavours with a broad range of people involved. Here are some pointers.

1. They are not the enemy!

They are often quite stupid, brash, divisive, argumentative and divisive. But a great deal of them are in it for the right reasons, and when they pull together for something that is right than can be effective. Sadly they lack experience on a lot of things, but booking coaches and paper sales, placards, banners, megaphones and mass demonstrations are all strong points.

The reasons you might think they're the enemy...

2. Caucusing

Before any mass meeting that involves a lot of interested new people they will caucus. They will have probably already got their key messages from central office, but if not, or if there is some bits they have to sort out, they will decide this before the meeting. This is then the party line. It will not be deviated from, and will be pushed through unless there is strong resistance. This can be tactically sound (the student anti cuts tactics so far) or moronic (Stop the War, Respect).

3. Executing the party line

a) Placement. The party members will place themselves in little clusters around the room, of there is enough of them. This gives them the comfort of comrades next to them, but also the appearance of being part of the overall crowd.

b) Vocal support. One or two people will mostly propose the party line, with cheering and clapping form other members around the room. This will encourage other neutral people to 'spontaneously' clap and feel these are people worth supporting - unaware usually of the affiliations (not that the SWP hide them, but just that most lefties are unknown to the mass of the populace). If in doubt, other members will start to re-propose the spokes peoples suggestions, until there is support for them, or complete non agreement (which is very rare).

c) Attack. The SWP will have lines of attack for counter proposals that they know are coming. They will have developed criticisms and will execute their opposition to them in the same way that they propose them. This tends to build a momentum that makes their proposals seem inevitable to the new person in the room (or even experienced activists)

4. One party line itself

Often built out of a complete lack of experience of campaigning on anything consistently, the central committee base their strategy on an in depth knowledge of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and a complete lack of knowledge of the real world. The determination to somehow force a revolutionary situation out of the current crisis means that they are constantly calling demo's and occupations, strikes and so forth without building the necessary community support. They hope by utilising existing support they can create a wider campaign, whilst the opposite is true as they use up all the energy of those who are up for it with ill planned and ill executed actions.

Sadly as a national party they are hard to ignore so what do you do?

How to deal with them

2 WAYS

1

WORK WITH THE SWP

Prepare ideas

It is good to go to meetings with prepared ideas that you and others support. This is very similar to caucusing and it is sadly one of the things that has to be done. Maybe usually in meetings we will see what individuals are bringing to the table and go with it, but in these larger and broader meetings it is good to have teased out at least a basic idea for proposals.

1) because turning up and moaning without a counter proposal looks stupid.

2) sitting around and chatting openly for ages about plans when no one has an idea and a lot of people don't know what or how to do something is exactly the kind of wishy washy crap people hate about hippies.

3) because it is the only way to avoid going down a dead end proposed by the SWP, or at least to be able to make one of their ideas work in practice (you will find that whilst there is talk of teach-ins and occupations they have a very different idea of how to make these work, and often little experience)

Interaction with the SWP

Do not let them know your counter proposals if you know they will disagree. This will harden their resolve and make them prepare harder pre-meeting. It also leads to the undemocratic situation where two leftie elites argue about what they think is best for the movement, then stitching up the decision before everyone else has got involved. Or they create a split and massive drawn out arguments in front of a lot of people who really don't care, they just wanted to get stuck into the Tories/big business/bosses/etc.

However be friendly and supportive. They have good ideas, and when they propose a good one, support it and get on with the nitty gritty of how to make it work. Do not argue for the sake of arguing, and let them take the lead vocally if they wish. At the end of the day actions speak louder than words, so if you get stuck into making a good idea work then that will shine through in the response and satisfaction of all.

