https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article951

Far Left

Defending the SSP model - a reply to the SWP

- IV Online magazine - 2006 - IV374 - January 2006 -

Publication date: Wednesday 18 January 2006

The new edition of the International Socialist Tendency's [Discussion Bulletin](#) (Bulletin No7 January 2006) carries the SWP Central Committee text on International Perspectives written for the SWP conference which was held on January 6-8.
 The short section of the text entitled "radical left" - which addresses the issue of building broad parties in Britain and across Europe - provides further insight into the way the SWP sees Respect and into the roots of some of the problems Respect is facing.It also contains an attack on the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) which cannot go unanswered.

In arguing that such parties must be built as loose coalitions rather than political parties he the document argues it is "essential that the new parties are sufficiently open politically and organisationally to be habitable for refugees from social democracy?".

It is "a mistake to argue, as some of the revolutionary left do, that these formations should convert themselves into parties' based on the traditional model of far left organisation - with their own papers, unitary membership rather than the quasi-federal structure adopted by Respect etc". Underlying this "is the idea that what the new parties are about is regrouping the existing far left rather than acting as a focus of a much larger political realignment that draws in new forces. This may help to explain why the main organisation to have adopted the far left model - the SSP - has undergone a deep crisis over the past year". <embl802|right> It is indeed essential that these new parties are sufficiently open politically and organisationally to be habitable for refugees from social democracy. It is crucial. But this is not resolved by insisting that such parties' should be built only as loose coalitions. Respect does not meet this criteria, yet it exists as a loose coalition. Respect is marked by precisely its failure to recruit such refugees in significant numbers.

In fact it is the party' form, which the SWP text rejects, rather than the loose coalition form of organisation which is best placed to provide the democratic space for such 'refugees' to feel comfortable. It is the party form which gives individuals a role to play is such an organisation and a chance of contributing to its political development. It is the "quasi-federal structure adopted by Respect" which makes them feel that they have very little influence once the organised groupings, particularly the SWP, decide to move. In Respect he rights, procedures, reports, information, collectivity and accountability which is provided by the party structure is not there in order that people can be pedantic, it is there to empower the individual member and make the organisation effective. In fact refugees from social democracy probably need such a structure more than most and would least appreciate the structureless of a loose coalition and its consequences. This structurelessness was clearly one of the factors behind George Galloway¹s disastrous individual decision to go on the reality TV show Big Brother. (At Respect's recent conference he argued that we could reach more young people through programmes like BB than though party newspapers). On regrouping the existing left. No one in Respect, as far as I am aware, holds the view that these new parties should be about regrouping the existing far left rather than acting as a focus for a much larger political realignment. On the contrary, the very point of these new parties is to attract forces beyond the ranks of the existing left. It is very difficult, however, to act as a focus for new forces without regrouping a substantial proportion of the existing left - Â- both the far-left and the left social democratic left - in the process. The SWP text falsely counterposes these two key factors and devalues the need to regroup as much of the existing left as possible in the process of wider regroupment. The text attacks the SSP for adopting what it calls thefar left model'. That is "regrouping the existing far left rather than acting as a focus of a much larger political realignment that draws in new forces". But this is not the SSP model!

True the SSP has been able to embrace the bulk of the existing left in Scotland, that is one of its greatest

achievements.

It was on the basis of that achievement, however, that it has been able to go one and recruit a membership well beyond the ranks of the existing Scottish left. This is reflected in the fact that it has three thousand members. To match that in England Respect would need to have five or six thousand members in London alone. And the SSP has more branches in Scotland than Respect has in England - showing that it is a more comprehensive national organisation.

The SSP may be experiencing problems, certainly they did not do well in the general election last year. But such parties will not simply go from victory to victory, there will be setbacks in the process and problems to be resolved. Respect will not be immune from such things either. But the SSP remains a serious force in Scotland - both in Parliament and outside it.

Finally the text claims that the SSP is the main organisation in Europe to adopted this false model: i.e. building itself as a party. Again nothing could be further from the truth. In fact for such organisations organising themselves as parties is normal. The Red Green Alliance in Denmark is organised as a party with all the normal trappings of a party - despite its name. The same goes for Left Bloc in Portugal. Rifoundazione Communista in Italy is a highly organised party with a daily paper.

The Left Party in Germany is new and not yet fully formed - but its planned development point towards a party structure. In fact the former PDS, its biggest component, is very much a party, and its other component the WASG, is moving in that direction.