

INTERNAL BULLETIN No 111

Carolyn is a liar - Parsons

Group norms, the WSL National Committee and the imbalance
of power - Oliver.

Correction

Top two lines of page 2 are missing on some copies

"Let's give cdes a flavour of some of the problems we have
had to face as a branch because of Strummer's various areas of work."

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

RECEIVED

1961

1961

1961

CAROLAN IS A LIAR

There is an attitude among some cdes that the outpourings of Carolan and Kinnell, and now Collins are simply a reflection of a growing hysteria, that the wild accusations and absurd posturing of these people are not worthy of any response.

This, I think is an understandable but shortsighted view. It is shortsighted because the LIES and DISTORTION contained in the documents now raining on us thick and fast might play a role in convincing some cdes that Carolan has a point, or at least, that in Collins' words, he can be settled with "in our own way and in our own time" (IB 102)

A major problem in replying to Carolan/Kinnell is knowing where to start. Which lie does one choose to nail first? Perhaps the most serious charge from Carolan is that Parsons is against a centralised revolutionary party (IB 91,p9). This charge is justified via a series of lies on the preceding page in the section "Federalism, Anti-centralism".

Paragraph One - is to say the least a "partial" view of the old WSL reality. It does not relate at all to the charges in Paragraph Two which we will dissect lie by lie. "The Parsons group preaches hostility to the centre" (When? Where?). "It is undemocratic according to Parsons, for the nationally elected bodies to intervene in a branch." (When did I say this? Where?)

"There have been a whole series of disputes around this axis". Really Cde Carolan. When?

- (1) "The branch at one stage forbade James to attend national women's commission meeting."
- (2) "It tried to bar Strummer from national work."
- (3) "It complained bitterly about Elvis working at the centre."
- (4) "It put huge obstacles in the place of a visit to the branch by the National Youth Organiser to discuss youth work."

We find then that the "whole series of disputes" becomes four - in the space of 2½ years. However, there is more to come. "Parsons played a leading role in all these cases."

WE SHALL DEMONSTRATE THAT IN EACH CASE CAROLAN IS LYING.

LIE NUMBER ONE "The branch at one stage forbade James to attend national women's commission meetings" What really happened?

In the early stages of the Coventry work we had two branches. The branch concerned was not one in which I worked. Cdes Oliver and James were primarily responsible for it. It was our practice to discuss the work of each individual comrade. Cde James stated that she had too many commitments and asked what she should drop. The branch suggested that she need not attend women's commission meetings - especially as she did no significant work around women's oppression at a local level (Cde James raised no objection). When I found out about this, I stated that cde James would soon change her mind and accuse the branch of restricting her rights. The branch had made a mistake - although an entirely legitimate one. At no stage was she instructed to keep away from commission meetings. True to form, cde James made a complaint and I got accused (by cde Kinnell) of interfering with national work. I thought I'd explained the real facts of the case at the time, but they have recently been resurrected by Kinnell (in the dispute over Elvis) and now Carolan weighs in on the principle that if you tell a lie enough times it will stick.

LIE NUMBER TWO "It tried to bar Strummer from national work." Again when? Where? Why? There have been a number of discussions relating to this vexed problem, not least arising out of resolutions to the above effect brought to our branch by Strummer herself. It really isn't good enough to make an assertion like the above without detailing time, place, circumstances etc.

Let's give cdes a flavour of some of the problems we have had to face as a branch because of Strummer's various areas of work.

I well remember getting a phone call from Strummer about the problem of being elected as a delegate to Y ND national conference. She didn't see it as an important area of work for her at that particular time. (I can't recall the reason off hand - no doubt Strummer herself will fill in the details). She didn't want to go to the conference and she wanted me to say that was alright. I said that if she had been delegated she should go (as I understand it, that's in the Obligations of Membership document). She could avoid upsetting her other work by simply going to the conference and reporting back. Imagine my surprise when she came back from the conference a Y ND NC member - pressured into standing by cde Hunt. WE HAVE NEVER TRIED TO BAR STRUMMER FROM NATIONAL WORK. We have tried to rationalise that work and get the balance between national and local work agreed so that we knew what resources we had at our disposal.

