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INTERNAL BULLETIN No. 89 MARCH 1984

The basis of revolutionary organisation:  
'WORKER LEADERSHIP' OR MARXIST POLITICS?

Part II

Carolán

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p.1	'The Bureaucracy'
. 2	Conceptions of Bureaucracy
3	Federalism in not democracy
4	Leadership by celebrity
5	Reconstruction after the WRP
6	Within the new WSL
7	The 'record'
8	Petty bourgeois workerism
9	Workers in Marxist politics
10	Integrating workers
10	A fusion of attitudes
12a/12b	Introduction to the appendices
13	Appendix 1: the discussion on Poland, December 1981 - excerpt from an EC document
15	Appendix 2: EC discussion on IB 50
21	Note on the appendices, by Carolán.



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THE BASIS OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION:

## 'Worker leadership' or Marxist politics?

PART II, by Carolan. Contents: p.1 'The Bureaucracy'; p.2 Conceptions of bureaucracy; p.3 Federalism is not democracy; p.4 Leadership by celebrity; p.5 Reconstruction after the WRP; p.6 Within the new WSL; p.7 The 'Record'; p.8 Petty bourgeois workerism; p.9 Workers in Marxist politics; p.10 Integrating workers; p.10 A fusion of attitudes; p.13 Appendices.

### 'THE BUREAUCRACY'

Smith and Jones say that they are up against and persecuted by a bureaucracy. Their entire tactics and behaviour towards the organisation are modelled on their tactics against the trade union bureaucracy. They seek the 'point of conflict'. They try to 'expose the leadership'. When we say that they are disruptive, they reply: "That's just what the bureaucrats say when you step out of line".

In part this is an attempt to transfer some of their credit as trade unionists to a field where it is not good currency.

But it is a serious question. Everywhere bureaucratism clogs the workers' movement. Bureaucracies establish material and other privileges, defend them by elitist and undemocratic methods of organisation, and stifle working class politics.

The obvious response to the charge that the apparatus of the League is a bureaucracy is to treat it as a joke.

We have had four conferences in the last 18 months. Leading committees are elected democratically. There is no limit on the right to form factions. An alternative leadership slate can always present itself to the membership and call for the ejection of the present leadership.

There is not only freedom of criticism internally, there is extreme licence: in the WSL people can say and do things that would get them expelled from almost any organisation calling itself Trotskyist in the world today, or at any time in the 50-year-plus history of our movement. There are frequent internal bulletins open to all. Members have in fact, if not by constitutional right, more or less free access to our press.

There is no factional exclusiveness in the allocation of jobs. After the April conference we went out of our way to try to maximise the participation of the minority in the central organising jobs of the League. No-one willing to work full-time for the organisation has ever been turned down.

The conception of democratic centralism spelled out in our constitution is the least constricting we know of: nobody is obliged, normally, to argue for League politics they disagree with, though we do ask for discipline in action and in public voting and they may not, normally, speak publicly against the organisation.

Finally, privileges: the full-timers used to get wages way below the government's poverty level, and for very onerous work. By our own proposal we do not even get that now. The full-timers have no material privileges in the organisation.

So what possible basis is there for a bureaucracy? What evidence of its existence? Examine the hyped-up factional charges about being suppressed, and

you get... a request to Smith to reduce a factional article for the public press to two pages from four!

As James P Cannon put it:

"A very strange animal, this bureaucratism, like the purple cow; everybody hears about it, but nobody knows about it. Nobody, that is, except a coterie of thinkskinned petty bourgeois intellectuals, half-intellectuals and would-be intellectuals who magnify a few pin-pricks suffered by their individual persons into a murderous bayonet charge against the rank and file of the party".

The traditional Trotskyist answer to charges of bureaucratism in cases like this, where the facts are broadly what they are in the WSL, was expressed by Cannon:

"After all, what is the 'apparatus' of our party? What is this selection of people whom the self-sacrificing Burnham disdainfully calls 'a cynical group of small-time bureaucrats' and a 'rotten clique'? Let's take up this question, once and for all, and have it out. The 'apparatus', that is the National Committee and the functioning full-time staff of party workers, is not an economically privileged group and has no special interests of its own which are different from the interests of the party members as a whole...

"Our party 'apparatus' is neither a bureaucracy, nor a faction, nor a clique. It is a selection of people who fulfill different functions according to their merits and capacities and experience and their readiness to serve the party at the cost of severe economic penalties. There has been no element of 'patronage' in their selection... Neither can it be justly maintained that there has been any factional discrimination or favouritism in the selection of party functionaries..."

And Cannon again:

"The whole approach to the question of the 'regime' must be fundamentally different in each case, depending on the position taken on the question of the programme. The aim of those who stand by our programme can be only to correct the shortcomings of the regime, and to improve its functioning, in order to make it a more effective instrument of the programme. The critics from the camp of the opposition, on the other hand, cannot have any real interest in the regime as such. Their fundamental aim is to substitute the present programme by another programme. For that they require not an improvement of the present regime, but its removal and replacement by another..."

"This it is clear that the question stands not organisationally in the first place but politically..."

And Trotsky:

"Under such conditions every thinking worker will say: It is possible that comrade Cannon actually does sin in the line of bureaucratic tendencies - it is hard for me to judge at a distance - but if the majority of the National Committee and of the entire party who are not at all interested in bureaucratic 'privileges' support Cannon they do so not because of his bureaucratic tendencies but in spite of them. This means that he has some other virtues which far outweigh his personal failing..."

### CONCEPTIONS OF BUREAUCRACY

Only on an essentially demagogic and anarchist conception of bureaucracy are the full-timers of the WSL a bureaucracy. This conception has been popularised in Britain by groups like Big Flame.

The Marxist idea of the party includes the education of all members, espec-

ially the working class members, in skills and tasks; the maximum use of whatever varying levels of talent, education, and commitment members have; division of labour; specialisation; professionalism. Anarchist theory proposes instead a levelling-down and amateurism on principle. Smith and Jones' implicitly hold to this anarchist view, which actually means a 'tyranny of structurelessness'.

Now it is true that the passages from Cannon that I've cited above can be used to deflect a discussion on bureaucratism in organisations which are, whatever the theory they nominally adhere to may seem to say, highly bureaucratic. The SLL/WRP is one example. Or the SWP (Britain). But compare the WSL to these organisations.

In the SLL/WRP there is in fact a materially privileged grouping in the leadership. There is also the psychology of a religious sect to which people are recruited and within which they are bonded together and to 'the leadership'. And there are identifiably bureaucratic and undemocratic ways of functioning.

There are blatant political/organisational privileges for the leadership. No internal bulletins. No right of dissent. No effective right of faction. No possibility of electing dissidents to leading committees.

Or take the much less bureaucratic SWP. There are rigidly restrictive rules against dissent. There are regulations, justified on alleged security grounds, which allow the leadership to isolate dissent, and thus give the leadership effective privileges. As long ago as WF's expulsion in December 1971 they explicitly outlawed the possibility of an across-the-board opposition.

#### FEDERALISM IS NOT DEMOCRACY

Another very odd feature about the charges of bureaucratism in the WSL today is that they are made by those who ran the old WSL against those who ran the I-CL.

The I-CL, and WF before it, had a civilised internal democracy. We had a relaxed attitude to minorities having access to the public press. Normally they had access, and in the period before the fusion the public press carried debates on the Iran/Iraq war, on Cambodia, on the Middle East, on Scottish nationalism, etc. Everyone had access to the internal bulletin. I know of only one case of even an inordinate delay in publishing an IB article, and in that case the EC explicitly apologised to the author.

We were a centralised organisation: what conference and the NC decided was what was done throughout the organisation. Within that framework and bound by it, we had a leadership with some authority in the organisation, capable of holding the organisation together and enforcing conference and NC decisions. This leadership was not a fixed group of people, but selected and re-selected as we developed.

What was the old WSL like? It was formally centralist but in fact federalist. A high degree of local/branch autonomy on national political issues existed. The political colour of a local group (Leicester, Coventry, Oxford) would be highly affected by the origins, opinions, or prejudices of the leading people locally. Young comrades were inducted into the branch's politics. There were some common threads, of course, but very little political homogeneity.

