

IB 93

MARCH 1984

Carolyn prepares a split - Jones.

Wot? Only half a paper? - Cunliffe.

Carolán Prepares a Split - Jones.

At the time of the January National Committee meeting, the discussion on the timing of the Annual Conference seemed to ~~be~~ some comrades to be simply an argument around technicalities.

On the face of it, there was an argument for either an earlier or a later date. While those of us in the minority pointed out that all the major decisions on British Perspectives and the election of the NC had been completed in the April session of last year's conference, and therefore the proper time for the 1984 Conference was as close as possible to April, Carolán argued for September, pointing instead to the conclusion of the final stage of last years conference.

Tied in with our arguments for an early date was our assessment of the need to discuss major changes in the political situation since last April, and the work of the movement.

Yet the real thinking behind Carolán's insistence upon a later date, and some other moves over the recent months has now become clear.

At the very next meeting of the NC - on March 10 - Carolán put a resolution declaring that "the situation" (in relation to the Faction) "must be resolved in the next few weeks one way or the other". "The Faction must decide to go out of the WSL or come into it. It cannot continue the way it is." In the course of the NC Carolán's motion was amended to specify that "in the next few weeks" meant in effect "by the next NC" - whenever the EC majority decides that should be.

So at one NC Carolán argues for holding the Conference at the latest possible date: at the next he proceeds to insist that the situation is so serious that, unless the Faction knuckles under, they will be dealt with almost immediately; in fact we would be dealt with at the "next NC". Usually, the NC meets every 6-8 weeks. But a few days after the March 10 NC, the EC Majority decided to bring forward the next NC meeting to March 31, a mere 3 weeks from the previous one. The reason for this was that we had produced the necessary number of signatures to demand under the Constitution that a Special Conference be convened within 8 weeks. Carolán decided he had to speed up the process in order to expel us before such a conference could take place.

What is clear from this is that Carolán wishes to prevent the membership learning the issues involved and deciding for themselves where they stand on the state of the organisation. Surely, if he felt matters were so serious, Carolán would otherwise have supported an earlier date - or the earliest possible date for the Conference.

But that is not his way of operating. Carolán is opposed to the involvement of the membership in this, or any other serious participation in decision-making. In his view ^{members} are there only to be instructed and lectured. He believes that top-level committees - himself, Kinnell and Hill - should take all the decisions.

He now opposes the call for a Special Conference, arguing that "nothing is to be gained". But he does not oppose tiny committees discussing the state of the organisation. Indeed every EC and NC meeting over the last 4 months and more has been packed with resolutions on the subject.

So in Carolán's view it is OK for the top committees of the organisation to be bogged down for more than half their time in discussing the state of the organisation - or to discuss splitting the movement or the expulsions of an important section of the membership: but the membership is to be denied the right to consider the issues and express their views.

Yet what Carolan is proposing in his resolution is in effect a move towards splitting the fused organisation. What would happen should such a split occur? The members would be told after the event, and told Carolan's version of why the split occurred.

This is treating the members with contempt. They have a right to hear the points of view involved and to make up their own minds.

But in the light of these steps towards a top-level split, without the involvement of the membership, some of the recent bureaucratic moves by Carolan/Kinnell which we have complained about begin to fall into their proper context.

One example is Carolan's moves in relation to the paper - to exclude opposition to the views of the EC majority, or to present oppositional positions in such a way as to suggest to the reader that they should be ignored.

The paper is the most powerful weapon in shaping the views of the membership: far more powerful than Internal Bulletins. Yet in recent months it has been taken for granted that the views of Carolan and Kinnell on any subject whatever should be presented as the views of the movement - without any regard for the existence or not of adopted League positions. This was the case over Grenada, and even Argentina, where their view has been voted down. The same goes on industrial questions. And Carolan/Kinnell have shown themselves implacably opposed to any collective Editorial Board which might possibly opt for views other than their own.

In other words Carolan/Kinnell have been presenting their personal opinions and getting the whole membership to argue for them in selling the paper - while all the time they have been preparing for a split.