LIE NUMBER THREE "it complained bitterly about Elvis working at the centre."

Carolán is careful to select his precise words here. It is true that I do not think that Elvis should work at the centre. It is true that I complained about the manner of his being removed from local work. I think that perhaps the best thing cdes Carolán and Kinnell would be to re-print the written correspondence between the branch and the EC. I challenge them to do so - they will not because the charge of federalism will be found to be false.

LIE NUMBER FOUR "It put huge obstacles in the place of a visit... by the National Youth Organiser to discuss youth work."
Now this is simply not true and it is doubly untrue that "Parsons played a leading role..."

What are the facts? Up until his resignation, cde McKelvie was our branch organiser. He made an arrangement (some time in November) with cde Joplin for her to visit the branch and discuss youth work. The branch she should have attended was the first to be held after McKelvie's resignation and followed on from the NC in early January.

On our way out of the Jan. NC, cde Joplin said to me in her usual polite and charming way "When's your next branch meeting?" I asked her why she wanted to know and was told - "cos I'm coming to talk about youth work." I replied that we would have too much on the agenda - McKelvie's resignation, NC report etc. and that I would propose that she come to the next meeting.

At the branch meeting I argued that we should invite cde Joplin to the next meeting as promised. The branch voted instead to hold a different discussion. Not only was Parsons not central to preventing Joplin from not coming (to one branch meeting) it was Parsons who proposed she should come and NO ONE OTHER THAN PARSONS VOTED FOR THE PROPOSAL - EVEN THOSE WHOM CAROLAN ASSUMES ARE HIS SUPPORTERS.

Come off it Carolán you'll have to come up with something more significant than that to prove the charge of federalism.

Why does Carolán persist with his lies about the Coventry federalists?

Could it have something to do with the incident many months ago now when Carolán asked me what I felt about splitting the movement? I told him then that he would end up with no Coventry branch. Since then he has been trying to build a faction in the branch - not on the basis of politics, programme etc, but on the basis of cliquism, personal pressure, cosy chats etc.

Far from thinking it undemocratic for the nationally elected bodies to inter-ene in a branch, I have sought unsuccessfully to generate a political discussion with full-timers over local perspectives.

... Answer me this cde Carolan. Is it not the case that last September 24 we held a day long branch meeting to discuss local perspectives. Further is it not the case that I prepared a perspectives document for that meeting. Is it not the case that I am still waiting for cde Hill to comment on its content despite the fact that I spoke to him several times around October and asked for his comments. Is it not the case that cde Kinnell was informed of the document's existence early this year and has yet to comment on it. Is it not the case that cde Hill was only interested in attending the branch perspectives discussion "if we were to discuss cde Elvis' relationship with the centre".

The answer to all these questions is "Yes", and they add up to a searing indictment of downright indifference to local work on your part. (more of this later).

Lets suggest something to test the charges of federalism. Why don't you publish in the internal bulletin my branch perspectives document? Why don't you for once try to engage in a political discussion from the point of view of trying to develop the efforts of cdes to build the movement? Why don't you try to discuss with the branch leadership and the branch as a whole, rather than button-hole individuals and get them to act as your agents for you in the branch?

The answer is very simple. You see in Parsons someone who does not defer to you automatically. You see in Parsons someone who cannot be pushed around or intimidated. In short you see someone you can't dominate. You don't like what you see. It suits your aim of splitting the movement to get rid of everyone who might oppose you. You also need very much to discredit the so-called Parsons group.

In order to carry through the campaign to discredit us, you lie and distort events, views etc to suit yourself. You also do something more sinister. You use techniques which are devoid of straight political debate.