This federalism was supplemented by relatively frequent national aggregates. There was a weak amateur leadership consisting of (centrally) a couple of industrial militants supplemented by a technical apparatus of two full-timers.

The actual weakness of the leadership was compensated for by it having a very high designated status. This status was derived more (by way of the bourgeois press and the USFI press) from the comrades' work as industrial

militants than from their functions or capacities as political leaders. The pre-designated leadership balanced between the constituencies in the organisation and arrived at a political consensus. In this framework the leadership's own politics formed the base-line for the organisation.

Minorities fared differently in the organisation depending on their size, combativity, or 'influence at court'. The Leicester youth were able to push through a decision for separate youth organisations after the I-CL/WSL fusion (though they were later dissuaded). Generally for those within the central consensus the regime was pretty liberal. The Spartacist factions, thanks to combativity, could do almost what they liked. The rather deferential and un-combative opposition of Traven on the question of Afghanistan submitted to being denounced (and somewhat misrepresented) in the public press without right of reply.

Jo Q., on his own with very untypical views, fell right outside the consensus and could not even get access to the IB. It is debatable whether it was right to readmit JQ at all after his return from the Spartacists. But once readmitted his rights should not have depended on his political views.

He rejected Irish nationalism and championed the Protestant community. In my view his ideas are wrong and go from certain important insights to ridiculous political conclusions. But his starting point and his basic principle - the search for working class unity, and the primacy of working class unity - is the beginning of wisdom for Marxists, and certainly as legitimate as the starting point of his opponents.

By the time he came forward with these ideas, Smith, Jones and their group had evolved from their WRP starting point to adopting an attitude to Irish nationalism essentially taken from the USFI. This attitude was very strong in Oxford. JQ could not get a proper hearing for his views, or even get the material relating to his dispute into the IB.

The system of frequent national aggregates means plebiscitary democracy, not democratic centralism. In an activist organisation it is not possible for every issue to be decided by debate throughout the entire membership, and it demagogic to pretend that it is possible. Clear, sharp decisions and adequate political accounting demand a minimum of education, knowledge and practical responsibility: thus the broad outlines should be decided by conferences, the week-to-week issues by democratically-elected committees. Loosely prepared and casually called (they would have to be) aggregates cannot but allow a high-prestige 'bonapartist'/'chairman' leadership to balance, dominate, and create a muddy consensus behind a facade of flattering demagogic 'democracy'.

#### LEADERSHIP BY CELEBRITY

In fact the campaign against the full-timers is an inevitable by-product of the campaign of glorification and self-glorification of the designated 'worker leadership' (Smith and Jones). It has been a continuation of the attitude to full-timers in the old WSL, where they seem to have been auxiliaries of the real leadership. Morally blackjacked as petty bourgeois if they got out of line.

There is a closer parallel than appears at first sight with the pre-World War 1 social democracy as described by Cannon.

"The real honours and decisive influence went to the leaders who had professional occupations outside the party and who, for the most part, lived typical petty-bourgeois lives which were far removed from the lives of the workers they were presumably 'leading'...

"They decided things. They laid down the law. They were the speakers

on ceremonial occasions; they posed for their photographs and gave interviews to the newspapers... As for the party functionaries, the people who devoted all their time to the daily work and routine of the party, they were simply regarded as flunkys to be loaded with the disagreeable tasks, poorly paid and blamed if anything went wrong..."

Now Smith is not Professor Burnham! But there are workers who absorb the politics and prejudices of the petty bourgeois around them.

Smith has probably never been a rank and file Trotskyist. (If he ever was, then over nearly three years of close observation I have not seen a single trace of it. Jones was a rank and file Trotskyist, and there are traces of it.)

Smith joined the SLL from the CP in 1966 and was quickly an SLL star worker. He was lauded, feted, courted, publicised, flattered and managed, by a predominantly middle-class organisation. There was a lot of publicity in the bourgeois press, especially in 1974/5. After the break with the WRP in 1975 he was lauded, feted and courted by the USFI press world-wide.

And then what? Smith had been an SLL 'star worker' - spoon-fed with their ideas, organised, supervised, told what to do. (He himself says that he had to apologise to the IMG later, for example, for spreading the story in the early '70s that IMGers who came to work at Cowley were 'police agents'). With this training, and with the spotlight full on him, he found himself at the centre of a new political organisation. Nothing had been worked out politically. He had worked with, and taken criticisms of Healy from, the Lambertists (Blick and Jenkins), but soon saw them (rightly) as liquidationist and broke with them. Meanwhile people rolled to him as to a prophet, bringing politics with them.

Smith sat in the middle of all this. In politics he decided to compromise between the Lambertists and the SLL. The Lambertists looked back to a golden age of 'Socialist Outlook' (a crude, Stalinist-tinted Labour Party paper put out by the Lealy group from 1948 to '54). Smith and his group decided that the golden age had been around 1966, and jumped back 8 or so years to the mid-'60s SLL and their own political youth.

Smith's greatest strength is a nose for the real labour movement, and he had learned some things from Blick and Jenkins. So he combined SLL slogans of around 1966 with some Labour Party work. Slogans like 'Make the Left MPs fight' had for the SLL been transitional from Labour Party work to insane sectarianism: Smith travelled in the opposite direction (from WRP sectarianism to LP work) by way of the same slogans. It was a long, laborious process, not fully worked out and not having reached stable equilibrium even by the time of the fusion.

The SLL/WRP could and did behave with pathological arrogance: organisationally it was by far the dominant group on the far left until about 1970-1, when IS displaced it. The little WSL of 1975 had to scale down its pretensions drastically - and that too took some time. (When the I-CL first approached the old WSL for discussion, we got a very curt put-down in reply).

Much of the SLL/WRP politics derived from organisational concerns and factionalism, or idiosyncrasies of the leadership, and after the dispute of the early '60s around Cuba it lost any coherence. Now Smith and Jones had to think for themselves. Meanwhile many people from other groups were flocking to them, people of wider experience and larger knowledge to help them. They changed and adapted empirically over the years.

#### RECONSTRUCTION AFTER THE WRP

The above is the origin of the 'worker leadership', its pretensions and its practices, which have little in common with the Trotskyism they wish to espouse.

Now one can sympathise with them. At the time of the fusion, I did. To their

credit they didn't give up. They stuck to the work of building an organisation when their political world collapsed. They could do no more than their knowledge, understanding, experience and the circumstances allowed them to do. They were willing to learn, to adapt, to shed piecemeal much of the SLL tradition.

"But that was not enough. And that is not all there is to it."

1. They were trained in cultism in the SLL. Then their own centrality, and the character of the petty bourgeois who rallied to them, naturally hustled them into becoming the centre of a variant of such methods. They were the badge-wearers, the titular chiefs, the emblem, talisman and ideological court of last resort of the organisation.

Smith's fame was a major asset of the group, giving him a weight inside it independent of group affairs.

2. Their political underdevelopment and misunderstandings meant that they could not impose any ideologically unifying ideas or syntheses on the organisation as it adapted itself piecemeal away from the SLL. They could only licence or veto each shift. The fact that Smith was a driver and Jones a line worker limited even the energy and time they could give to the organisation: and in any case their local work was part of the central capital of the organisation.

3. To a considerable extent the organisation grew up around Cowley, and almost as an extension of that local industrial work.

Much that has happened since the fusion has arisen out of Smith's and Jones's attempt to transpose their leadership system, and the organisational structure round it (federalism, consensus politics, designate 'worker leadership' as arbiter, down-graded full-timers) onto the new WSL.

#### WITHIN THE NEW WSL

You can say that it is in the comrades' favour that they kept going. You can, and I do. They present themselves to us now, however, as a hard, implacable political formation, committed by all their instincts and political prejudices (let alone pride, personal interests, etc.) to be 'the worker leadership' and to have an organisation around themselves.

