

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO. 70

AUGUST 1983

National Committee, 13.8.83: recommendations etc to conference

National Committee, 13.8.83: recommendations to Standing Orders
Committee

Standing Orders Committee report

Report from the NC on the Socialist League

12 points on the minority question in Ireland Kinnell

The Oxford Faction threatens a split Carolan, Kinnell

NATIONAL COMMITTEE 13.8.83: RECOMMENDATIONS ETC. TO CONFERENCE

IRELAND: BOMBINGS

Point (a) was unanimously accepted by the NC, and point (b) of Jones's amendment, too, with the modification (agreed by Jones) to replace "Within this struggle..." at the beginning of the second sentence by "In this context..."

The resolution thus reads:

1. We give unconditional support to the fight of the Catholic minority, and those organisations which fight in its defence, in Northern Ireland, against British imperialism (and its Irish representatives) and for a united Ireland.
2. We fight for British troops to get out - unconditionally and immediately.
3. We support the right of the IRA to strike against British military and state targets - even if we may question the tactical wisdom - but we condemn attacks on civilians. These criteria apply to events in Britain and Ireland equally.
4. We support the struggle of the republican movement to drive out British imperialism, while we criticise the nationalist and militarist limitations of the IRA leadership. In this context we counterpose a fight to link the struggle against partition with an all-Ireland class movement. This is the struggle to develop a revolutionary socialist leadership. We couple this with a campaign of solidarity within the British labour movement. We do not use the socialist programme on nationalism to avoid taking concrete positions on struggles led by petty bourgeois nationalists.
5. Debate should continue on the immediate prospects and possibilities of the struggle in the North, etc.

The outstanding amendment from Jones is:

Add to point 3, "This criticism is secondary, and presented in such a manner".

In addition, the National Committee is tabling a further resolution of its own:

This conference rejects the position of the amendment to the above resolution defeated at the December 1981 NC, i.e. to delete all point 3 and replace by:

'We are opposed to guerillaism as a strategy. We are for the weapon of mass struggle and the working class. The armed struggle of the Provisionals substitutes itself for the mass of the class and the politics of the class. But in defending the right of the oppressed to struggle, we cannot select parts in this struggle to "condemn" more than the other parts, and we are careful in our criticism always to distance ourselves from bourgeois reaction. We recognise that the distinction between military and civilian targets is not a clear one and we cannot therefore "support" one and "oppose" the other.'

WIGANISATION

The NC recommends support for the resolution on Wiganisation - which is only the proposals (section 9, points a, b, c) at the end of Oliver's document, not the whole document.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS TO STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

1. UNEMPLOYED

That the new resolution being drafted by the Southwark comrades be taken as the basis for conference discussion (rather than the existing documents).

2. ITEMS TO BE REMITTED TO N.C.

That Black Work and the McInnes/Abbot resolutions not be given conference plenary time, but instead be referred to the NC.

3. COMPOSITING

That resolutions on CND, etc., be composited if possible before the conference.

4. SUGGESTED CONFERENCE AGENDA

Saturday	10.30	Registration
	11	SOC report
	11.30	Commissions/workshops. (There would be 3 workshop sessions, on CND, unemployed, and black work. The idea is to enable the comrades specially involved in these areas of work to discuss the resolutions in closer detail than is possible in full conference session, to draft amendments, etc. On black work, according to the NC proposal, any recommendations would go forward to the NC rather than a full conference session).
	12.30	Break
	1	Wiganisation
	2	Building WSL
Sunday	3.30	Bombings
	6	End
	10	Federalism
	1	Break
	1.45	Unemployed
	2.45	CND
	5	Close

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE REPORT TO CONFERENCE

1. The proposed agenda for the conference is:

Saturday

- 10.30 Registration
- 11 SOC Report
- 11.30 Workshops - CND
 - Unemployed
 - Black work
- 1 Dinner break
- 1.45 Ireland: bombings
- 3.45 Fund appeal
- 4 Ireland: federalism
- 6 Close

Sunday

- 10 Building the WSL
- 11.30 Unemployment
- 1 Dinner break
- 1.45 CND
- 4 Wiganisation
- 5 Close

2. Deadlines for resolutions:

- a) Resolutions on Ireland, Wiganisation, and Building the WSL to be at the centre by first post Friday August 126.
- b) Resolutions on CND and unemployment to be given to the SOC by the end of the conference session on Saturday. (This is to allow the workshops on Saturday morning to 'composite' existing material, if possible, and to add further points).

3. Resolutions not to be taken at conference:

- a) SOC recommends the following items be referred to the NC:
 - Black work
 - Using our programme
 - McInnes/Abbot resolutions on the paper, journal, fares & personal experience.

This is in order to allow adequate time for discussion of those items remaining on the agenda.

- b) SOC recommends that the resolution on Ireland (bombings) from the NC of 13.8.83:

'to reject the position of the amendment to the December 1981 NC resolution on Ireland, defeated at that NC',

be not taken.

The SOC proposes that it is unnecessary to discuss a position which has been rejected by the organisation, at the NC, and which has no support, in terms of resolutions in favour of it, from any member of the organisation.

