

Discussion Document on Methods of Work

General

We need to re-affirm some basic principles of good methods of work. Good methods of work should be the hallmark of a communist organisation. Even though we are small, we need to work in a principled way in order to make progress. For some time, methods of work in the League have not been good.

There are two basic principles that we should discuss, study and apply: democratic centralism and our method of leadership, the mass line.

Democratic centralism: "Within the ranks of the people, democracy is correlative with centralism and freedom with discipline. They are the two opposites of a single entity, contradictory as well as united, and we should not one-sidedly emphasise one to the denial of the other..."

It is even more important for a communist organisation to work in a strong democratic centralist way. There are two main reasons, both of which are related to the need to work collectively, not individualistically. We need democratic centralism in order to maintain the link between theory and practice; to concentrate correct ideas upwards and for strengthened policies etc. to come back down and be put into practice. Collectively, we can concentrate the best ideas, both within the organisation and from the masses. Secondly, in order to put ideas into practice we need to work collectively, with unity of action and discipline. This is important now. As a small organisation, if we work together we can make a big impact which is impossible if we work as a number of separate individuals. At later stages, it may be a matter of life and death that we work together.

The League has gone through periods when it has one-sidedly emphasised centralism and the opposite, one-sidedly emphasised democracy. Since the last Congress, we have not worked in a united way and individuals and branches have often "done their own thing". The fact that at the last Congress, there was not a high level of unity around line was probably the basis for this. However, individuals, branches and particularly the CC should take responsibility for the lack of democratic centralism in the recent period.

Mass Line: "Take the ideas of the masses and concentrate them, then go to the masses, persevere in the ideas and carry them through, so as to form correct ideas of leadership - such is the basic method of leadership."

We should aim to practice the mass line wherever we work. We need to apply the mass line both within the organisation and with others outside it, at the place of work, in broad fronts etc.

We should not use the idea of the mass line as an excuse for not doing the necessary theoretical work. But in order to turn our theory into a useful tool to change the world, it has to be linked with reality, with the real experience of ordinary people. In the course of applying our theory, we will also strengthen it, find out mistakes etc.

Both democratic centralism and the mass line involve a constant process of testing ideas in practice, concentrating ideas and passing them down again. This is a constant spiral.

If we are serious about building good democratic centralism within the organisation, we need to develop a good style of criticism and self-criticism. We do not criticise others or ourselves for personal reasons but in order to strengthen the organisation and develop policies, sort out problems etc. We need to get rid of liberalism. We also need to be more practical and

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realistic about what we take on, time limits etc. so that we can reliably do the work we undertake. If we are serious about the mass line, we will seriously listen to other people, whether members or not. In particular, we need to have methods of work which enable women, working class people and national minority people play a full part. We need to pay attention to combatting chauvinist and sexist methods of work within the organisation.

Central Committee

As the committee responsible for leadership within the League, the CC needs to give a lead in making a self-criticism for bad methods of work in the last period.

The CC has, at best, given patchy leadership to the organisation and most recently has given even less. One form this has taken has simply been lack of communication between the CC and the branches. There is considerable liberalism on the CC. Often work is not done on time and this has not always been taken seriously.

This document can be used for a fuller discussion of this.

As mentioned earlier, at the last Congress, membership of the League was split between a majority and substantial minority. While not being an excuse for bad methods of work, leadership etc. this did not form a strong basis on which to build a lively organisation, with effective centralism as well as full democracy. It looks as though on some questions there will be a far higher level of unity within the League at the forthcoming Congress, and on others there is recognition of the need for serious study and debate, as well as struggle. This is an opportunity not just to strengthen political and ideological unity on questions of line but to look self-critically at our methods of work and strengthen our working unity as a collective organisation.