And there is another - organic, basic - reason for conflict. Smith and Jones claim to be more than the equals of the rest of the EC, and that we should defer. Actually, in the circumstances, they must either make that claim or informally adopt a pretty subordinate position in the leadership bodies. Not because it is decreed, or because we demand it. But in terms of relevant experience, competence, Marxist education and commitment, these comrades would not even be first among equals on the EC or NC.

They know that. The last three years have shown that. The background to the dispute that blew up over the Falklands (preceded at the end of 1981 by a dispute over Poland) was their realisation of that. Either Jones, for example, had a monopoly by right over 'the line of the movement' on Poland, or (if the matter were decided by informed debate) he would have relatively little say in it. That is the living root of their demands for deference. That is the tragic element in the situation. That is what makes apparently minor or even trivial political differences so intractable and inaccessible to rational argument.

Before he left Cowley, Smith used to say that it was a question of the workers versus the full-timers, and the problem was time and energy. Now he has been out of the factory nearly 18 months. That has not resolved the problem. Instead of transforming themselves and integrating into a collective leadership, Smith and Jones demand that they be accepted as the measure of all things, and that the rest of us be - and agree to be - second-class citizens.

## THE 'RECORD'

One other aspect of the situation needs to be discussed candidly - of Smith and his 'record' in relation to the party. He himself invoked this 'record' at the March 10 NC as the reason why there could not be equality in the leadership: if it is just a matter of ideas, he said, then everyone is equal, but to recruit in the working class you need a record. Therefore, no equality.

Now one would expect that when a tiny organisation contains someone as well known as Smith there would be problems. Either the comrade has a high degree of disciplined restraint in relation to the party; or he becomes a free-wheeler, rather contemptuous of the 'small-scale' politics of the party in contrast to the mass-publicity world in which he operates; or - by one of a number of possible mechanisms and roads of development - you get the organisation turning into an appendage of the 'personality'.

I can think of two relevant examples from the history of our movement - Jim Larkin and Bala Tampoe.

Larkin was - after 1907 - the effective founder of the modern Irish labour movement, of both the mass union of the 'unskilled,' the ITGWU, and of the Irish Labour Party. In the history of the international labour movement he ranks as a very great man indeed, in my opinion. He was also an incredibly muddled, egocentric individualist.

In the 1920s Larkin led a militant splinter from the ITGWU, the Workers' Union of Ireland (they reunited in the '70s), and also 'led' the tiny Irish Communist Party. He ruined it: the party became just a helpless appendage of his union and of Larkin personally. It collapsed in the late '20s, and a new CP had to be founded in the early '30s, when Larkin had dropped out of the Third Period Comintern.

All accounts suggest that in Sri Lanka the USFI section was (until they parted ways recently) a mere appendage of Bala Tampoe's Mercantile Union. As our recent Sri Lankan Trotskyist visitor put it, Bala Tampoe worked out policies for the union, and that was the party's policy.

Now Smith's reputation and his activities in and around Cowley do not belong in the same category as Jim Larkin and the Irish unions and 1920s Communist Party of Ireland. The difference in scale and importance is too great for that. Smith's reputation and field of operation is small beer even compared with Bala Tampoe and the Mercantile Union in Sri Lanka.

But it is the same type of problem. For the old WSL, its fate and its fortunes were very much tied up with Cowley and Smith's reputation. The concern of old WSL comrades to defend their own creditable and good work should not blind them to that.

For the new WSL the problem is compounded. For better or worse Smith and Jones were in fact the uncontested leadership of the old WSL. The explosive problem for the new WSL from day one has been to integrate the old WSL leadership into a collective leadership with people who had led the I-CL and whose attitude, while friendly and appreciative (as indeed it was) towards Smith and Jones, was not quite one of awe and acceptance that the leadership of the new WSL would by right be the same as that of the old WSL.

I am not trying to downgrade the achievements of comrade Smith. Of the thousands of shop stewards and local trade union leaders who have encountered the revolutionary left (or what they thought was the revolutionary left) over the years, he is one of the few who have stayed and developed. He developed beyond his SLL/WRP teachers. The battles fought at Cowley were very important. The attempt to construct an organisation free from the defects of the WRP was a work of great merit even in the eyes of those of us who broke from the same organisation a decade earlier, and saw it as lost for serious revolutionary politics long before 1974.

But in addition to all the problems sketched out above, there is the fact that Smith's reputation is enormously inflated and vastly out of proportion to what he has done. It is derived from the distorted reflection in the bourgeois press of his work as a trade union leader in Cowley, and from the lavish praise of his political work in breaking with the SLL/WRP which came from tendencies like the USFI who wished to court the old WSL.

The reputation is grossly inflated even granted that the Cowley work was and is very important. That should not surprise anybody.

In the 1960s Jack Dash got vast publicity as a dockers' leader when in fact he was pretty marginal to the leadership of most of the important docks struggles. (In a piece of happy coinage the SLL press dubbed him the 'pearly docker'!) Our own 'Red Ted' has certainly done some serious work in the O., but he has hardly been as central in that work as the vast press publicity might seem to indicate.

Or take Tariq Ali. He achieved immense fame as an anti-Vietnam-war demo leader, though he was in no way the central organiser (Pat Jordan was).

Conversely, look at the way the press reported the Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy. I'm told that a semi-fiction/semi-documentary TV programme gave great play to scenes of Jon Lansman to dramatise the manner in which it was set up. In fact, Gunther coined the idea (at our NC); I worked out a scheme for getting it off the ground (utilising connections built up by Khan to open the door out of isolation for us); Hill and I negotiated with various people; Hill built it. Lansman was secretary because the reformists could not let the obvious candidate, Hill, be secretary (he was 'organiser' instead). Lansman's actual role in the affair was as V. Derer's littee lad.

The press likes to seize on personalities - and once they have selected a personality, whether someone who plays a real role (like old Smith) or practically no role at all (like Lansman), to inflate the role of that individual.

And Smith's reputation in revolutionary politics has partly seeped over from industry to politics. In the actual political record, despite the merits of the effort it reflects, there is nothing to justify claims for deference.

#### PETTY BOURGEOIS WORKERISM

On at least two or three occasions over the last 18 months I have said at the NC that Smith's politics are petty bourgeois. That wasn't mindless abuse. I had thought about it and I meant it. I meant it particularly in relation to Smith's politics on the key question on which for us everything else depends, the question of the revolutionary party.

Smith's idea that a couple of workers (or, now, one worker and one ex-worker) can, by flashing their sociological credentials, claim deference in the leading committees of the Marxist organisation, is petty bourgeois workerism. Smith and Jones no longer see themselves with the eyes of revolutionary workers, but with the eyes of petty bourgeois workerists - of their petty bourgeois admirers.

An average proletarian militant in Marxist politics does have real problems. You are recruited to an organisation which claims to base itself on the sum-total of human knowledge, no less. You yourself may have difficulty reading a book. You may, like the writer, have left school at 15.

Many or most of the other militants in the Trotskyist movement will be

better educated than you. They will be more at home with books. They will have a better basis of general knowledge to help them understand the theorising and generalisation in the Marxist classics.

You can do one of two things. You can put yourself to school again and learn - studying individually, using whatever education facilities the organisation offers, seeking help from comrades who know more. This is the only way the individual can develop, equalise upwards, maintain and develop a party as the ideological vanguard.

If you make that choice, then you will not be very interested in 'star workers' who claim a leading status on the basis of being workers rather than of real knowledge, political clarity, etc. What you want from the organisation is not flattery but education.

The other choice is to recoil and adopt a crude workerism, an illusory self-sufficiency, denouncing in various ways the 'intellectuals', the 'full-timers' and the 'petty bourgeois'. You can fall back on the idea that the working class and its immediate direct-action experience is sufficient to itself.

Now this is a coherent position. But it is an anti-Marxist position, and one that explicitly repudiates the irreplaceable *raison d'être* of the Marxist party - the ideological struggle.

It is basic to our politics that the working class does not arrive spontaneously at scientific Marxist consciousness. Formally, Smith, Jones and Cunliffe hold to a much more rigid version of this thesis than I or others would. I would say that although the class cannot spontaneously arrive at scientific Marxist consciousness, history shows that it can arrive at a general socialist consciousness. Smith and Jones (like the SLL before them) would probably say that the class cannot even arrive at socialist consciousness.