4. Conduct of conference business.

- a) The SOC will propose in its first report that:

'No points of order relating to the order of conference business may be raised from the floor following the SOC report. Proposals for altering the order of conference business may be made only through the SOC'.

b) The SOC will propose in its first report that: 'In the event of debates overrunning the times agreed in the agenda, the debate on Wiganisation will be referred to the NC'.

5. Emergency resolution.

Since the SOC meeting on August 20 we have received an emergency resolution on the Labour leadership election from Mellor and Gunther.

'Conference believes that a victory for Kinnock in the Labour leadership election would be a disaster for the labour movement. Conference therefore resolves to campaign only for Heffer and to reverse the previous NC decision to support Kinnock in the event of Heffer being eliminated'.

The SOC will make a recommendation on this at the start of conference.

Weightman

REPORT FROM THE N.C. ON THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE

The NC on August 13 received a report on the progress, or lack of it, of discussions with the Socialist League.

At the last meeting with them, we delivered our letter (dated March 28, printed in IB 50), outlining the political issues as we saw them and proposing discussions and joint work. The SL said they would reply.

We received no reply. On June 15 we wrote to them pointing out we had no reply, and asking if they could reply. We have still had no response.

The NC decided:

1. To continue joint work with the SL where appropriate as in the past;
2. To make no new initiative towards the SL. To let the question of discussions with them lie on the table.
3. To inform our own members, and SL members in so far as we have contact with them, of the situation.

12 POINTS ON THE MINORITY QUESTION IN IRELAND

1. The Protestants of Northern Ireland are a distinct community within the Irish people. They have a distinct economic, political, and cultural history.

Despite the privileges which the Protestants have enjoyed historically, they cannot be defined as simply a group of exploiters imposed on top of the Irish class structure. The Northern Protestant workers form a large chunk of the working class.

There can be no socialist revolution in Ireland without the unity of large sections of the Catholic and Protestant workers. There can be no democratic solution in Ireland - that is, no solution offering the best, clearest conditions for the free development of the class struggle - without democratic relations between the majority (Catholic) and minority (Protestant) community.

2. The Protestants cannot be compared with the whites of South Africa or the European settlers of colonial Algeria. The economic differentials are much smaller. In South Africa and Algeria the income differential is/was, according to various estimates, between 30:1 and 6:1. In Northern Ireland there are more poor Protestants than poor Catholics.

They cannot be defined simply as a political grouping - 'pro-imperialist.' This would be as wrong-headed as discussing our attitude to the white workers of the USA simply in terms of our attitude to racists, without bearing in mind that the workers involved are defined by a social position more fundamentally than by their political views in a given period (even a long period).

Nor can the Protestants be defined as simply an extension or a catspaw of Britain. Generally they have been used by British imperialism, and have allowed themselves to be used, against the majority of the Irish people. But they have a distinct identity and distinct interests. These have expressed themselves at times in democratic revolt against Britain (late 18th century), more recently in ultra-reactionary opposition to Britain's timid reforming plans - eg, 1974 Orange general strike against power-sharing and Council of Ireland,

3. The problem of relations between Britain and Ireland, and the problem of relations between majority and minority within Ireland, can and must be separated.

Britain has no rights in Ireland and should get out. That does not resolve the problem of relations between majority and minority within Ireland.

4. If the Protestants are simply identified with Britain, or with their current reactionary politics, then the only possible perspective is to drive them out of Ireland or beat them down by force.

This perspective is not viable - who is going to drive them out or conquer them? - and cannot be the basis for a democratic solution giving the best conditions for class struggle, still less for a socialist solution.

An attempt to put this perspective into practice could only result in full-scale sectarian civil war, a bloodbath, repartition, and the poisoning of the Irish politics for many years and decades to come by communal hatred.

5. Even bourgeois Irish nationalism has traditionally accepted the Protestants as part of the Irish nation - thus the Irish tricolour, uniting the Green and the Orange.

But in bourgeois nationalist attitudes - and even more so, scandalously, in parts of the left - there is often a slippage whereby the Irish nation is defined, fundamentally, as the Catholic Irish people, and the Protestants are accepted in so far as, individually or in small groups, they separate from their own community and identify with the Catholic Irish.

Thus Socialist Action: "Sinn Fein wins 42% of vote" (i.e., 42% of Catholic vote). Thus IRSP: "In the eyes of the Irish people they (IRA PoWs) are political prisoners, and everybody in Ireland accepts that" (i.e. the Protestants, because of their undoubtedly reactionary views on the prisoners, are not part of "the Irish people" or "everybody in Ireland").

We cannot support or endorse a perspective of uniting the Irish people by way of the Protestants, bit by bit, ceasing to identify themselves as a separate community and instead identifying with the Catholic-Irish - i.e. by the Orange fading away into Green.

Class struggle can convince Catholic and Protestant workers that they have more in common with each other, as workers, than either have with the exploiters of their own community. Disillusion with Britain; awareness that the Northern Ireland Catholics will never submit to a renewed Protestant Ascendancy; awareness that there is no option but to come to terms with the majority in Ireland - such influences could conceivably, if coupled with confidence that there would be democratic treatment of the minority within a united Ireland, push the Ulster Protestants, or a big enough section of them, towards a perspective of Green-Orange reconciliation.

No force on earth will push the Protestants into dissolving themselves into Green nationalism.

Moreover, it is no part of a Marxist programme to demand that the identity of minorities be dissolved into a 'model' national majority. We are in favour of generating the broadest international outlook through maximum freedom for local diversity.