Create space for autonomy

One of the key things early on is to make the case that people should be able to do as they wish, and act in small groups to support the overall cause. This can help create a diversity of

action and give new people the comfort to find their own space and not have to do everything on mass. There may have to be a discussion to set the parameters of this. Usually a lot will be against damage to property and an argument may have to be made to about this (not necessarily to encourage this in others, but to defend those who do) - solidarity in outward response, diversity in action

Admit defeat graciously

This is not something the SWP will do, but we have already learnt that you can't be right all the time and that building consensus has to take in new ideas. What you realise in a democracy, very quickly, is sometimes you're just wrong.

Be nice, not shouty

The SWP have a tendency to shout. This can put a lot of people off. It is worth not be so loud and brash for two reasons.

1) when proposing ideas you do not seem like Lenin come back to life about to storm the winter palace, this make people feel like they have not just joined some crazy sect because they're pissed off and want to do something about it.

2) you will not seem like a lunatic will you make counter proposals. Calm eloquence and determination will seem reasonable and worth supporting. Back that up with the necessary work to make a good idea happen and this will hopefully encourage people into acting autonomously and feeling comfortable about putting their own ideas forward in the face of withering opposition from the SWP.

Make the effort to not speak to just your friends in meetings - we see each other enough. Strike up a conversation with someone new, ask them their opinions and thoughts and empathise. Catch them at the next meeting and say hello, or even get a post meeting pint. Also be creative and support other creative ideas, this is the way forward for everyone.

Use Consensus - sometimes!

One of it's main strengths is that it allows for autonomy and stops the rushing of ideas to forced votes. Forced votes create an atmosphere of necessity and people may support something purely because they haven't had the time to consider other things, they also allow for people to be bullied in the ways described above.

However voting is not the enemy - and you may seem peculiar if you oppose it in all instances. Voting for political spokes can be positive, accountable and important (especially when the SWP line is not to fight for Free Education - hold them to that!).

2

WORK OUTSIDE SWP

One of the problems with the SWP is that you have no control over what they organise nationally and therefore no control over their decisions (or what you do). If you think these are strategically too difficult to carry out - or having the inverse effect of what is intended (like the constant demos now) - or if you think your energy could be better used elsewhere then do exactly that - work elsewhere. BUT

1. Make publicity a key focus of what you do. At times of general struggle there is no space for lifestylists lounging in their squats with just their clique, whilst the majority of people

doing something are being led down the garden path by idiots. This is how to create generations of apathy and distrust of the left. Use every trick in the book to get people involved and make sure there are a few people dedicated to just this. As long as it is for a worthwhile group that you are happy with, and that it is a plural group working in alliance with as many as possible.

2. Focus on creating space with your meetings and organisations for newcomers to get stuck in straight away and to be made welcome. People introducing themselves to new people, encouraging new ideas and giving them practical support to try them out, and a very clear structure of organisation (for instance working groups drawn up and put at the front of the meetings and explained every meeting) will help do this. Working groups based around occupation are good - students, public sector workers, etc.

3. National Network

Being part of a national network will be important as the ability to be part of the decision making process for nationally arranged events, or even a strategy will help in several ways. First it is nice to know you are part of something larger than your locality. Second you can share best practice and learn about what is good and what is to avoid - all of what we do is an experiment so we learn as we go along, but it is nice to avoid some mistakes! Third an overall strategy, brought together from collective knowledge for longer term struggle - and also for instantaneous and devastating national action - will hopefully help everyone achieve the end goal of the campaign. Or the final end goal - one solution!

4. Demo pack

What the SWP are doing is not to be ignored though, and to be assisted by your organisation as best as possible. Creating a demo pack, with lots of handy hints and tips - legal stuff, medical stuff, how to look after each other and dress right, maybe some pointers on the campaign - can be a simple way to be able to readily and easily support demonstrations with very little preparation. Banner making, soundsystems, samba bands and maybe an effigy or two can add colour! Maybe you could offer to take on a specific role in the demo - legal support, medical support, costumes - (or maybe keep it under wraps depending what role you plan to take) - this would require more planning and work, but can be rewarding to help something get pulled off.

And of course a little cheeky promo for your own organisation and any of its events would be good.

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