You claim to understand the "Parsons group" but persist in ascribing the chief role in it to myself. The Sept '82 document called "Save the Fusion" was published as the Oliver/Parsons resolution. It was written almost exclusively by cde Oliver - you call it the Parsons/Oliver statement. The McKelvie/Oliver/Parsons document likewise becomes the Parsons/Oliver/McKelvie document. There is more justice in this, in that I wrote the document. However, I wrote it from the point of view of a political position we shared - one which was inspired and initially developed by cde Oliver. It suits your purpose Carolan to emphasise my role and downgrade that of Oliver and McKelvie. I am ex-WSL, they are ex-ICL. You explain my "return" to Smith/Jones as a personal thing - somehow connected with "an understandable human desire to affect what happens, to have influence, prominence, and in general play a leading role" (P9, IB91).

How do you explain cde Oliver's attitude? Is he under my spell somehow? Is he old and tired? The reality is that the "Parsons group" is not the "Parsons" group at all. Cdes who want to understand what some of us have been trying to do over the last couple of years should read IB 84.

Parsons is apolitical

"By the August '83 conference he was at the stage of pure factionalism ...completely unsullied by any defined politics" (my emphasis -Parsons) (IB 91 P9)

"The major political issues were Ireland and our attitude to civilian bombings. Parsons was ostentatiously un-interested in these, extremely reluctant for example to organise any pre-conference discussion on Ireland in Coventry." (IB 91, p8)

"They used the conference debate on that issue...to rally feeling... against...people allegedly interested only in debating abstruse politics not in the practical work..." (IB 91,p8)

In IB 84 I tried to explain that I did not accept cde Carolan's definition of the terms of the political debate within the movement. Cde Carolan believes himself to be right on everything and that everyone else is wrong. More importantly, cde Carolan believes that his politics form a coherent whole and therefore that if someone agrees with some aspect of what he says, that is "progress of a sort" (reference to Levy p7) but only represents partial understanding. His view is Healyite in that any deviation from his established body of knowledge can be extrapolated into support for some alien class intent.

He sees cdes Smith and Jones as having a defined set of politics, but not Parsons. Parsons you see has no organisation to go with his politics. If I had sought to elaborate an all-round political programme and to build a faction around it, presumably I would have been accepted as approaching the issues correctly.

I have explained on a number of occasions that I think all the Trotskyist currents are inadequate and it is our task to struggle together to overcome our programmatic weaknesses. There has yet to be a political discussion within any movement in which I have been involved to which I have been indifferent. I have always sought to contribute to that movement. My quarrel with Carolan is that he sees political debate not in terms of education and clarification but in gladiatorial terms - with him as the winner on each occasion.

He says that Parsons was "ostentatiously un-interested" in the Irish debate and "extremely reluctant to organise any pre-conference discussion on Ireland in Coventry."

Now, cde Carolan, we can't let this one go. If you can furnish me with the proof that there was any branch in the WSL which had as many pre-conference discussions in the run-up to the 1983 conferences as we did in Coventry, I would be extremely surprised.

We discussed all the major documents in the run up to the February, April and August conferences. It is true that we did not hold many pre-conference discussions before the August conference - but then we were in a holiday period. One issue we did discuss was Ireland. Cde Carolan's charge I was extremely reluctant to organise any pre-conference discussion on Ireland is a BARE-FACED LIE. What I think he is referring to is a conversation we had when he suggested we organise such a discussion. I informed him that we had already held the discussion. We had invited cde G from B'ham to visit the branch in Coventry and outline the different points at issue in the discussion - both on bombings and federalism.

The cde explained the differing points of view and pointed out where we could read them. We had a discussion on the two issues. By the end of the discussion I felt that my objective had been achieved - the cdes in the branch would go to the August conference with some idea of the issues.

Remember that the documents for the Irish discussion were very obscure -i.e. difficult to find. We needed a calm clear outline by someone competent to explain the different points of view. We did not need a polemic - we would get plenty of that at the conference. Cde Carolan showed not the slightest interest in our already held discussion. He wanted to come and speak and quite frankly I was fairly uninterested in listening to his style of debate.