6. If we say that our general attitude to minorities does not apply to the Protestants because their minority identity is tied up with a history of sectarian oppression, then we fail to rise above Green nationalism.

If the alternatives offered to the Protestants are to retain their Orange identity, together with all the oppressive sectarianism, or to dissolve into Green nationalism, then they will opt for 'No Surrender'. Any democratic programme for Ireland - and therefore, also, any socialist programme - must offer them a perspective in which they shed their oppressive sectarianism, but have their minority identity respected.

Generally, to argue that oppressor nations, groups, or communities are not entitled to general democratic rights, is merely to legitimate reverse oppression. History shows that privileged or oppressor groups can rapidly become oppressed (Tamils in Sri Lanka, Asians in East Africa, southerners in Chad, etc. etc.), and vice versa.

Lenin's principle: "A struggle against the privileges and violence of the oppressing nation and no toleration of the striving

for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation" should guide us also on the relation between communities and groups within a nation.

We do not attempt to erase or suppress the national identity of even the most bloodstained oppressor nations - Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, etc. We side with the oppressed against the oppressor on a programme of the most democratic relations possible between nations, peoples, majorities and minorities.

7. To support individual democratic rights within a united Ireland is vital, but does not raise us above the level of Green nationalism.

The arsenal of Marxism provides us with a proposal which can raise us above that level.

As a general principle Marxists favour regional or provincial autonomy for markedly distinct areas within a state, together with the most decentralised possible local government. "A consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government ... calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government ..." (Lenin).

This general principle should apply to the mainly-Protestant areas within a united Ireland.

8. The proposal for a united, independent Ireland, with within it a measure of self-government for regions, and within those regions maximum local autonomy for towns, districts, etc., can offer both majority and minority the maximum of democratic guarantees possible without infringing on the rights of the other community.

The Catholic majority of Ireland would have the rights of a majority within all-Ireland politics. Catholic minorities in mainly Protestant regions would have the protection of local government (town/district) autonomy, plus the constitutional guarantees (courts, bills of rights, appeal procedures, inspectorates) of the federal government. Likewise Protestant minorities in mainly Catholic regions. The concentrated Protestant minority in the North East would have the safeguard of regional institutions.

So far as formal democratic constitutional provisions can ever guarantee anything, this proposal would protect the rights of both Catholic majority and Protestant minority, while allowing neither to oppress the other.

9. Formal democratic constitutional provisions can never in fact guarantee anything if the conflicts of real social forces dictate otherwise.

The essential purpose of the proposal above is not as advice to the powers-that-be, but as part of a socialist programme around which Irish socialists and Republicans could assemble a real united working-class force, capable of being a real material guarantee against all sectarian discrimination.

10. The proposal for regional and local autonomy, like all our other democratic demands, is part of a socialist programme. It does not contradict, limit, blunt, or stand as an alternative to that programme.

But we fight not only for the whole programme, but also for

the various parts of it. The specific democratic demand for regional and local autonomy within a united Ireland has a special relevance in the current situation.

The struggle in Northern Ireland is caught in a stalemate. The fundamental alignment of forces has not changed since 1972. The Northern Catholics - 10% of the Irish people - are in justified, courageous revolt. The Northern Protestants (20%) are hostile. The Southern Catholics (70%) are sporadically sympathetic to the Northern Catholics, but Southern politics show no sign of any breakthrough that could make influences from the South a decisive force for progress in the North.

There is a grave danger of sectarian civil war. If it came to that, we would have to support the Catholics, but the outcome would certainly be not progress but repartition, massive bloodshed, terrible poisoning of Irish politics.

The proposal for regional and local autonomy is not a cure-all, but it does offer a possibility of a progressive outcome from the present situation, or something resembling it, without demanding external events (revolutionary class struggle in the South, etc.) as a precondition. At the same time, the specific proposal in no way hinders us from fighting for the rest of our programme.

11. A united Ireland in the foreseeable future would probably involve an element of coercion against the Protestants: a clear indication that renewal of the Orange state was not possible, and repression against die-hard Protestant groups. That is radically different from full-scale conquest of the Protestants.

Full-scale conquest of the Protestants is not materially possible. In any case it cannot be part of a socialist programme. An attempt at such full-scale conquest would mean bitter, lasting division of the working class, and no prospect of a socialist movement in Ireland for a long time.

The idea - advocated by the USFI, RCP, etc - that the socialist revolution in Ireland can be carried out through war against the Protestant workers must be firmly rejected.

12. We must support the oppressed against the oppressors. But we cannot decide our politics according to the logic of anti-imperialist and pro-imperialist 'camps'. We must have an independent programme.

Kinnell

THE OXFORD FACTION THREATENS A SPLIT

Carolan, Kinnell

INTRODUCTION

The many charges and allegations -- all of them ridiculous -- contained in the IB 63 article entitled, 'A serious problem of democracy in the group', will be discussed in the course of the present document.

First, however, comrades should note that under cover of a preposterous hue and cry about the alleged plans of Kinnell, Hill and Carolan to drive the Oxford faction out of the WSL, they themselves threaten split.

The alleged breaches of democracy threaten, they say, not only the democratic rights of all the members of the WSL, "but (also) the minimum democratic conditions necessary for our faction to continue as a minority without being crushed".