Be that as it may, the notion that the revolutionary organisation must be built on the accumulated knowledge and theoretical capital of Marxism must mean that, of the two options that face a worker coming to the Marxist movement, only the first is compatible with having a Marxist movement. The worker must go to school with the movement. (So, of course, must the petty bourgeois).

#### WORKERS IN MARXIST POLITICS

True, the schematic way I've posed the issue above does not quite do justice to complexities in the real world.

Often, despite their general average level of education, the petty bourgeois are as ignorant of Marxism as the workers; and frequently they have a lot of relatively developed ideas to shed before they can become Marxists. They can often get by easier with a superficial fluency in the new ideas, and do not have to make the irreplaceable effort at self-making-over that the serious worker finds necessary.

More than that, contrary to the way Jones and Smith have posed it over nearly three years, there is no necessary, mechanical link between formal education (or even formal Marxist education) and ability to function in politics. If there were, a speed-reader could become our Plekhanov, and we could have a rigid division of labour.

The comrades also sell themselves short in the course of pleading for a special position for the 'worker leaders' in the organisation. For example, Jones has probably read a lot more of the basic Marxist books than most of the people in the organisation who have university degrees, and he has the advantage which every worker has of already knowing in his guts what it is all about. (Smith is less well educated, which means that he is also less shaped and constricted than Jones is by a thorough mid-'60s SLL cadre-training).

But what all that goes to show is that workers can play a leading role in a Marxist organisation, despite lack of access to formal education, under a regime

where issues are decided not by deference but by the relative strength, clarity, documentation, etc. of different arguments. It does not justify Smith's demands for status above and beyond the ideas involved.

### INTEGRATING WORKERS

Think it through, again, from the point of view of the underprivileged working class party militants that Smith and Jones (falsely) present themselves as.

The worker in the party - let us say that s/he is an influential shop steward - either learns and develops, or s/he doesn't and perhaps can't beyond a certain point. Perhaps there is pressure of time, family difficulties; perhaps s/he is too old.

Suppose s/he is part of an organisation where her/his shop steward experience and eminence count for little as the committees discuss complicated questions of current world politics, theory and so on, or when they discuss the work of the party in areas where the militant has no experience. Again s/he has two choices.

S/he can stay in the organisation, integrating her/his area of work into it, giving what s/he can to its deliberations on all sorts of questions, getting help and some guidance for her/his factory work. Even if s/he does not outstrip the other members on the broader theoretical questions, over time s/he will learn and grow and develop. S/he will be an element in the organisation which helps keep it firmly in touch with the working class. Her/his factory work will be less one-sided, more stable; it will be integrated into the work of building a multi-faceted movement that integrates the fronts of the class struggle.

Her/his other option is to recoil from the party into one-sidedness and to pour scorn on its works. S/he can react against those who offend her/his sense of self and of what's right in the world, and who do not treat him, in fields where s/he is a pupil or a journeyman at best, with the deference to which s/he has become accustomed in the field where s/he has become an expert. Back to syndicalism and narrowness.

In the last 15 or 20 years, hundreds and thousands of militants at all levels of prominence in industry have recoiled in just that way after contact with or membership or one or another of the revolutionary groups. Quite a few have passed through our own ranks. The fight against such tendencies is part of the fight to build a revolutionary party. It is part of the fight to integrate workers into the revolutionary party, especially when the party is small and weak and primarily petty bourgeois in composition, and it can be plausibly rejected and scorned.

Smith and Jones neither integrate into the party and learn, taking whatever place they are able to fill in the general affairs of the League; nor do they plainly kick over the traces, as so many militants similar to themselves have done.

Circumstances have allowed them to find a middle course. They have built their own party after their own image, around themselves as personalities, industrial militants, and prominent recipients of media attention. Beginning with a breakaway from the SLL/WRP, they have assembled their own party around their own industrial work. The circumstances that I have analysed above (SLL ideological underdevelopment, etc.) have shaped the old WSL around them, and shaped them. They fight to reduce and diminish the aspirant general revolutionary party that the new WSL was founded to be, to what the old WSL was.

### A FUSION OF ATTITUDES

Is the above unjust and unfair? It is the minimum that can be said while remaining true to the facts.

Smith and Jones represent a fusion of the syndicalist attitudes of the

thousands of militants who have recoiled from revolutionary politics in the last 20 years (often with superficially good reasons), with the attitudes of petty bourgeois workerists who accommodate to such workers.

Such petty bourgeois workerist trends have played a big role in the history of the last 20 years on the revolutionary left in Britain. Some of us in the organisation had a lot of experience of this in IS (Keith, Kinnell, Hill, Oliver, myself, etc.)

In the '60s the petty bourgeois leftist groups made a cult of very militant workers. They were the carriers of history, the 'working class heroes' of John Lennon's song, the men (and occasionally women) who were at the heart of the spectacular class struggles.

Personally I know something about this phenomenon from both inside and outside. A relatively prominent militant docker was a very prestigious thing to be on the left in the late '60s, and that's what I was. But my main experience of the phenomenon was from the outside, watching in horror what happened in IS.

IS became formally 'Leninist' in 1963. It had been explicitly anti-Leninist before that, and had recruited lots of people in 1964-8 who were repelled from Bolshevism by the stupid antics (which included sectarian strike-breaking, in November 1964) of the self-proclaimed Bolsheviks, the SLL. IS turned to industry. A number of prominent militants joined IS. They were lionised, feted, treated as gods on a visit to the lesser mortals. None of them lasted long.

Smith and Jones had a different variant of the same thing in the petty bourgeois SLL, with its organisational cultism and hierarchy of cult figures (with Zeus-Healy at the top).

The decisive test for anyone subjected to that sort of lionisation is how the militant sees him/herself. The militant who begins to see him/herself as the adoring petty bourgeois see him abandons the outlook of a Marxist class-conscious militant and adopts an alien view of the world, the party, and his/her place in both. In the two worst cases that some of us saw in IS, the militants became more and more demanding and contemptuous towards the organisation, and more and more prima-donna-ish, until they blew out in a huff.

The honest and sober working class militant, in contrast, knows that s/he must change and develop. S/he knows that to demand (or accept) that the party make him/her the measure of all things is to demand that the party destroy itself. S/he knows that there must be levelling up by way of education, not levelling down by way of accommodation.

But the demands of Smith and Jones on the rest of the organisation and on the other members of the leading committees are demands that we adopt the politics of petty bourgeois workerism, and see them in the way they have learned (from such petty bourgeois workerists) to see themselves.

One of the worst signs of the ill-health of a layer of the organisation over the last two years has been this. You could get lots of comrades who had experience of the NC or EC to admit in individual argument that much of the problem was that Smith and Jones insisted on trying to delimit the organisation's politics on issues that they didn't know the first thing about. Yet these comrades would not do anything about it. They deferred. They were trained to defer. They blamed the rest of us for not deferring.

Are we unfair to Smith? Even if the problems outlined above are implicit in the situation, when you probe it and tease them out, perhaps the comrades are victims of circumstances? Yes, they are victims of circumstances and of their own history. But their faces are set like flint against any change. They are fighting now primarily against having to take their places as equals in a collective leadership. They have, underneath all the issues, been fighting this fight for 2½ years, since they realised in late 1981 that (despite being

ultra-conciliatory on minor issues, and deferential on issues where they knew more), the rest of us would not defer to them on important political matters, and would insist on going ahead by majority vote even if they disagreed strongly.

Take an early example.

You're in a discussion on, to give an example that happened in late December 1981, the question of the 'anti-imperialist united front' in El Salvador. Smith is there, says something perhaps. He was presiding over that particular discussion.

After a while it dawns on you that he hasn't got a very clear grasp of what is being discussed. Or, as on the question of imperialism, that the sum of his wisdom is an a-historical moralism decked out in a few phrases from Lenin.

The greatest shock of all, however, is when you realise that he may scarcely know what is passing in the discussion, but he is absolutely convinced that he has a god-given right to determine the outcome of it.