It is interesting that cde Carolan now says that Ireland was the major discussion at the August conference. He prepared very seriously for that by not producing the resolution until the actual conference itself.

When we were organising the pre-conference discussion, Ireland was not the central issue - as far as Carolan and Kinnell were concerned. Is it not the case that in early August, cde Kinnell, you phoned cde Oliver and told him that the key discussion at the August conference was "Building the WSL" (sic) IB50.

Look at my article 'An alternative view of the crisis' (IB84). It ends by saying "It is in the context of the above that we must judge the debate on building the WSL". It ends thus because it was written as a response to the news from Kinnell that this was the key debate.

My argument all along has not been there is too much political debate but that it is conducted in such a way as no one can learn anything from it. It is a slander that I am opposed to discussing "hard to understand and profound" politics. (p8)

Indeed while he shows not the slightest interest in an even elementary knowledge of day to day practical work (ask the Islington branch what it thinks about cde Carolan) in reality he is not interested in political discussion either.

On the face of it, the facts contradict this assertion. But look closely at the facts, and ask how they fit together, and the facts do bear it out.

Cde Carolan has set himself the task of dismembering the old WSL and imposing his culture on the fused organisation. He does this by introducing political issues to suit himself, pressing for early decisions, restricting debate to the NC, making sure the NC has little prior notice of the issues etc. Above all he is keen to keep the membership out of the discussion.

It is interesting that Carolan does not mention my main contribution to the August conference. Doubly interesting is that he and other members of the WSL's ruling troika worked very hard (and in the end unsuccessfully) to prevent my arguments from gaining majority support. I refer of course to my proposals that the membership be (a) involved in the process of decision making, and (b) helped to assimilate the politics of the movement by providing them with a booklet containing the positions of the group.

These proposals were passed in the teeth of vicious and lying denunciations by the Carolan faction. They have been ignored by our "Bolsheviks".

I have been accused of blurring issues, not wanting debate, fence-sitting. All I have ever argued for is a process of discussion based on mutual respect and trust, with a clearly defined timetable and the involvement of the membership.

Cde Carolan however, does not want debate and discussion with a clearly defined timetable, before the membership. He wants manipulated discussion with a victory for his positions.

He refers somewhere to the "recent debates on local government". It is interesting that he thinks debate has taken place. The reality is that it has not. Many months ago I raised at the NC the necessity of discussing the situation facing Islington (The NC in question was around May/June 83). The NC agreed to discuss the issue at its next meeting. Despite the fact that I have raised it subsequently at every single NC, we are still waiting for the discussion. No doubt the recent resignation of cde Booth has cleared the ground for a discussion on Carolan's terms.

At no time between May/June and his resignation was cde Booth asked to come before the NC and put forward his point of view. It is quite clear that Carolan, Kinnell and Hill were determined that such a discussion would not take place.

In the run up to the Broad Groups AGM (I think at the Sept. 83 NC), cde Kinnell produced an outline document on local government. We were forced to vote on the line of the outline without having any idea how it would be filled out. We were given the document as we came into the room. It was a total revision of our existing policy but the only votes against it were from the cdes in Coventry. But there was something else involved in that brief discussion - something extremely sinister. Cde PL was wheeled out by the troika to articulate the sectarian regression on local government. Cde Booth had no knowledge of the discussion and was not asked to attend, but cde PL (described at the meeting by Kinnell - as "absolutely useless as a councillor") was elevated to the status of "specialist with knowledge" and brought into the meeting.

Since that time there has been no discussion on WSL leading bodies, although there has been very limited discussion at Broad Group national gatherings. Cde Kinnell's positions on local government became a position of the movement via the backdoor - in a resolution on immediate tasks in IB 83. This resolution incidentally was almost as extensive as a perspectives document but was railroaded through the NC in just 3 hours.

Carolán/Kinnell/Hill use their resolutions, limited discussions and quick votes to establish not a coherent line understood by a membership which has had a hand in shaping the movement's position, but a justification for whatever they choose to be the position of the movement.