Now the faction is a minority -- less than a quarter of the organisation. Plainly they would not let themselves be 'crushed'. What's left? Appeal to the membership. And if the membership don't endorse Smith and Jones and their slanderous document -- split.

The story of alleged breaches of democracy -- which, as we shall see, are not 'breaches' of anything at all but the pretensions of Smith and Jones -- is a story designed to prepare the ground for a split. Even if their 'charges' were true, and their interpretation of our intentions towards them exact, that would not justify this grotesque irresponsibility.

How seriously they mean this as an immediate split threat is not clear. The available indications are that Smith and Jones do not mean it very seriously. Instead, they are irresponsibly indulging in semi-split agitation, (a) to stiffen up the faction, (b) to appeal to the 'middle ground' in the organisation.

Nevertheless they have -- on the basis of inventions, pinpricks, and trivialities -- publicly raised the perspective that the way things are 'threatening' to go will leave them no option but to split. Such an approach will push the entire faction towards a split -- whether they consciously want it now, or not.

THE CHARGES

Smith quotes Carolan saying words that Smith construes as an admission/declaration that Carolan wants to drive the Oxford faction out of the WSL. The reader who pays attention to the text and not the emotion-toned phrases of Smith will have noticed already that he does not make his case.

"Comrade Smith raised this at the EC on July 29, and the response of Carolan essentially confirmed it. Carolan said a split would be serious but not very serious; it would be a splitting away, he said, of a segment of the organisation which would be destroyed in the process -- the organisation itself would continue and survive".

We believe that the reaction of the majority of the WSL to such quotations will be the opposite of what Smith hopes for. We believe (and if we are wrong the organisation is in serious trouble) that the majority of the members of the WSL will join us in telling the faction leaders: No, you can't blackmail us. You are mistaken if you believe that you have the power to shatter the WSL at will, and can use that power to get your way. The WSL will survive without you if it has to.

THE FACTION

Since the February and April conferences the Oxford faction and one or two of their fellow-travellers have been preaching woe and doom for the organisation. Many of the rank and file members of the faction, and all of its NC members, are extremely alienated from the organisation. Most (though not all) of them express their attitude to the League most clearly in their financial contributions and paper sales.

After the two conferences had rejected their documents and most of their candidates for the NC, they then declared a faction. If there is a precedent in the history of the Marxist movement for this back-to-front, upside-down way of going about things, then we have never heard of it.

We have not commented on the declaration of the faction so far, because we hoped it might not develop aggressively and we feared by attacking it to give it a life it might otherwise not have had. The circumstances and manner in which the faction was declared gave us reason to hope that Smith's main reason for declaring it was to provide some people who might otherwise have gone out with the IF a framework for remaining in the WSL.

But logically the declaration of the faction immediately after the conferences was a major move towards splitting the organisation. We chose to hope for a better outcome, but it was predictable that the faction would take on a life of its own, whatever Smith initially intended.

The platform of the faction was also a bad sign. Smith scooped together a bundle of documents which had one essential thing in common - they were hostile to the majority position. They had very little else in common.

Take the youth document of Hunt. Hunt voted with the IF on many issues, including on youth; and the IF supported Hunt's youth document. Probably Hunt helped push some wavering youth into the IF.

Hunt had been full-time youth organiser for most of 18 months. We had a formula allowing great scope for autonomous youth work outside official J. structures. But what did Hunt say about the failures of our youth work? Not enough autonomous activity. The answer? Scapegoat the J. orientation and instead propose (effectively) a reversion to an 'independent' youth movement. (The proposal for a full structure, with branches in every area meeting fortnightly, 'regional committees, a tighter national organisation', etc. could mean nothing else, given our resources). At the same time he proposed that our youth tendency should fuse with the SL and the Lambertists.

At a stroke of the pen, all that is now official faction policy! Why? Because of a reasoned political argument? No - because it is 'oppositional' ammunition.

Labour Party: If we had taken the LP question at the first part of the conference, Smith would have had as his platform a few trivial amendments to IB 39. The actual differences between us and Smith (as distinct from others in the faction, including Jones) on the LP are secondary. We charged against Smith that with his wild, distorted polemics against us, and his pandering to sectarian trends, he would blunder us into sectarian isolation.

Women: The faction have incorporated, en bloc, the vast, rambling and incoherent bog of a document called IB 34. Personal histories of various comrades, historical polemics against the I-CL's work in the Working Women's Charter - all are now factional positions.

And then, to keep their options open, the faction threw in "differences on international questions not yet discussed by conference..."

Attempt to discuss such questions in a comradely way? to argue each issue on its merits without presuming that it is factional? to take up theoretical arguments seriously by responding to documents like IB 49 or contributing at the summer school? No! As from April 1983, all 'international questions', from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, are factional property - if Smith and Jones care to take up the

'option' they have established in their faction declaration.

Smith and Jones are not sufficiently prepared to engage in a serious discussion on imperialism at, for example, the summer weekend school. But they're quite prepared enough to make the issue a factional banner.

FIRST COMPLETE THE DISCUSSION, THEN FACTIONALISE ...

Smith's document declaring the faction is itself a clear testimony of the blind factionalist political logic.