That particular argument was settled by Smith and his co-thinkers agreeing to consider amendments, and then accepting the amendments without further discussion although they reflected a completely different view from the original on the point under debate. As we were to find out in the debate about the South Atlantic war, that did not mean that the point had actually been clarified.

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To sum up: The idea that the WSL is run by a bureaucracy is ludicrous - unless the comrades seriously want to argue that accumulation of skills, specialisation, division of labour and professionalism are the decisive defining characteristics of a bureaucracy. (They are, of course, socially, the raw material out of which privileged undemocratic elites can develop). In some of their utterances Smith and Jones seem to share the one-sided view of what bureaucraticism is put forward over many decades by anarchists and syndicalists. Unlike Smith and Jones, the anarchists and syndicalists draw conclusions from these ideas: they are hostile to the building of a working class revolutionary party. By contrast, the WSL exists to build the working class revolutionary party - a task to which Smith and Jones have given a considerable part of their lives.

Far from being bureaucratic, the WSL diverges from the model for a Bolshevik party in the direction of anarchic licence. Full-timers have to make serious sacrifices: they have neither material nor political privileges. Neither the constitution, nor the way it is operated by the leading committees, is undemocratic. The only departures from the constitution over the last 2½ years have, again, been in the direction of anarchy.

The problem is not that we are a bureaucracy, or that we behave bureaucratically, but that Smith and Jones refused to be disciplined members of the organisation. The main reason for this is that they have grown accustomed to relating to the Marxist organisation, over the years, as special people and had indeed as pre-designated leaders. They look at the world, at the revolutionary organisation, and at themselves, with the eyes of people who in political terms are petty bourgeois workerists. Their conception of the revolutionary party is built round this situation. It is an incoherent conception, but unmistakably it is a long way from that of Lenin, Trotsky, Cannon, and the constitution and fusion platform of the new WSL.

The dynamic of their conflict with the organisation, and what now looks like their impending separation from us, has come not from our bureaucratisation but from their implacable determination not to let themselves become immersed in the new WSL as mere members with no more rights and privileges than any other member, in the organisation and in the organisation's leadership.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE APPENDICES:

THE 'WORKER LEADERSHIP' QUESTION OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS

At the March 10 NC, Jones, his face showing the utmost sincerity, denied that he had ever heard the expression 'worker leadership' used, let alone habitually used, to describe Smith and himself. Never mind - Smith's comments at the same NC about the importance of 'having a record' left little room for doubt about the substance of the matter.

In fact the first sharp crisis in the leadership (the EC) was over exactly this question. I can't recall whether anyone used the expression 'worker leadership' then. I can recall, and can cite some documentary evidence, that this issue - Smith's and Jones's refusal to integrate into a collective leadership, and their demand for privileges in the leadership - has been central to the problems of the organisation since the fusion.

After a majority of the NC voted against them on it, Jones and Smith made the demand, effectively, that they should determine the League's line on Poland. They talked about the organisation being 'hi-jacked' (Jones) because the NC had voted against them.

These are the facts. In late 1981, immediately after the fusion, I thought events in Poland might trigger major divisions in the organisation of the sort which were in fact later to be triggered by the Falklands war. It looked like Russia would invade, and I feared we would have difficulty getting a common line in the not unlikely event that serious fighting occurred in which the Poles got help from the west.

Smith and Jones had been educated in the SLL tradition on issues like this. The SLL had had ambivalent politics on, for example, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The SLL raised two equally prominent slogans, giving them equal weight: No to the invasion, no to the restoration of capitalism (though even the Russians didn't say that capitalism was being restored).

So I tried by discussion to ensure that events in Poland would not take us by surprise. The issue was discussed on the NC and the other committees, and we even got unanimous agreement on the OC that we would support the Poles even if they were receiving western aid against the Russians.

Then came martial law in December 1981, shortly before our NC met. At the NC, during the discussion on slogans, I proposed that we adopt 'self-determination for Poland'. Jones said he was against it. He and I had equal time to speak, against and for self-determination, five or ten minutes each, and then the NC voted for self-determination.

At the following EC Jones and others bitterly condemned the decision as a 'hi-jacking'. They did not want to call for self-determination, so the NC should not have done so. I should not have proposed it. There were supplementary arguments. I was 'pushing things' too fast: the organisation should go at the pace of the workers in the leadership, not that of the 'intellectuals' and full-timers, etc.

Now, as a general rule, since the EC meet frequently, it can - unless a matter is very pressing - postpone a decision to the next meeting if a comrade asks it to. Other beings being equal, it should agree to such a request. The NC has less room for such flexibility, unless it wants to let the organisation's political metabolism slow down badly, since it meets much less frequently. But if, at the EC or NC, an objectively pressing matter is left undecided because someone would like a bit more time to think about it, if the pace is dictated by the slowest members, then the organisation cannot keep up with events. It will not gear into events in the outside world, but into the development of its own most sluggish or least developed, or most cautious, members. As a general demand, therefore, the idea that, whatever is going on outside, the organisation should go at the pace of some designated members of the leadership, is utter nonsense. It would be to make those individuals the measure of all things for the organisation.

But the argument about 'hi-jacking' is not only nonsensical because of what

it implies. It is also dishonest. There had been a number of discussions on Poland: nothing in the history of the fused organisation has ever been as thoroughly prepared for as the December 1981 NC discussion on martial law in Poland. There were no sudden new proposals made at the December NC. On the contrary. The minutes of the previous NC even record Jones himself as saying that he was in favour of self-determination.

So what was the point? Smith and Jones made a demand that they should have privileges in the organisation as workers in the leadership. Think about the sheer arrogance of calling the NC vote a 'hi-jacking'. And think about the implications for the other EC and NC members of accepting the pretensions of Smith and Jones. It would be to accept that we ourselves were second-class citizens.

Throughout the fusion we have lived with the insistent demand, implicit or explicit, that we defer to the 'worker leadership'.

As for the dispute on self-determination itself, I've never been very clear what the substance of it is. Jones seems to have been pushed by subjectivism after the December meeting to take a hard line of opposition to self-determination whereas at the previous NC he had been in favour with some reservations. A few weeks later he announced that he agreed with self-determination, but disagreed with the allegedly excessive prominence we gave it.

According to the logic of Jones's position, the difference has to be that Jones keeps open at the back of his mind the possibility that the Russian bureaucracy might be supported as the final defenders of nationalised property, against the Polish people, whose right to self-determination was of lesser importance. People like myself rejected that possibility.

This dispute led to others at an EC meeting during the Christmas 1981 TILC meeting, where Smith, Jones and Cunliffe used an accidental majority factionally on this question. This led to further discussion on the EC and to a document by me (never circulated outside the EC). The relevant sections of that document are reproduced below.

This, incidentally, was the background to and, if you like, the 'secret history' of the Falklands dispute. The formal outcome of the January/February 1982 discussion was agreement on a 'collective leadership'. It never happened. Then real differences arose over the Falklands war. Smith and Jones saw the chance, so they thought, to solve the problem of divisions in the leadership by steamrolling us. They did not call for a special conference until after the war was over; they decided to call for it <sup>then</sup> because they had the impression that there was much more support for their position than in fact there was. They thought they could use the issue to rally a big, clear majority of the organisation against us, around the core of the old WSL. As we argued in IB 35, that September 1982 special conference was for them not just, or even essentially, about the Falklands war.

In the event they miscalculated and bungled it all, and wound up scattering their own forces.

The most explicit and clear discussion on these questions of our functioning - apart from January/February 1982, the only real discussion - took place last summer. The document 'Building the WSL' (IB 50) was drafted in an attempt to spell out our basic conceptions of the organisation. In stating the Marxist ABCs it made a clear challenge to the conceptions of the 'worker leadership'. They responded with an explicitness and clarity which leaves them little room for evading the issue now, as Jones did at the March 10 NC.

APPENDIX: THE DISCUSSION ON POLAND, DECEMBER 1981

(Excerpt from a document by Carolan to the EC,  
14.2.82)

At the meeting of the EC immediately after the December [1981] NC, cd Jones rather bitterly expressed resentment and anger at the fact that the NC voted against his opposition to raise the slogan of self-determination for Poland. This was, he said, a case of 'hi-jacking' the line of the organisation. I was 'pushing' issues too quickly, he said.