The process works like this. C/K/H put forward a document to a conference or the NC. Usually the document has no practical proposals. The document is passed. Regular passing of documents acts as a justification for C/K/H to act as the "majority" on everything regardless of whether or not the movement has actually adopted a position.

They claim that the minority are disruptive. They, however, carried out the biggest example of disruption yet seen by introducing the concept of conversion into the proceedings of the leading bodies a matter of weeks after a whole range of conference discussion during which they had never mentioned it. Their job is to implement conference decisions, not introduce major new discussions before any attempt has been made to implement them!

The NC state - what is the real story?

Cde Carolán claims that I should have gone along with his slate on the grounds that he was proposing one. I felt at the time that (a) there was little point in a slate which was not a joint effort. (b) Cde Carolán was taking advantage of his 'majority' position to appear conciliatory. I was not prepared to give him cover on this.

He claims that the sticking point between us was Strummer. THIS IS A LIE. I said right from the beginning that I would not not involve myself in a joint slate. I allowed him to outline his proposals and I dissented on at least 3. He did in fact ring me a few days later with one of my absolute necessities now included on the list. I still made it clear that I was not prepared to endorse his slate. It is true that on each occasion I argued that Strummer should not be on the NC. Cde Strummer herself will tell you that I told her direct to her face, that I didn't think she should be on the NC. I find it extremely offensive, however, for Carolán to claim that "this was the sticking point" or "that comrade was out of favour with Parsons". I'm not sure what "out of favour with Parsons" actually means. (I know what it means to be out of favour with Carolán). At the time, if anything, Strummer should have been "in favour". She had voted with me on the International at the February conference, she was to endorse the sentiments of the McKelvie/Oliver/Parsons statement to the April conference. She attended the meeting which picked a number of cdes to push for the NC.

During the April conference we had quite amicable chats about whether she should stand for the NC. Indeed I find it difficult to remember many occasions on which we have had heated clashes. I have some severe criticisms of her (as I know she has of me) but I am not hostile to her. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, that Carolan inserts the references to Strummer, in order to create hostility to me.

The episode relating to Levy is likewise full of dishonesty and lies. Cde Levy had every opportunity to attend the meeting we called at the April conference. If he had attended and had endorsed our action he would have been top of everyone's list. He did not attend. It is not true that someone came to the meeting to ask us to adopt Levy "as our own" and help Carolan get him re-elected. If they had, we would have discussed it. No, the truth is rather different.

Carolan saw Levy as a potential recruit. He wanted to get him back onto the NC and be seen to do so. However, he realised when he saw the size of the Saturday evening meeting that he was in a mess. To elect Levy he would have to sacrifice someone else - unless he could persuade us to elect Levy. He knew that our decision having been made we would be allocating votes and an additional consideration was the disruption which large-scale reallocation would involve. We might have cocked up the whole thing and ended up with less people on the NC.

He sent someone - I can't remember who - well after the meeting, I think it was in the morning when we were filling in the ballot forms. His actual approach was not "help us elect Levy", but "Levy is in danger of missing out, you should elect him". It was so transparently a manoeuvre that I did say that he should use his own votes. He then found 2 or 3 of our already allocated votes and persuaded them to vote for Levy.

Let me repeat. If Levy had been at the meeting he would have headed up our slate. He was first after the agreed 7 on my voting slip. Carolan's approach to this was pure cynicism.

(This document is only a partial response to IB 91. Time has not allowed the definitive answer to all the lies. But rest assured, every lie will be nailed in the next period. In particular I intend to outline my attitude to the so-called Smith group and also review the development of discussion on mass party work).

PARSONS - 8th April 1984

Group norms, the WSL National Committee and an imbalance of power.

1. In IB 50, "Building the WSL", much stress is laid by cdes Carolan and Kinnell on the establishment and enforcement of group norms. A lot of this emphasises discipline with regard to the individual member. Nobody can disagree with this in principle. What are missing however, are guidelines for the actual democratic functioning of the organisation - a point I made in IB 64 "Re-building the WSL".