He writes: "a process of political discussion has been completed...", "now the discussion has been completed; the internal situation of the movement, which has been wholly factional for some time, should be recognised as such".

How's that for a theory of the Bolshevik party! We have prolonged, time-consuming, partly paralysing discussions. There is an authoritative conference decision. The formula of Bolshevism is that then the party, which is not a petty bourgeois talking-shop, acts on its decisions. The minority awaits the verdict of experience or more mature consideration.

Smith? The conference has merely "completed the discussion". Now the factionalism can really begin!

The attitude and the politics here are not proletarian revolutionary politics, geared to doing a job in the working class, but the politics of the petty bourgeois discussion circle. Smith came out of that conference and in his declaration dissolved the WSL - as far as he could - into factional 'spheres of influence'.

His explanation? "Comrades Carolan, Hill and Kinnell, who now control the majority leadership of the organisation, have a hardened factional approach to those now in the minority. This is exemplified in IB 35, IB 58, their voting in relation to the Glasgow resolution which called for the leadership of the IT to be expelled at conference, and the far-reaching party-building document ('Building the WSL', IB 50) which they attempted to get on the agenda without prior discussion. Amongst other things, the document appears designed to outline the way the new majority leadership will take control of the organisation over the coming months. This situation cannot be countered in other than an organised way".

This is the core of it. The political documents are window-dressing. The proof of it is that the faction have had nothing to say about the LP, industrial work, etc. since the conference.

The references to the voting on the Glasgow motion to expel the IT leadership are simply inaccurate. Hill voted for it, Carolan and Kinnell abstained; all three of us voted against taking the motion.

But what are the politics of that issue? For a year before the IT split, Smith, Jones and their allies stopped the organisation from defending itself against a blatant raid by the RWL. It was the third time in their experience that they had seen the organisation 'colonised'. (The first two times it was Spartacist groups within the old WSL). But Smith and Jones seem incapable of learning from their own experience.

If decisive action had been taken earlier, then we could have limited the damage. If the whole WSL leadership had shown a hard united front against the colonists from the beginning, we could have limited the damage. Instead Smith and Jones saw the IT, the RWL, etc as allies against those they opposed on the EC - 'the main enemy at home'.

What about it now, comrade Smith? What about your record of protecting the sectarian colonists right up to the point that they walked out on you? The Americans have an expression to describe no-hopers: third-time losers. Why were you so incapable of learning from the experience of two waves of Spartacist colonisation? Why? Blind factionalism.

The leaders of the IT should, on the merits of the case, have been expelled at conference. Our dilemma was that we were stopped from pushing for this by the fact that the Oxford proto-faction would have joined the IT in a walk-out.

The organisation is entitled to an account from Smith and Jones on this matter.

The point on 'Building the WSL' reads strangely in August 1983. Every bit of that document which we moved for voting when we first put it out is now going before the third 1983 conference with Smith's assent (as of the EC, August 3), though he continues to disagree with some of the explanations we give for our practical proposals.

But the meat of the explanation, the most obviously heartfelt complaint, is this section: "Comrades Carolan, Hill and Kinnell... have a hardened factional approach to those now in the minority. This expressed in IB 35, IB 58..."

THE POLITICS OF THE SICILIAN VENDETTA

This, note, was before the organisation had the chance to catch its breath after the conference; before the first meeting of the new NC; before the election of the new EC; before any detailed discussion of post-conference arrangements.

Assume - though we don't - that Smith had real fears of being discriminated against on the EC, being cut off from areas of work, being treated harshly as a defeated minority. What would someone committed to building the organisation and concerned to observe the norms proposed by Leon Trotsky, J.P. Cannon, etc., do about it? He would at least try to find out if the fears were justified. He would either wait and see, or ask representatives of the majority what their intentions were.

Smith did neither. On the contrary, when the rest of us on the EC asked whether he would discuss allocations, committees, etc, before forming a faction; what guarantees might serve to calm his fears; etc, he replied:

"I expected such a proposal. But it's gone beyond that. We could discuss easing tensions, etc., but not as a way of stopping us forming a faction. We would just be persuaded not to form a faction then subjected to the same old manoeuvres..." (EC April 28).

He wanted a faction and he was going to have a faction, and that was that!

In fact the declaration of a faction had little to do with the stated motives in Smith's statement. It had everything to do with (a) placating some people in Oxford who Smith feared would go with the IT, and (b) keeping the door open for a deal with the IT. (Smith spoke to their conference shortly before they separated from us).

Smith virtually declared the faction on 'instructions' from the RWL/LOR. At the TILC meeting on April 24 they put down a resolution calling for such a faction. Smith and Jones's first reaction was to storm out of the meeting. That was Sunday forenoon. By Sunday evening Smith was organising his faction. (We learned about it on the EC at the end of the week). It seemed probable to us at the time that the faction declaration was intended to cut some people off from going with the IT. But factionalism has its own logic.

In retrospect that act of Smith's can be assessed for what it was: the first step towards a split. It is not an irreversible step - yet. The direction is very clear, however, and emerges in Smith's IB 63 document.

Note that in the declaration of the faction it is not what we do - in the election of the new EC, in the apportioning of jobs and positions in the League, for example - that matters. It is our 'attitude' to them, and what they allege we have in the past done to them, that matters.

IBs 35 and 58 were insults, outrages, slanders, they say. They are unforgiveable. They will never be forgotten!