The term 'hi-jacking' expressed an idea that has come up again and again, also in comments from cd Smith. Jones declared that from then on he 'was going to fight' (perhaps he said, 'fight back').

Smith expressed general agreement with this.

I was taken aback a little by this, for a number of reasons.

At the NC Jones had had as much time to oppose the slogan as I had had to advocate it. It was a properly convened meeting of the NC. Jones did not even allege there had been anything underhand. Jones or others had every possibility of proposing a longer discussion in the NC (we were in the first day of a two-day meeting), and I would have supported this. Therefore, the notion that a NC vote should be seen as 'hi-jacking' the line of the organisation was a rather bizarre one (especially since there was no ex I-CL vs ex WSL line-up on the matter)....

In no sense could it be said that I raised this question of Poland's right to self-determination suddenly, or without warning. Quite the contrary. I had raised the matter on leading committees repeatedly in the period before the December NC. At the joint WSL/I-CL public meeting at Conway Hall in autumn 1980, at which both Jones and I spoke, I expressed my opinion with extreme sharpness so that there would be no hint of ambivalence such as afflicts all sorts of pseudo-Trotskyists. I said that Polish nationalism was justified, was progressive vis-a-vis the USSR, and that Great Russian chauvinism was the reactionary nationalism holding Poland in subjection. I expressed my support for Polish national independence and for those fighting for it.

At on OC on September 25 I raised the question of what our attitude would be if a Russian invasion led to full-scale war, and if the USA etc. were running guns and other help, perhaps through Gdansk, to the Poles fighting the 'Red' Army. There was unanimous agreement at the OC that this would not inhibit our support for Solidarnosc and the Poles. At the OC of October 22 I raised the Polish question again, asking comrades to consider the call for blacking of Russian goods in the event of an invasion. I raised the matter as clearly and sharply as I could at the October NC.

Obviously I focused on this question because in my understanding of what was happening in Poland, the fact of Poland's lack of national rights played a central role. It was the looming shadow of the Warsaw Pact armies that made the Gdansk soviet diminish and downgrade itself, and attempt to become a trade union, in August 1980.

I kept on about it because I wanted the organisation not to be caught unawares and politically unprepared by likely events...

The idea of hi-jacking in this situation is in fact the notion, or the ingrained and perhaps subconscious assumption, that cd Jones and his close associates have special rights: that is exactly what their behaviour in the EC meeting expressed, too. The notion that even against the background of the attempt to murder Solidarnosc, the line of the WSL should evolve in line with Jones's and Smith's thinking and not according to the urgency of events, I find singularly unattractive and self-centred.

There is no reason whatsoever why the WSL NC should wait, despite events in

the outside world, for Jones and others to reach firm conclusions before publicly assuming its responsibilities as a revolutionary organisation and raising the Trotskyist banner of independence for Poland...

There is a lot of demagogy here (and in much that I believe was said later at the EC). If it were to be generalised from, it would mean that the Leninist party would be impossible. Specialisation would be ruled out, so to an enormous extent would division of labour. The revolutionaries would opt out of trying to 'keep up' with the 'struggle on the ideological front' - the struggle which distinguishes our theory of the party from all other notions of a party. The comrades take a self defensive stand on the limits imposed on themselves by working at Cowley, and seem to want to confine what the party can do within those limits.

All of this has, of course, no bearing on whether I would write anything useful on Poland, or whether I should be dismissed as a party worker for incompetence or some other reason. If these are the issues, though, then the comrades should focus on them directly, and not argue in generalities which challenge the basic theory of the party we are trying to build.

More damning in its implications is the demagogic 'workerism' which they try to use here. Working in Cowley is not the best situation from which to prepare for and write serious articles. That's for sure. That the organisation should do everything it can to offset the pressure on time and energy so as to make it possible for the comrades to write and study, is essential to the organisation being a healthy one attuned to the working class, one in which workers can live, breath and develop. I would argue for Smith and Jones having their burden of routine party work lightened much more than it is at present. I also know from experience what the comrades face in trying to combine writing with doing heavy industrial work.

But Jones has written on Poland. How can the gaps and limitations, and the fact that over months he didn't seem to manage to focus his ideas on the issues raised, be explained in terms of his general situation, within which he has written a lot of articles over the years?

In fact this seems to be an attempt to appeal for support and sympathy on a spurious and dangerous basis - a demagogic appeal to a section of the organisation against the Bolshevik idea that the party is a cadre organisation which knits together petty bourgeois and proletarian members (and, to bring myself into it, proletarian members who function as professional revolutionaries).

The attempt to appeal demagogically - and with complete spuriousness - to something essentially irrelevant to the issues under debate, against their political opponents on Poland, is quite a long way from the letter and spirit of the political tradition we declared ourselves as having in common six months ago - that of the theorists of our view of the party, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Cannon.

Smith's assertion that I had insulted the Assembly Plant branch at the last EC was in the same vein. I hope that if a discussion develops, we will not descend to this level again. I serve notice, however, that if it does, then we will discuss these questions politically - in terms of what conception the comrades have of the revolutionary party we are trying to build.

The question of the revolutionary <sup>party</sup> is indeed the heart of the problem. The revolutionary party is in the first place a programme - which is not just a set of numbered points, but a concretisation of goals and basic concepts in relation to the world around us, i.e. it is also an analysis, if it is alive. The drive of some comrades to reduce down the ideological work, or even the work of keeping the real world under review (the issue in dispute over Ireland last year) amounts to a drive to sterilise the organisation politically and intellectually. Instead we need to have Bolshe-

vik approach of not being frightened to express differences and to fight for clarity on the basis of an effort to learn and convince.

Many of the problems we face arise from an averaging-out approach - organisationally and politically - which as far as I can see afflicts the old WSL, which threatens the new WSL, and which thus threatens to undercut and destroy one of the essential strengths of the I-CL.

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#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DISCUSSION ON I.B. 50

31.7.83

(After some preliminary procedural discussion, Carolan introduced the document 'Building the WSL'):

CAROLAN .... Basics: Scientific Marxist consciousness comes to the working class from outside. So what is the irreplaceable role of the revolutionary party? Ideological. Obviously the party needs a worker base, but the irreplaceable core is ideological - in certain periods the core can be sustained even on a non-worker sociological basis.

So the party is separate from the class though ultimately it can do nothing without it. The party is defined by commitment and minimum education.

What the party is to the class, the leadership is to the party. There is uneven development there, too - probably more unevenness within the party than between the party and the class.

Workers and intellectuals: the party should be an 'intellectual of a new type', fusing workers and intellectuals into cadres, even though special provisions should be made for workers.

We need a party of professional revolutionaries - and professional revolutionaries who undertake the job of political leadership, not just technical functionaries.

Leadership cannot be by ascription but by function. There must be some separation between the leading committees and the rest of the organisation - a collective leadership.

Ideological struggle goes on even within the party. The post-Trotsky Trotskyists have combined dogma with adaptation.

Some comrades have objected that this is a 'blueprint for taking over the organisation'. The majority of the organisation is entitled to 'take over'. But that's not the point. The issue is to state basics of functioning.

The details of the analysis in the document are entirely open to discussion. Most of the basics seem pretty obvious to me, though.

CUNLIFFE: The unacceptable aspects of the document are sections I, II and III. There express a summary of one side's view of the history of the organisation. Any serious attempt to discuss norms in general is nullified by them.

Section IV should be amended. The basic postulates on the ideological role of the party are not in question - but section IV leaves out the role of the membership of the party in developing ideology. It also leaves out the role of the branches. We should take out sections of my document last year on party-building, and insert them to fill that gap. That is crucial convincing comrades of the indispensability of the WSL....

(Cunliffe continued with a detailed section-by-section commentary).

JONES: I'll make just one statement, then I'll say no more. I would have nothing to do with this document except to say that the conference should not vote on it. Every single line has a factional motive behind it. For example the references to the role of intellectuals are written to justify

intellectual bullying of the organisation, as shown for example in the agenda for the summer school.

