

I-CL National Committee minutes, December 20 1980:

'Discussion on the old WSL'.

(From I-CL Internal Bulletin no.44).

'Putting it in perspective', by Kinnell.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE 20 December 1980

DISCUSSION ON THE W.S.L.
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Carolyn . In 1949 the old Trotskyist movement collapsed - through a loss of cadres and also a political collapse. Healy took the leadership of the remnants.

The Healy tendency was characterised by (a) since 1944, a fight for a LP orientation, (b) political primitiveness (e.g. in the early '50s their theoretical magazine discussed nationalisation in an implicitly Fabian way - this primitiveness led to political mimicry, e.g. adaptation to the chauvinism of the Left on German rearmament), (c) an authoritarian internal regime derived from the 1940s faction fight. Healy used the authoritarian regime to consolidate a majority in the post-1949 organisation. By the late '50s, at least, the regime had become pathological. Psychological terror was used to keep the members in line. At each conference a comrade would be singled out and denounced for failures of the organisation.

In 1948-50 Healy had quite a lot of success through the Socialist Fellowship, a loose left grouping within which the Trotskyists had influence. Then the Socialist Fellowship split apart over the Korean war. In 1950-54 the Healy group was still quite influential tho' tainted by adaptation to Stalinism.

In 1954 their paper was proscribed and until 1957 they just sold Tribune. Their practice was certainly opportunist, but not as bad as it would seem now because they were working in a real movement round Tribune. After 1957 they recruited a lot of CPers, started the Newsletter and Labour Review, gained a serious implantation in industry, were able to hold an industrial conference of 500 in 1958.

What happened next was essentially the result of the regime. After 1959 the Healy group became much less open. Then, after the Scarborough conference in 1960, there was a shift in their attitude to the LP. First they were euphoric about the Scarborough victory. Then they soured up as the lefts betrayed, and began an Oehlerite turn identified by Cannon as early as mid-'61. The feebleness of the official Labour left and the sectarian turn of the revolutionary left were two sides of the same coin in this period.

In the early '60s the Healy group gained in numbers - especially raw youth who were easily manipulated, so the regime hardened even more. It began to counterpose its own organisation to the evolution of the labour movement. Serious industrial work was still done, but was being weakened by the turn to youth. The Labour Left was just denounced. In 1964 the Healy group provoked its own expulsion from the LP. By 1965-66 'Build the revolutionary party' was a front page headline. The turn to youth eventually destroyed the industrial work. Then the degeneration accelerated - systematic lying, abstentionism in relation to VSC, a Maoist line in 1967, etc.

The WSL came out of the WRP at an ultra-degenerate stage, when it went literally mad in 1974. And Thornett joined the SLL in 1966 so his whole history was in the degenerate period of the SLL.

It is remarkable these comrades could 'recover' from the SLL/WRP to such an extent. Perhaps it is because long-standing SLL people were more damaged by the turn to systematic lying in the 1960s than people newly coming into the SLL then.

In 1974 Healy seems to have gone literally mad, and the WSL people split. It seems that Thornett had contact with Robin Blick,