This would be bad enough if a conference were actually to be held. After all, we managed to reverse such a position over the Malvinas war (though we were roundly denounced by Carolan as "splitters" because we insisted on taking the discussion to the membership and allowing them a vote). But with no conference being held, the members are being coldly told to take a position after hearing only the one series of political positions for the past year. That is the Carolan plan.

WHY SHOULD A HANDFUL OF NC MEMBERS BE ALLOWED TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO SPLIT OUR ORGANISATION?

In true hypocritical fashion, we have ^{been} branded as "splitters" from the point where we made it clear we were not going to abandon our politics and tamely toe the Carolan line.

Far from being splitters, we have proposed a Special Conference to put forward a democratic centralist structure which would enable the different points of view to work together within a common organisation over the next few months to the Annual Conference. This would mean involving the membership in the discussions on the development of the movement and the political positions it adopts. Carolan/Kinnell prefer to move quickly to expulsions or a split.

Their concept of a movement is one where a "politically developed" elite leads, and the rest docilely and blindly follow. Our view is that a healthy organisation is one where members follow a leadership because they understand the political positions fought for.

The argument has also been advanced that a Special Conference would result in a lot of people being lost to revolutionary politics. It is sad indeed if this is the current level of morale in the WSL, but ^{such a} level can only be raised politically, through clarification and discussion.

Can anyone seriously argue it is better for members to be blandly told, after the event, that their movement has been split in two by decision of a small committee, than for them to hear both sides for themselves and weigh up the proposals on offer?

It is not we who have prepared or wanted a split. Indeed Carolan's current hit-list of opponents for expulsion includes comrades of widely differing political opinions. It is our belief that such differences can and should (indeed must) coexist now and in the future within a common, democratic centralist structure. We can coexist with differences: but Carolan cannot, and now wants a split. Anyone who follows him into such a split but has disagreements had better be prepared to keep their mouths shut now, and for ever hold their peace.

March 22 1984.

Wot? Only Half a Paper?



The "Split Special" and the sorry tale of IBs 88 and 89

Gunliffe

Those comrades who have thought of the WSL as a class struggle organisation and the EC Majority as committed to the class struggle will have been doubly perturbed last week to receive the threadbare half-size newspaper, laughingly describing itself as a "Miners's strike Special". A more candid title would have been "Split Special". Virtually devoid of any political analysis of the miners strike or anything else, the paper was a miserable expression of the EC Majority's real attitude to the massive class battles going on around us, while they rush the movement, hell for leather, towards an a-political split.

The energies and resources which might otherwise have gone into producing our movement's press were devoted instead by our worthy Editor to the production of a strange blend of fantasy and frenzy - IBs 88 and 89, with presumably more of the same where they come from.

Among the more extravagant passages are comrade Carolan's fanciful speculations on "What was the old WSL like?" (IB 89, pp3 onwards). Of course Carolan doesn't know what it was like. But that doesn't worry him: his account is obviously not intended to convince anyone who was ever in the old WSL (they have either been dismissed as a lost cause, or now cynically regarded as servile Carolan hand-raisers). Carolan's purpose is simply to whip into line comrades newly recruited to the fused organisation by ex-ICL members, and old ICLers who may prove vulnerable to a well-spun yarn.

Despite the welter of inept and irrelevant quotations and reprints from James P. Cannon which lend a veneer of "orthodoxy" to Carolan's drive for a split, it is conspicuous that Carolan omits to use the most appropriate:

"Lenin said 'Anybody who takes somebody's word for it is a hopeless idiot....We printed that quotation of Lenin on the masthead as an appeal to Communist Party members 'Don't take anybody's word for what Trotsky said, read the documents.'" (Speeches to the Party, pl54)

Of course anyone actually reading the material of the old WSL, looking at our actual work in the labour movement, or reading the documented positions of ex-old-WSL comrades in the fused organisation would get a very different picture from that offered up by Carolan. Indeed it is only necessary to read Carolan's own frantic text carefully to see glaring holes in his case. The entire, elaborately-constructed myth of Smith and Jones seeing themselves in so many words as a pre-ordained designated, god-given "worker leadership" rings slightly hollow if the reader can find the strength to soldier on to page 12A of IB 89, where Carolan admits that:

"I can't recall whether anyone used the expression 'worker leadership'". He also admits that Jones appeared sincere when at the March 10 NC he denied ever having heard - let alone used - the term. But, says Carolan: "never mind".