This is the politics not of Marxism but of the Sicilian vendetta. Each factional blow and 'wrong' must be avenged, in a never-ending cycle.

* At the NC on August 13 Smith went back on the EC agreement and moved that the 'Building the WSL' resolution be taken off the conference agenda. What attitude he will have at the conference itself is impossible to say.

We believe that what IBs 35 and 58 said was true and needed to be said. We also believe that the synthetic outrage from Smith - whose political stock-in-trade is to accuse us of 'reformism', 'capitulation to imperialism', etc. - is pretty sick.

But in any case Smith's approach here is utterly incompatible with a democratic centralist organisation. It hopelessly confuses personal subjective reactions with politics. It is normal that in an organisation like ours disputes and faction fights occur. Inevitably things are said - whether justified or not is not the point here - which cause anger. But once the decision is made, the disputants have to work together for the cause that keeps them in a common organisation.

The Bolshevik organisation is not a group of friends, nor is it an ever-adoring fan-club for designated leaders. Some of the present writers have had bitter disputes before now. Kinnell and Carolan, for example, had a dispute about the Iranian revolution. Carolan, in the minority, walked out of an NC meeting - for the only time in his life. He would still say some disgruntled things about the way that issue was handled. But the issue is past. The politics of the Sicilian vendetta has no place in resolving such conflicts.

Yet it seems to be the essence of Smith's appeal.

PALESTINE

Smith's document calls for a reply giving a true account of what has happened in the organisation since the April conference. But time and space do not allow us to tell the full story.

All we can do here is respond directly to some of Smith's major points.

Smith argues that the EC majority undemocratically changed the League's public position on Palestine.

What is the political gist of it? What was the old position and what changed position have we substituted in its place?

We put out a leaflet at the LMCP conference which explained that 'self-determination for the Palestinians', rigorously and logically interpreted, contradicted a 'democratic secular state'; and that in our view the better and more fundamental slogan was the democratic secular state.

The argument was based on the TILC resolution of last summer, which comrades can read in WSR2, and which was endorsed by the February conference when it rejected the IF's counter-motion on Palestine. The TILC resolution calls for a democratic secular state in Palestine (with local autonomy for the Jewish population) and it does not use the term 'self-determination'.

It is not an accident or an oversight that the resolution does not use the term 'self-determination'. There was a long discussion on it in the drafting commission between Keith and Kinnell (a discussion which Smith mis-dates for a year later). 'Self-determination for the Palestinians' implies that in some territory, presumably the whole of Palestine, the Palestinians have the sole right to determine political arrangements, and the Israeli Jews have no more rights in the matter than the British or the US or the Eskimos or any other foreign people. Whatever the merits of this proposal, it clearly contradicts the idea of a democratic secular state in which both Palestinian Arabs and Jews have equal rights.

In fact 'self-determination for the Palestinians' is often used as a general, vague expression of support for the Palestinians. It has been used in that way in our press. But once the contradiction has been pointed out, we should try to be logical.

Smith, who is now earnestly defending the 'self-determination' formula, also makes some effort to be logical in IB 63 - and ends up clearly contradicting the 'democratic, secular state for both Arabs and Jews'. He objects to the sentence (in the leaflet done for the LMCP conference):

"The precise nature of that state (a 'democratic and secular state in all of Palestine') would be the outcome of the determination of both Jews and Palestinian Arabs; it would not be self-determination by the Palestinian Arabs alone". The objection can only mean that Smith believes that the 'precise nature of the state' should be decided by the Palestinian Arabs alone. That is not a democratic, secular state in which Arabs and Jews have equal rights!

Yes, we do believe that the Israeli Jews should have some veto rights! The TILC resolution says:

"We advocate and would fight (i.e. alongside the Jews, against the Arabs) for the maximum cultural and communal rights for Jews within such a state that are compatible with its existence..." (emphasis added)

- i.e. it recognises a 'right of veto' of the Israeli Jews over any settlement that would make them an oppressed nation.

So Smith contradicts the TILC resolution. He cannot do otherwise if he insists on 'self-determination for the Palestinians' as a precise formula rather than an imprecise expression of solidarity.

This is the political gist of it. Smith insists on discussing it not as a political question but exclusively as one of procedure. But this is nonsense given that the procedural question - did the EC illegitimately change the WSL's position - presupposes some political judgment.

What of the procedure? As the LMCP conference approached, we had never discussed the Palestine work on our leading committees. Carolan repeatedly pressed for a discussion. There was never time. We ended up discussing it on June 24, two days before the LMCP conference.

Keith, the comrade mainly responsible for this work, reported at the start of the EC discussion that he intended to put out a leaflet at the conference, based on the TILC resolution, explaining our view on some of the issues raised in the LMCP platform. He had already told the LMCP committee this.

The EC discussion, and the leaflet, covered a number of items other than the self-determination slogan. However, the LMCP draft platform contained the formula 'self-determination' no less than three times (and 'democratic secular state' once, but with no spelling out of what it means in terms of rights for the Jews). Given the politics of the TILC resolution, we had to see this as a problem.

We soon decided that it would be disruptive and impossible to propose changes to the draft platform. But then accepting 'self-determination' in the platform made it necessary to spell out explicitly what had been implicit in the TILC resolution. We agreed that the leaflet should spell out our position on Palestine; in doing so it should not use the 'self-determination' formula, and it should explain why not.

