

**IOPS***international organization
for a Participatory Society*

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IOPS, parecon, and plurality

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Tim Cornelis

15th Dec 2012

My view on IOPS.

Ideology

The first thing I noticed when reading some of the information on the website was that the interim organisation's theoretical views is too much in debt to 'parecon', such as its theory of a "coordinator class." The aim of the IOPS is, or should be, advocacy of a participatory society in general, not parecon specifically. It should be plural enough to welcome anti-Stalinist Leninists (Trotskyists), communists, democratic socialists, Marxists, left communists, inclusive democracy-advocates, syndicalists, anarchists, 'participists', libertarian socialists, and communalists, while not plural enough to welcome reformists such as social democrats who seek to not only work within the framework of the current system, but also merely adjust capitalism to a friendlier form. However at this point the bulk of communists, revolutionary socialists, and anarchists are excluded from IOPS due to a commitment to 'parecon' principles, such as "workers who work longer or harder or at more onerous conditions doing socially valued labor (including training) earn proportionately more for doing so," which would exclude anyone who believes in the principle of distribution according to needs.

Additionally, I believe advocacy of participatory planning should be a requisite for membership. I do not however believe this should be of the 'parecon' variety. There are many variants of participatory planning that have been advocated throughout the last 150 years or so, including guild socialism, council communism, anarcho-communism, inclusive democracy, and Bookchin's communalism. This seems to coincide with the current IOPS-stance.

The IOPS can fill a vacuum: a complementary, non-sectarian and inclusive socialist organisation. Currently, all kinds of left-wing political sects operate alone, while we have far more in common than we diverge on relevant matters. Often what we disagree on is semantics or irrelevant historical arguments (think Kronstadt or what we call the Soviet Union). An inclusive socialist organisation could potentially attract socialists who are not interested in either anarchism or Marxism or any other variant, but merely just want to advance anticapitalism. I can imagine that being compelled to have an understanding of anarchist or Marxist theory in order to be able to join a political organisation (since currently political organisations are centred only around such ideologies) is an obstacle to many. The IOPS could be a broad and approachable alternative and as such it has a greater potential to grow.

Thus, specific theories regarding whether a "coordinator class" is an accurate theory should be left to individual members, not the organisation. At the same time we should not allow oppressive mentalities to enter our organisation, such as homophobia or Stalinism. Membership should thus be restricted to those who advocate:

- Participatory democracy
- Workers' self-management
- Participatory/Decentralised planning
- Socialism from below
- Class struggle to achieve this

Currently, 'parecon' is featured disproportionately on the website, in rhetoric, program, and promotion. If the IOPS seeks to be an International of 'parecontists' this is fine, but it doesn't appear that this is the explicit set up.

Strategy

In terms of strategy, it is important to delimit our activities, as to prevent some chapters becoming partisan-oriented and sectarian whom mobilise and cheer on particular political parties. We may attract people from Green, Socialist, and Communist Parties and as such this would be impracticable as well as undesirable. Since we seek an end to parliamentarianism as political decision-making structure, we should not vote or vote with reservations. Mobilising to vote should be left to the respective parties themselves and their sympathisers, not the IOPS. The IOPS should neither condemn nor condone voting, yet attempt to provoke

discussion and critical analysis of voting in order to advance its alternative: participatory democracy.

The IOPS should seek to mobilise people and workers outside and against the system. Extra-parliamentary activity, therefore, is fundamental. Direct action (e.g. the use of strike action or picket lines) is what IOPS should focus on. Direct action will be employed to fight for intermediate demands, such as prevention of job loss. However, it is important to remember that fighting for these demands is a part of the strategy of mobilising people. Organising communities and workplaces to form self-managed solidarity committees, as well as linking individual struggles to broader and class-oriented struggles, is key. In this sense, we shouldn't be activists (organising ourselves against X), but organisers: organising others against X.

The IOPS should operate on a broad platform for collective struggles such as: anti-sexism, anti-racism, migration rights, anti-nationalism, ecology, sustainability, workers' struggles, emancipation and so forth. Intervening in labour and social struggles by IOPS chapters should not be done in order to realise intermediate demands while flying the IOPS' banner high which may attract new members, but rather in order to steer those struggles into a more revolutionary direction and giving it a permanent character, for example by organising 'permanent' self-governed committees which continually seek to challenge social issues through direct action. By this means we create and sustain a solidarity network of popular action, extra-parliamentarianism, and revolutionary struggles.

Social Insertion

One aspect of the IOPS' strategy should be "social insertion," in my humble opinion, which means participating in organisations that share commonalities in ideology, and promote our ideas for a participatory society. Not with the intention of hijacking it or foster ideological homogeneity (which would be entryism), but to simply seek, with the members of that organisation, to fight for common goals and hopefully this common struggle will attract people to our organisation and ideology.

For example, we would cooperate with the Pirate Party in its advocacy for direct democracy (and hope to make it more face-to-face than online-based), we would cooperate with the occupy-movement in creating networks for participation, or with Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa, Landless Peasant Movements, housing activists, and other various social movements or anarchist, socialist, and communist political parties. This way we attempt to create a network of and by socialists centred around participatory democracy. A network that hopefully will be able to challenge the current system.

Replies 1



Dave Jones

7th Jan 2013

This is a well thought out proposal Tim. Because I am a libertarian (revolutionary) socialist, I have no problem with "to each according to sacrifice (duration, onerousness, parecon criteria) but I know communists who prefer "according to need" and know this is a real issue that will have to be taken up by the larger body. IOPS cannot be all things to all people so we will see how it shakes out.

Because I follow the Gramscian notion of hegemony, I don't think of "entryism" as a problem and would complexify exploited subjectivities beyond class (proletarian, bourgeois, capitalist)

Great piece.