2. In an attempt to fill part of this gap and also to bring some collective group control over the NC of the WSL, I drafted a resolution for the January NC on standing orders (see IB). Comrades will note that this resolution was not on the agenda of the January NC (see IB) despite me sending it in advance. The Carolan faction objected to the resolution ("poisonous" cde Hill; "a personal slur" cde Kinnell; "sub-consciously pernicious" cde Cardan). In the event the NC decided to discuss the resolution. (This decision is not minuted (see IB)) and it was amended and passed unanimously.

3. The NC therefore had the beginnings of a set of standing orders, some group norms by which to proceed. At the next NC (March 10th) however, every single standing order discussed at the January NC was broken. My objections to this were turned down, first by the chair (cde Hill) and then by the EC majority and their supporters. More incredible than this was Cde Carolan's angry accusation that underneath my amicable and friendly exterior I was playing a factional game by raising the objections - a factional game to argue for group norms, the standing orders only passed at the previous meeting!

4. The totally outrageous nature of this accusation has led me to think of two major issues of concern.

a) How does an ordinary member get to have a say in the WSL?

I have raised this question in IB 54 on CND - regarding the resolution from the floor of the Feb 1983 conference passed and then totally ignored by the EC. My resolution on NC standing orders is yet another example. An NC comrade puts a resolution to the NC. It gets left off the agenda by the EC. The NC vote to put it on the agenda. It gets amended and then passed unanimously - and then? Every decision is flouted! And these people talk about group norms!

Would the resolution have been left off the agenda and then flouted, if it had been acceptable to the Carolan faction? The answer must be "No".

b) What are the relationships of power within the organisation?

The breaking of the standing orders at the March NC were as follows:-

i) the chair My original proposal to the January NC was that the NC should elect a chairperson annually for the whole year. My reasoning was that the chairperson would have the authority of the collective over the individuals - particularly in a factional situation. The NC decided against this and for more informality and a rotating chair. (Cde Hill - a member of the Carolan faction) is normally the unelected chair of the NC. At the March NC I proposed that some other comrade should take the chair - nothing personal against cde Hill - but on the principle that we had decided previously. This was voted down. Other comrades were very reluctant to do the job, showing in my view the intimidating nature of the NC.

ii) the agenda. The agenda as sent by cde Kinnell did not include minutes etc. as per the standing orders. The final agenda did include these, except there was no political report, put put them at the end of the agenda at 8.15pm after the NC had been meeting since 10.30am. Thus they were never reached.

The serious implications of this omission are as follows:

- minutes of the Jan NC have been sent out by cde Kinnell to the membership (see IB) without them being agreed by the NC as a correct record.
- there has been no check on whether the Jan NC decisions have been carried out or not.
- the EC which is supposed to meet regularly and report to the NC has made no report and so individual items in the EC minutes cannot be questioned or raised.

In other words there was at the March NC (which lasted all day from 10.30am to 9.00pm) no method of accountability whatsoever of the WSL leadership.

I should make it clear that this is not an unusual state of affairs but has been normal practice and continues from the days of the old ICL.

I should also make it clear that I am not claiming that there is or there is not an abuse of power or trust (the same with cde Hill in the chair). The point is that present NC norms are informal, slaphappy and open to bureaucratic misuse. They would not be tolerated in any normal Labour movement body. In a relatively stable group (e.g. the old ICL) they are and they were bad; in a time of factional heat they are far worse and they must be stopped.

I should also make it clear that is not something I have recently dreamed up as part of a factional struggle. I complained about this in the old I-CL, as cdes. can check in old IBs.