The references back to 100 years ago on the party and theory are laughable. This is today !

The document is presented as abstract. But it's not. The concrete content should be brought out.

Intellectuals will always go to the top - there should be positive discrimination for workers. There must be a clash between intellectuals' intellectual arrogance and the organisation. The major problem for the organisation is workers, not intellectuals.

Separate off leading committees? That's laughable. You make it impossible for the committees to function by putting out minutes.

This discussion has been launched for factional reasons. Everything is done for factional reasons now. This document imposes one side's norms as papal decrees on the minority.

Either this document is withdrawn or there will be a huge clash at the [August] conference. This is the third stage. The first was getting rid of the Internationalist Faction. The second stage was trying to consolidate. The third stage is to try to drive us and the other grouping out. As part of it, a structure is proposed which gives complete dictatorial control. This is exactly what we envisaged.

CAROLAN: Does Smith agree with Jones?

SMITH: Yes.

KINNELL: The only part of the document that needs to be voted on is six short points in section X. Jones's points are not reasonable.

Some of Cunliffe's points are fair. But there is a danger of losing the specific argument of the document in generalities about branch functioning, etc. A separate resolution on branches' work would be better. On other points there could be amendments.

(A discussion followed on separating out the earlier sections of the document from the parts for voting).

CAROLAN: ... The first three sections are separable from the rest, though I'm not sure whether I'm in favour of separating them. We could make any separation explicit.

Jones does relate to the disputes in the organisation. Intellectual bullying? On issues like Ireland, either we don't discuss at all, or we start from where we are.

The point is that the leadership has to function in the first place as a Marxist cadre - obviously not apart from the class struggle. Obviously intellectuals who just sit around and don't get involved in class struggle activity should be disciplined. The point is to equalise workers and intellectuals. Positive discrimination for workers? Yes, in all sorts of ways. But the leadership must function politically.

Driving comrades out? No. But we do need to try to get the organisation into shape. None of the concessions made to the minority seems to work.

#### FURTHER DISCUSSION: 3.8.83

CUNLIFFE (presenting some amendments): The basic line of the amendments is to counter a wooden and schematic view of the functioning of the leadership as an ideological force within the movement - reducing the role of the membership. Also to say more on branch work.

We have to relate the party to members' day-to-day work in the class struggle, and not just seem them as following directives. Branches have not been functioning satisfactorily.

Section IX should be deleted. Some say this section is central. The question may come down to what it means. I think it's not adequate - it can be seen as a licence for the existing majority leadership to function

at a pace regardless of other comrades in the organisation. I'm alarmed that comrades place such stress on that section.

Sections I, II and III should be deleted - or there will be no chance of uniting the organisation.

SMITH: The document spells out an elitist view of leadership.

KINNELL: I accept some of Cunliffe's points, would argue over others. I'm happy to separate off sections I, II and III, and let's discuss sections IV onwards. My views on sections I, II and III have not changed, but it's not worth arguing about those now.

The disagreement is not about whether to involve the membership. Obviously the greatest number of experiences and insights possible must be drawn into discussions, the leadership must learn from the membership, the party must learn from the class, etc. But all these are truths about workers' organisations in general, and miss what is specific about the Leninist party.

The Leninist party, if it is to do what it has to do, must be not only active, responsive, democratic, etc., but also the organ of a continuity of scientific analysis. And science requires study, knowledge, etc.

Lenin, as usual, put the question very sharply:

"This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. But they take part not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of the age and advance that knowledge".

Only by developing a leadership - necessarily more restricted than the entire membership - of 'ideologists' who try, at least, to function on the level of the 'knowledge of the age', can a Leninist organisation do its job. Only then can it establish the clarity which can in actual fact (not just in pious intention) make it uniquely response andand democratic.

To promise that every member can have an equal part is to be demagogic and to downgrade science. Whatever the good intentions, it cannot lead to real democracy and responsiveness, but only to ideological instability and 'tyranny of structurelessness'.

Our answer to those who say, "it should not be confined to the 'intellectuals'" should be: "To a certain extent it has to be confined to the 'intellectuals'. The answer is for more comrades to become 'intellectuals'. That can only be done by study".

The organisation has a duty to respond to real issues in the class struggle, calling on the ability of those best-placed to draw clear conclusions. Where there is no great urgency in an issue, however, we should allow for slow discussion, maximum involvement, etc.

CAROLAN: I'm in favour of withdrawing sections I, II and III to enable discussion, though I don't repudiate the views. We should try to get a common document, but not confuse the issues.

CUNLIFFE: Section IX is not a full assessment of the role of intellectuals. The majority leadership regard only themselves as intellectuals, and everyone else as having less knowledge. The issue is not abstract. I'm not prepared to concede that the monopoly of the development of political positions is in the hands of intellectuals. Intellectuals should be subordinate to the need to develop workers: but there is nothing of that in the document.

KINNELL: Yes there is. We discuss Gramsci's idea of 'worker intellectuals'.

CAROLAN: The discussion is de-focused. Section IX is a specific response to Smith's arguments on the question. It's not a full treatment, but it does contain the kernel of the issue. A monopoly for intellectuals? No. No-one proposes any formal limitations, monopoly powers, etc. But Marxism demands knowledge, skills etc. We recognise the facts of unevenness within the class

and also within the party.

The issue is the relations within the leadership of the WSL. The issue is whether we function on the basis of equality and issues being decided by power of discussion, or of some having more rights than others. The question is whether Marxism is to guide the organisation.

The classic example is the Irish dispute. There is inequality of knowledge. So: we proceed either on the basis of argument - or of Jones 'laying down the line'.

SMITH: This is theorising to allow two people to dominate the organisation. It's not a question of formal equality. If you have formal equality, then automatically the organisation is dominated by intellectuals. Is that desirable? I think not, so you have to have positive discrimination for workers.

The document is theorising to allow two intellectuals to dominate the organisation - Kinnell and Carolan.

CAROLAN: What do you mean by positive discrimination?

SMITH: A relationship where we try to develop workers into leadership. What we've got here is the use of intellectuals to browbeat people, by pressurising them personally and individually.

CAROLAN: Intellectuals? I'm a proletarian who left school at 15. My 'intellectual' interests are fundamentally political.

Positive discrimination? Yes. But certain decisions have to be made for objective reasons. The leading committee has to be guided by Marxism. What would positive discrimination mean there?

SMITH: People are oppressed by intellectuals putting issues on the table, demanding instant responses, etc... It's a form of oppression of workers.

CAROLAN: I've spent a lot of my political life with people far better educated than myself. I know the problem. But there has to be some objectivity. Sometimes the organisation has to respond - not let itself be dictated to by comrades who want to go slow. You can't compensate for inequalities by reversing them.

KINNELL: I'm not demanding a formal definition of 'intellectual', but it is important what Smith is talking about.

If 'intellectual' means people who have a certain level of knowledge, then yes I do mean that that sort of 'intellectuals' should be in the leadership, and workers should be turned into intellectuals.

But Smith seems to mean not quite that, but people who are fluent, articulate, have formal education, etc. Actually the description does not particularly apply to those who are supposed to be dominating the organisation.

We do need to stop such people dominating. But that is not quite the same question as 'intellectuals' vs 'workers'. E.g. in discussing the early US Communist Party Cannon describes how Fraina, an 'intellectual', was destroyed and carved up by the leaders who didn't have formal education but were factionally able.

In our organisation now, Smith is the most fluent speaker, and sometimes he uses that demagogically to win support.

Personal pressure? I've seen more of that from the minority. The way to avoid personal pressures dominating is to ensure the supremacy of rational argument. Those who can argue most logically, have most facts on their side, etc. should dominate - but this should not be a fixed group of people....

On intellectuals in the old WSL, maybe there were problems that Smith did not recognise. E.g. I discussed with Traven about his failure to take part much in internal discussions. He replied: 'You can't say all that you think. You have to put ideas in a way that is acceptable'. This was an example of an intellectual not using their knowledge to the maximum to help clarify the organisation, but holding back deferentially. The most shocking thing to me is that Traven saw nothing controversial in his approach.