We did agree that we should explain the issue carefully, not just denouncing the 'self-determination' formula but explaining that it was unclear. But Smith's claim that we agreed not to argue against the formula is self-evidently untrue; most of the point of the leaflet's comments on the question would be lost if we did not present that argument.

Keith then wrote and produced the leaflet (without further discussions with anyone on its contents: as noted above, the 'long discussions' which horrify Smith had taken place nearly a year earlier).

The EC decision was unanimous, including Cunliffe. Smith and Jones were as absent through transport problems. In other circumstances their absence might have made us postpone the discussion. In the actual case we couldn't because the LMCP conference itself was so close.

What is undemocratic about that? Would it be more democratic to let the issues be decided just "by the comrades involved"? Democracy meant here that the decision was taken by the highest, most authoritative body available. That's what was done.

In the Yorkshire area pre-conference debate on Ireland (!) Smith linked the

LMCP issue with his factional demonology about Carolan's minority position on Palestine (which is that the democratic, secular state, though a desirable idea, is actually unrealisable, and that the choice in reality is either to drive out the Jews or adopt some variant of a 'two states' policy. He favours the 'two states' policy, as do, for example, the majority of the USFI). The majority of those at the EC who voted on the line of the leaflet - and Keith, too - support not that minority view but the 'democratic, secular state'; and the whole argument is that the 'self-determination' formula logically contradicts the 'democratic, secular state'.

The EC was acting responsibly and entirely within its rights to interpret the policy of the organisation. The gist of the problem is that Smith and others actually do not agree with the TILC resolution they voted for last year, or do not understand it. All of us bear part of the blame for this: vague phrases about self-determination have frequently been used in the paper, and clearly we did not bring the issues out well enough in the discussion last year.

The organisation is in fact confused on the issue. A full political discussion on it is overdue and now urgent. It is quite plain that a number of quite different positions exist within the majority formula of the 'democratic, secular state'. The confusion can be remedied only by political debate, not by wild accusations in which politics takes second place to factional point-scoring.

AFGHANISTAN

Smith's other prize exhibit is our alleged 'coup' on Afghanistan.

What happened? At the EC on July 14 Carolan raised the question of putting Afghanistan on the conference agenda. The EC decided to put it on the NC agenda of August 13, with a view to deciding whether it could be on the conference agenda.

At the EC on July 29 we discussed the NC agenda in more detail. It was immediately obvious that there would not be time for any serious discussion on Afghanistan. The idea of debating it at conference was dropped. Kinnell, who had missed the July 14 EC meeting, explained that he would have been against putting it on the conference agenda anyway, but strongly favoured starting coverage and discussion in the paper. The EC decided to do that.

At the NC on August 13 Smith raised this issue as an 'outrage'. In doing so he insisted (as he does in IB 63) that the EC decision had been to start discussion in the paper 'from a troops out position'.

Kinnell (who had moved the successful EC resolution) explained that it was not: it was simply to have coverage and discussion (in which of course both the views, or all the views, within the organisation would be represented).

Now you might think that Smith would be pleased to hear that the EC decision gave the pro-troops minority equal rights, rather than favouring troops out. Not a bit of it. He insisted hotly that the decision had been for a troops out position.

For people to misrepresent decisions by making them out as more favourable is bad, but comprehensible. Why should anyone want to misrepresent decisions so as to make them unfavourable? It makes no sense except factionally. To keep his faction on the boil, Smith has to claim that they have been done down.

There are no grounds for a complaint of lack of democracy. The pro-troops minority - and it clearly is a small minority - has been given equal rights with the troops out majority.

Behind Smith's complaint, no doubt, was a feeling that the pro-troops minority would not be able to keep its end up in a debate (and on Afghanistan they could not expect the IMG/SL and RCP to do the job for them, as they have done in the debate in the paper on Ireland). But the faction's lack of ability to argue its politics coherently is not a question of democracy.

Smith does raise one question worth answering: why push the issue of Afghanistan now?

When we fused we gave ourselves a set period of months to decide a majority position on Afghanistan. Everyone knew there was a majority in the new WSL for Russian troops out, but for the sake of harmony and conciliation we decided not to push it.

25 months into the fusion we are no nearer a decision. The factional atmosphere in the WSL rules out the sort of discussion we looked forward to. (We would just have another round of accusations about 'reformism', 'capitulating to imperialism', etc.) Meanwhile the terrible slaughter goes on in Afghanistan. There are over three million refugees. It is indeed a mini-Vietnam.

Smith/Jones's NC rejection of the mini-Vietnam comparison expresses the essential difference. Vietnam, they said, was a reactionary war; Afghanistan is a progressive war. I.e. the expansion of Russian Stalinism by conquest is progressive. Trotsky would not agree; we do not agree. On this Smith/Jones and their co-thinkers have a quasi-Stalinist position.

Our lack of coverage, i.e. our silence on the Kremlin's crimes, over the last two years, has been an implicit endorsement of the pro-troops line.

We cannot continue being silent into the indefinite future. Therefore, either take a decision - even if it is only a vote-out - and/or open the paper the coverage and discussion.