(iii) The time factor The major items on the agenda (see IB 83) were lengthy resolutions from cdes. Kinnell and Carolan. The first was a codification of the work of the WSL on a whole range of issues, and amendments were asked for. The second was a thinly veiled provocation to split the fusion. I received these resolutions at 6.00pm on the Wednesday prior to the Saturday NC, ie 2 and a half days beforehand. I was at meetings on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings. Also, to save the Group money, I brought 2 more comrades down in my car on Saturday and so did not read the documents on the train to the NC which is my habit (this is a reflection, not on my seriousness, but on the normal lateness of arrival of NC documents). Therefore, I arrived at the NC without having had chance to study the two detailed and very important resolutions.

My original proposal for standing orders asked for 7 days notice of NC documents. This was amended to 4 days as being more reasonable. The documents were posted on the Tuesday afternoon - therefore, no NC member outside the Centre could have received them within 4 days.

When I complained that this lack of notice broke the NC standing orders, Cde. Carolan made a very spirited defence of Cde. Kinnell who, he claimed, had been up all night on Sunday writing and typing his document. This burden was in addition to his very considerable work on the paper. My complaint was seen by him as a personal attack on Cde. Kinnell and the resources at the Centre. In the event Cde. Hill ruled that my objection was trifling and this ruling was again upheld by the EC majority and their supporters.

My objection was not trifling - it was based on elementary democracy and an attempt to get some order and political equality in the movement - nothing more, nothing less. The power relationships on the NC are revealed here starkly.

Cde. Kinnell's staying up all Sunday night writing and typing his resolution was out of order, since resolutions were supposed to have been in by the Saturday. There is nothing of an emergency nature in the resolutions, they should have been written and typed at the end of the previous week when the paper is not being produced.

If resolutions of a similar nature had been written by an individual NC member or by the faction and handed in even on the Saturday, would they have been produced and sent out? I think not. I think they would have been rejected as having been too detailed and too long. The point is, bluntly, that Cdes. Carolan and Kinnell in practice decide on what political issues are important for the NC to discuss. They may be right, they may be wrong, that is not the point, it is far too much top down. The NC tends to become an EC meeting with observers. Again, the same imbalance was true of the NC of the old I-CL.

A typewriter, postage stamps and a letter box are not unique to Cde. Kinnell. There is absolutely no reason why some other NC cde. cannot take minutes, receive resolutions and send out agendas. In fact, it is a chronic waste of Cde. Kinnell's political abilities to give him such menial tasks. The amazing thing is that to even suggest that Cde. Kinnell delegate responsibility or has some sleep or goes on a holiday is condemned as a personal attack - not taken as comradely concern, or concern for the internal health of the WSL.

The fact is that Cde. Kinnell's tremendous workrate is used and was used in the old I-CL as a means of maintaining power in the hands of the triumvirate - Cde. Carolan as the ideas man, Cde. Kinnell as the work horse, Cde. Hill as the public face. Comrades who complain - eg about lateness of documents, lack of magazine, no international work - are made to feel guilty. After all could they stay up without sleep for two nights running? Thus we take what is offered with gratitude and what is offered is what the triumvirate consider politically important. I am not saying that this is deliberate on their part; I am not saying that it was not in many ways inevitable; I am not saying that it compares with the excesses of Healy, Cliff or Grant; I am not saying that the political conclusions, in spite of all this are not in general correct. What I am saying is that we are dealing with a form of bureaucratic centralism - and that this has been one main block to the development of the fusion.

When anyone mentions the term "bureaucratic centralism", of course, bells ring and people rush to action stations. In my view "bureaucratic centralism" and "sectarianism" are endemic to the British Left - they are like the relationship of sexism to men, just name me one who isn't! Of course, you can call somebody a sectarian or a bureaucrat or a sexist for that matter as a term of abuse - but words also can have a fairly precise meaning. Turn it round the other way. Let anybody in the Carolan faction explain what system it is where:

1. the EC does not report to the NC
2. minutes of the last meeting and matters arising are not checked
3. comrades are given lengthy and important documents to vote on at very short notice
4. the agenda is decided upon and the lengthy documents written by a few key individuals
5. NC decisions which leading cdes. do not agree with are ignored
6. anybody questioning or complaining about such procedures is denounced as poisonous, pernicious, playing factional games or making personal slurs.