HILL: The organisation's positions should be determined by the most rational, fact-based argument - not by the record or status of particular comrades. Kinnell

is not arguing that comrades who are slow etc. should be excluded. Obviously discussions can be postponed to allow time. They have been, e.g. on Ireland. But the comrades complain of not time to develop their positions and simultaneously fight for a rapid decision in the organisation! The party must be fundamentally political - political argument must dominate.

Bullying? You can get an RWL situation of intense personal pressure. But that's different from political pressure, which is necessary and desirable. I think the pressure has been fundamentally political.

Why the stress on removing Section IX?

The comrades seem to be most concerned with not being shown publicly to be wrong on issues.

SMITH: The intimidation is all political argument. But it's a wrong method. People are hammered for hours.

CUNLIFFE: It's new and bad to have this system of political pressure spelled out by Hill. I moved deletion of section IX to draw out the discussion.

Traven's position? In one way what he says is true. You can't put every idea into the organisation as a whole. In the old WSL there was no hint of any restriction on comrades who had ideas. But we fought for a system where comrades who had ideas did not dominate the organisation.

Precious few comrades can argue positions in detail - so would Hill disenfranchise the majority? That's the epitome of elitism. A small grouping of people consolidating their status.

Take Ireland. I've said nothing in the debate. I haven't had time to read enough to sustain an argument - but I hold a position. I won't defer, or feel inferior. To say that just because an item was tabled for discussion, everyone should be ready with their argument, is unreal. It militates against the development of the worker comrades.

HILL: I didn't say that comrades who don't have a fully-argued position should have no say.

SMITH: You did say that if you have difficulty arguing a position, you can't expect to determine the line.

CAROLAN: It's possible to be ignorant yet have a gut feeling that something is wrong. But if you don't go beyond that, we have trouble. We get denunciation, not argument.

Comrades can be intimidated by ideologues. That's a problem. But issues have not been pushed through the committees arbitrarily. And some arguments have been held back indefinitely for the sake of individuals.

Smith has defined the full-timers as the intellectuals. But in Gramsci's sense Smith and Jones are intellectuals too.

SMITH: Gramsci just blots out the worker/intellectual distinction.

CAROLAN: I don't.

SMITH: Aren't we all professional revolutionaries?

CAROLAN: No. Some people have to work in the factories, etc, too. We should give them time, etc., where we can to help equalise.

Bullying? What do you mean? I think the bullying has been the other way - e.g. the denunciations against me on Ireland.

KINNELL: Political pressure in terms of intense discussion is positive. In 'The Struggle for a Proletarian Party' Cannon points to opposition complaints of private discussions before committee meetings, and defends those discussions as the best way to get clear political ideas. Most useful discussions begin informally and are later formalised on committees.

CUNLIFFE: Be specific. Talk about this organisation. E.g. you hammered Keith on the question of the Middle East.

KINNELL: I had an individual discussion with Keith on the TILC resolution draft. In that discussion we arrived more quickly at a conclusion than in previous discussions. Pressure? Keith has greater experience than I, more fluency in

argument, more knowledge on the area we were discussing...

SMITH. Another example. In the debate on the WRP coverage Parkinson agreed with us. Kinnell was extremely hostile to this...

(argument followed about the facts of this matter)...

KINNELL: I don't remember all the details. It's possible I was annoyed. But it's insulting to think that Parkinson could be 'whipped into line' as you suggest. And it's quite in order to get an individual discussion with a comrade over a disagreement.

On Smith's and Cunliffe's points: I certainly think that if you can't put a position clearly and coherently, then you shouldn't determine the position of the organisation on that question. We should try to avoid decisions being taken in confusion and ignorance. The function of the party - the indispensability of scientific analysis and Marxism - implies that the most rational argument has to prevail. Otherwise we can base ourselves only on deference and personal factors.

If Cunliffe doesn't know anything about Ireland, then he should defer to those who know more.

CUNLIFFE: If Trotsky were around, I would defer.

KINNELL: Or take the imperialism debate. I've attempted in IB 49 to argue a view with as much rational explanation and factual detail as I can. 'Bullying' in this context is the behaviour of those comrades who do not argue a position but just denounce. For example all the shock-horror agitation against the notion of 'sub-imperialism', without any detailed discussion of the theory. Or the 'enclaves' theory of imperialism - never argued, but voted through at the September 1982 conference. That's an example of rational argument not winning, and I think it was wrong. Fixed hierarchies in the organisation come about when you desert the supremacy of rational argument and operate by authority, status and deference instead. In the I-CL we had a much less fixed composition of the leadership than in the old WSL.

SMITH: Really three people run the organisation.

KINNELL: Look at the history. It hasn't been a fixed group.

CUNLIFFE: What about now?

KINNELL: Look at the history of the Lambertists. Lambert dominated the group by virtue not of political argument but his organisational ability and his position as trade union organiser. He pushed out the intellectuals who had developed the tendency, and that led to its destruction as a Trotskyist organisation.

Similarly, with Healy, the organisation man dominated the intellectuals. That's where Traven got his views on the role of intellectuals from.

The work of integrating the organisation has got to be done politically. All the examples of wanting vote-outs immediately have come from Smith and Jones, etc., e.g. Jones on Ireland. We've been prepared to try to argue and clarify. We need a rational method of arriving at positions. Within that I would support taking debates as slowly as possible.

(Some argument about Jones's procedure on the Irish issue).

CAROLAN: Two or three people dominating? You'll find in the history of the I-CL myself and/or Kinnell frequently in a minority.

Deference? Either you defer to knowledge, or you defer to people in ascribed roles.

Three people dominate the WSL today? Smith has taken on the attitude of an oppositionist, but he could if he wished be central in running the organisation.

SMITH: The apparatus controls the organisation. It's like the trade union bureaucracy. And Carolan controls the apparatus.

HILL: Formally Smith is part of the apparatus.

SMITH: It's naive to think that by attending the committees I can control the organisation.

organisation.

CAROLAN: What stops you?

SMITH: Maybe I'll have to come into the office every day.

(The discussion concluded with a proposal on how to deal with the document: that only the proposals at the end be considered as a resolution for conference, and that it be explicitly stated that the vote on these did not imply acceptance or rejection of the previous sections. Discussion should continue after the conference on sections IV-IX. This was accepted with 5 votes for and 1 abstention - Smith).

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NOTE, by Carolan.

One question arises from all this and from things like the EC-only document excerpted above which was not even circulated to the NC members. Why was it kept within the EC and NC?

Because of the nature of the problem. To pose the real problem publicly in the organisation would have been to declare war on Smith and Jones and their 'side' of the organisation. Saving the fusion depended on conciliating Smith and Jones, on finding a way to coexist with them by accommodating them as much as possible. To pose the issues publicly as we saw them, and I as I wrote about them (in a very restrained way) in January 1982 would have been to rule out all hope of accommodating them. That implied a split, given the nature of the old-WSL forces in the organisation and given that Smith and Jones (and such as Morrow) had prepared for the fusion by arming their comrades against us. (Smith, for example - so we had it from two different sources - told the future Morrowite youth on the eve of fusion that he would 'go into the fusion and smash that Pabloite leadership and make the new organisation Trotskyist').

So we kept it all bottled up, and tried to find a common basis for work. We never did. Then the Falklands war came, real differences arose, and about the time the war ended Smith and Jones thought they saw enough opposition in the League to the line we had presented to be able to solve their problem by steam-rollering the ex I-CL group in the leadership.

Were we wrong to keep it bottled up? It depends on your assessment. We were right ~~that~~ to pose things openly would be to create an irreparable breach. Maybe we should have done that. But I don't think so. We had to do our honest best to save the fusion.

There was another general consideration. After the Falklands dispute the amount of venom in the EC had to be sealed off - as far as we could do so - or it would have poisoned the organisation. Seeping through the organisation, as it has done, it has in fact poisoned the organisation.

Even in retrospect I think we were right to fight to save the fusion, even though it cost us a lot in terms of nervous energy.