Never mind indeed. Never mind the facts. Never mind the truth. Never mind objective reality. Never mind the class struggle. Never mind our class position. There are more important things to attend to: there is a factional struggle to pursue.

How else are we to read Carolan's shameful stance on the Cowley situation? Smith was savagely victimised from the factory (after 24 years) by BL management, assisted by TGMU bureaucrats. That did not trouble the EC Majority: it strengthened their hand in the factional struggle. Supporters of the EC Majority sang songs in public to celebrate the

victimisation of a Trotskyist militant from a major plant. Now, after bottling up his feelings for so long, Carolan too dances a little jig to celebrate. In IB 88 we find Smith described as an "ex-worker". In IB 89 we are told that he "left Cowley". Whose side is Carolan on? Does the workers' movement really mean anything to him when weighed in the scales against petty factional point scoring? In similar vein, we should note the echoes of Gerry Healy's style, as the succession of vicious press witch-hunts of Smith are described as if Smith himself had sought out the particular variety of "fame" they offered.

The sad fact is that as they have intensified their drive towards a split, travelling the country to corner members one by one and whip them up into an ill-informed frenzy of hostility to the very notion of the old WSL, the EC Majority have completely lost their way in the class struggle.

A clear symptom of this was in the pathetically weak stance of EC Majority members and supporters on the current slogans of our movement in relation to the miners' strike, as displayed at the youth cadre school on March 24. An introduction by Wettling on "Revolutionaries and the labour movement" failed even to mention the trade unions. The present-day class battles received not a mention: nor did any of the work done in the period of fusion. For an example of what he regarded as the correct approach, Wettling went back four years to the period of the Rank and File Mobilising Committee.

When comrades from the floor raised current problems - specifically asking what were the demands around which what is left of the paper is calling on workers to "Prepare a General Strike", Wettling's self-confessed inability to answer the question was matched by a silence, and eventually (after the session closed) floundering and unconvincing replies from the Editor! One thing both these EC Majority hardliners were sure of was that under no circumstances should the General Strike demand be linked to a call to kick out the Tory government. The reason? Because this was a slogan advocated by the old WSL, and there can be no concessions on such questions, regardless of the class struggle outside.

Some comrades independently argued that the correct demand was for a general strike to kick out the Tories, pointing out, correctly, that it is hard to sum up any other objective or lend it any more political a trajectory: nor is anyone else on the left at present making such a call. But in reply all the EC Majority defenders could come up with was vague reference to the "anti-union laws" (which are not currently being used) and defending the miners.

Here indeed we run up against the problem of policies being dreamed up by comrades who never have to implement them in practice. Faced by such evidence that the King has no clothes, perhaps even some of those comrades otherwise borne aloft on the jets of hot air in IBs 88 and 89 are likely to plummet rather rudely to earth. Maybe this, too, is why every available moment of time, every last penny and every ounce of energy is quite shamelessly being used by the EC Majority to drive what they hope will be the final wedges into the fused organisation and precipitate an unprincipled, unnecessary, unsavoury and destructive split. In IB 86 Kinnell warns (p5) of the possible danger of the WSL being possibly left in B "with a shell and a bad odour round us". Comrades preparing to split with Kinnell/Carolan should prepare for just such an eventuality as far as the League is concerned: those without pegs for their noses or the stomach for the smell should join the fight for democratic centralism in the WSL as part of a fight to turn the League back to the class struggle. Maybe, if Carolan was half as hostile to the employers as he is to Smith, he could think of something to put into future issues of the paper?

Cunliffe. March 26 1984.