If this is not "bureaucratic centralism" then I would like to know what is. One thing is for sure - "democratic" it ain't.

GROUP NORMS etc

PART 2 Written After the 31 March NC

Needless to say the NC of March 31st once again broke standing orders.

1. the time The NC of 10 March amended Carolan's resolution on dealing with the faction from "the situation must be resolved in the next few weeks" to read "by the next NC" ie 6 weeks. The NC of 31 March was 3 weeks after the last NC, not 6 weeks. "The situation is an emergency" responded Cde. Hill, once again in the chair. What new factors had arisen within one week, since the EC must have decided on the new date immediately following the last one - comrades can perhaps judge for themselves. Certainly none were mentioned at the meeting.

2. the resolution We were presented with Carolan's resolution to expel the dissolved minority faction, to split the fusion, as we entered the room at 10.30am. The resolution was 3 pages long. No proper discussion can take place on such a basis. The faction had met the Sunday before and its response to the NC resolution was known then. We could have been given the statutory 4 days' notice. It was not a question of resources at the Centre since new IBs had been flying around like confetti all week.

Not only was the lack of notice a breaking of standing orders but it was clearly a deliberate attempt not to give any warning to the membership, and to hold the NC meeting in an atmosphere of intimidation. The Carolan resolution was not even available to the EC meeting on the Thursday evening prior to the NC because the members might have been warned even by one day.

3. the agenda The items of NC and EC minutes were not on the agenda once again. Two resolutions had been received by the EC before their meeting on Thursday - one from South West London, one from Coventry - opposing any split or expulsions. These should have taken precedence presumably, but they did not - Carolan's resolution must come first.

4. the constitution The NC took upon itself the power to break the Constitution, by a majority of 14 - 8. They moved to expel comrades whose names they did not know. They decided not to hold a Special Conference, despite being told at the 10 March meeting by Cde. Hill in the chair that this would be called automatically within 8 weeks of the arrival of the appropriate number of signatures according to the Constitution and nobody disagreed. They did all of this without even having a copy of the Constitution in front of them and having received a 3 page resolution on all of this at 10.30am that very same morning.

These points were all raised and objections made. They were all voted down by the same 14 - 8. In introducing his resolution Carolan stated that it was precisely to avoid these "wranglings" that the split was necessary - ie to overcome protests at the breaking of standing orders and the Constitution! We must get on with the "essential NC business", ie his own lengthy split resolution given to us at 10.30am that morning.

Let all comrades be quite clear about this. The methods by which this expulsion, this split was carried out are completely out of order. The membership has been denied a say, the NC has been denied a proper discussion, and so even has the EC. The Carolan faction decided on a split and used their majority on the NC to get it. A precedent has been set. The next wave for the chop are the 5 non faction NC members who opposed the Carolan resolution. The Coventry branch has

already been smashed. Cde. Collins (IB 102) says "we'll deal with Cde. Carolan in our own way in our own time". Who this "we" is I am not sure, and neither is she. Just let her seriously try it and the way events are moving she will be out on her ear as well. These things take on a momentum of their own. We have seen it all before in IS/SWP and we have heard bluster like that from Cde. Collins before too. Once you involve yourself in essentially undemocratic processes, the precedent is set.

The conclusion of this sorry episode is that the methods used by the Carolan faction are an extreme version of those used in running the WSL over the past period. The only term I know for describing them is "bureaucratic centralism". They are methods which continued the regime of the old I-CL. They have been a major factor in the break down of the fusion. In my view, it is the leaders of the Carolan faction that should be brought under collective and democratic control not the Smith faction. If these methods are not analysed and lessons learnt, if they are not dramatically altered by the power of the membership, there is no way in which any other fusion can take place with what is left of the WSL - no matter what the political programme. It will then not be as Cde. Collins puts it, others left in the political wilderness but Cde. Collins and her friends casting off into outer space.

Oliver.