In that sense, the issue does reflect a deterioration in the organisation. The comrades who have adopted such a consistent 'dog in the manger' attitude since the April conference should examine their own consciences about that. Meanwhile the organisation has to function.

'FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES'...

The questions discussed here give a few examples of what Smith/Jones's factionalism has meant. To convey the full reality of it we would have to go through the full history of disputes since the April conference.

There is a standard pattern. When an issue is first raised - TILC/international work perspectives after April; assessment of the general election results; format of the Sep. 17 conference; YTS; proposals for building the WSL; etc. etc. - Smith and/or Jones react on the EC by declaring that they have 'fundamental differences' or that 'huge issues' are raised. They do not discuss: they issue a statement distancing themselves. Then, depending on developments, they either take the matter up as a factional issue or let it drop. Even where decisions are taken with their participation, they take no responsibility for the WSL's functioning - their abstention on the expulsion of the IF, when they did not dispute that the IF had flouted discipline, and their vote to censure the EC on CND when they themselves have always represented a sectarian trend on CND, show that.

None of this can educate. None of this bears any resemblance to principled factional struggle.

In the earlier factional struggles around the Falklands and the Labour Party, the factionalism emerged, more or less, from the issue (though there was more to it: see IB 35). Now the issues emerge, almost completely, from the factionalism.

The faction has not operated as an organised body to promote informed debate on the issues it was set up on. In fact it has shown little interest in those issues. Instead it has operated as an oppositional gang, a fixed group of people starting from a stance of hostility towards the EC majority and taking up issues as they come... without concerning itself with consistency (CND!), logic, coherence, or the elementary decencies of WSL internal life.

At the OSC on August 19, for example, we discovered that bombings and 'federalism' are now faction issues. (For the faction 'majority', anyway, said Smith. What do the minority think? Will they vote on lines of faction discipline at the conference?)

Is Palestine a faction issue? De facto, yes. And what will be next? Issues come and issues go, but the faction remains.

No good can come of such a faction. The comrades should think again, and take a step back from the present course of irresponsible gang warfare. It's a course that can lead them to conclusions which they would never have coolly, consciously chosen.

The faction is a grouping which has enjoyed both the rights of a die-hard oppositional faction, and those of an integral part of the leadership. It has used both sets of rights to the full, with endless politicking and striving for advantage.

With the rights of a totally oppositional faction should go the duty to let the majority implement its perspectives more or less unimpeded until an opportunity comes to re-raise the issues, and a willingness not to presume a factional line-up on new issues. With the rights of an integral part of the leadership should go the duty of responsibility, and a willingness to discuss rather than just issue pronouncements.

Smith's grouping recognises neither duty: they claim power in the running of the League without responsibility.

Yet they have never had their rights diminished. They have never even faced any protest against their irresponsibility, other than statements at committee meetings.

Now they claim that they are in danger of 'being crushed'.

Smith's article is a demagogic attempt to rally his faction and to appeal to discontented people in the 'middle ground'. It is also highly irresponsible.

When the IF was being formed, Morrow kept insisting that he never wanted to form a faction. Quite possibly he wasn't lying. Quite possibly, making a calm decision in last December or thereabouts, he would not have chosen to split.

But once he formed his faction, it had its own logic. There were faction members who took seriously the ideas that Morrow threw around for the sake of point-scoring. The logic of gang warfare forced them on the road to a split.

The same can happen to Smith's faction. Even if he doesn't know it, even if he doesn't want it, even if at the early stages he would fight against it within the faction, Smith is preparing a split.

You cannot go on 'educating' people in an ideology of irresponsibility towards the organisation; fixed demonological hostility to the leadership; doom-and-gloom about our prospects; and factional catch-cries about 'capitulation to imperialism', 'reformism', and supposed secret positions of the EC majority, without it having a snowball effect. Sections of the faction will want to go further than Smith and Jones would like - to take what Smith and Jones say to its logical conclusion and get out of this rotten 'reformist', 'capitulating' organisation.

This process has already happened to Smith and Jones once, with the IT. It was Smith and Jones who gave that grouping its initial impetus, its basic attitudes, and its hostility to the WSL majority.

When Smith did not go all the way with the IF, they turned on him with contempt, as a faintheart who did not take his ideas seriously. They denounced him as a charlatan. It is virtually certain that the same process will happen, or is

happening now, within the Oxford faction. A point will come when Smith and Jones will act on the logic of what they say about the WSL, or face a split in the Oxford faction.

Because the RWL is no longer intervening, the process may go at a slower pace. Nevertheless, if you don't learn from your experiences, you end up repeating them. It would be better for Smith and Jones if they learned instead of repeating.

They are leading the faction into a political blind alley. Its logic is a split. Such a split would be bad for the WSL, but the League would certainly survive and maintain its essential activity. The comrades who split would survive politically not at all and organisationally not for long.

Stop the factionalism. Disband the faction, start arguing the political and ideological issues, instead of squealing about intellectual bullying and resorting to slander and insinuation. Deal with the issues as issues, not as rounds in a factional battle. Start taking some responsibility for the practical functioning of the organisation.

Discussing a split from the Trotskyist movement in 1940, which had been preceded by years of existence of a permanent faction, Trotsky wrote:

"Comrade Abern in his appreciation as in his perspective is moved by hatred. And personal hatred is an abominable feeling in politics".