

'A Question of Strategy', by McInnis

'How Smith was "denied access to the public press": the illuminating tale of the "suppression" of the faction', by Carolan

'Gunther and Oliver - who know not what they want', by Carolan

LEADERSHIP WITHOUT PERSPECTIVES.

A year ago I put a short paper in the internal bulletin which outlined ideas around the alteration of our programme to take account of new technology and its related social consequences. I consider that the leadership's lack of interest in these questions results from their equating politics with the issues embraced by the labour movement, rather than locating their politics in the analysis of society as a whole. Trapped within this viewpoint, they do not relate properly to the general concerns of working class people. Their direction stems from consideration of tactical ways to relate to the N.O. Left, and tactical ways of relating to each industrial struggle which comes along. It may well be that this is why comrade Carolan came out with the banality before last August's conference: 'Ireland's more important than New Technology'. Perhaps he saw more importance in revising our position on Ireland to make it more acceptable to the N.O. Left than in making an overall reappraisal of social and political changes from which he could evince no tactical gains. Those in the former faction have seemed unable to raise their obvious awareness of such problems into a cogent analysis and clearly thought out practical alternative to the way we operate just now. We have not, therefore, got any overall programmatic strategy. For example, the well-thought out manifesto of the ICL is something for the bookstalls, not a practical guide to the political direction of our movement.

TRANSITIONAL APPROACH DITCHED.

The ability of capitalism to constantly regenerate at the expense of the working class and oppressed people throughout the world-requires us to look with care at the Transitional Programme, not in order to throw out its basic method, but to examine how the changes and the rich history of class-struggle are to effect this programme. However, since the Democracy Campaigns, we have, in my view, been carried not forward but BACK towards the MAXIMUM/MINIMUM approach. The very effective tactic of relating to the struggle for democracy has been fossilised. I would argue that formerly it WAS tactically important to stress the implementation of Labour's more progressive policies. I would say that it is STILL important to relate to the reformist figures to draw their followers into the struggle against the Tory government. And I would agree with those who say that denunciation is not an effective way of achieving this.

TRANSITIONAL STRATEGY REQUIRED.

But with Kinnock moderating policies which were not adequate in the first place, with the political retreat of the M. O. Left, with the increase of closures and privatisation, and with the recent rise of militancy...it is clearly a time when OUR PROGRAMMATIC ALTERNATIVE ought to be RESOUNDING within the labour movement. Lo and behold. We have NO alternative to view.

The policies we present in the paper, apart from the odd afterthought, chip away in a minimal manner, whilst we pursue tactical advantages in the limited campaign which we have helped to develop in the M.O...and we chase up each industrial struggle, arguing tactics for winning battles, whilst we appear to have no overall strategy around which we can draw people in order to confront the futile reformism of the Labour and T.U.C. leadership.

ALTERNATIVE PLAN OF PRODUCTION.

In 'New Technology. Implications for our programme' I wrote 'Unless there is a much more coherent and offensive Labour Movement intervention, businesses will be able to go on cutting back, as will the public sector. Defensive resistance alone is insufficient to prevent closures and lay-offs, as technology continues to develop and the world economy continues its crises. Nor is the fight for shorter hours alone sufficient to deal with the scale of the problem. Therefore we need to develop a more farsighted strategy of opposition and positive proposals, based on actual resources and the needs of working-class communities.' In this context I suggested, and I now propose, that we have to develop an overall direction to these tactical battles, and that the key demand, if posed rightly, would be the ALTERNATIVE WORKING-CLASS PLAN OF PRODUCTION.

The crises of ship-building and coal-mining under capitalist run nationalised industries and the problems that labour and the unions have confronting these situations, point to the growing need for a forthright approach based on transitional demands. More than a mild interest or toying with such ideas is required...if we are to develop them into a practical and a political means of advancing the thinking within the labour movement—and consequently improving our profile and drawing new people towards us. The demand for a working-class plan of production needs to be fleshed out, explained in terms of practical implications and related into the other aspects of our programme.

CONTROL OF PRODUCTION.

The alternative plan demand can relate to the general and well-deserved public dissatisfaction with nationalised industries by linking in workers control and some form of community control of products and prices, this being 'the ONLY possible way of making public assets work for the public. Workers control itself should relate not just to the management but also to what is produced. The workers at Leyland might be demanding that the whole B.L. production be turned over to 'useful' products, utilising all the potential of modern technology as did the plans of the Lucas workers. However, the Lucas workers were linking alternative products with the need for their company to make profits. We would favour an argument running contrary to this. We would, I believe, demand that Leyland produce things that meet public need, linking this up with the need for more efficient local authority transport systems and the improvement of public services. We would argue that profitability is against the interests of ordinary people.

BASIS FOR MASS MOBILISATION.

In this way the interests of workers in nationalised industries can be linked with the interests of the working class as consumers of products, users of services. This will lay the grounds for real mass campaigns against closures. It is also an approach we could adopt for workers in the armaments industries, a demand we could counterpose to those in the peace movement who argue for 'alternative defence systems'. We would be arguing for an assessment of the skills and machinery, reapplication and retraining of these capital and human resources for the public interest as assessed in a 'Working-class social plan'. It would of course be inadequate to simply consider such an approach on one or another industry. Our movement should be capable of making the general ideological groundplans for rational publicly owned utilities and industries functioning for people's benefit. Within this context we can both defend publicly owned industries against privatisation and closures whilst arguing for further nationalisation of others. The often cited example of this is relating the defence of the NHS to the nationalisation of the drug companies under workers control, confiscating the assets. We would argue for a complete reappraisal of this industry and a workers enquiry into the real effects of the various substances which are foisted on patients. The 'Alternative plan' is different from the AES because it requires mass mobilisation for its implementation-not tinkering.

ALSO A SOCIAL PLAN.

In the document on our programme and new technology I also argued that 'we should combine the fight for a plan of production with a forthright fight for the development of community based public services to bridge the gap between the unemployed and the employed. In this way the fight against the cuts could be made more directly relevant to the working class.' I argued the importance of a demand for free access to computer and video resources for creative, educational and other uses...with free training in their use in every local community. I went on to suggest that the many relevant and vital demands on housing, health, education and other facilities be combined into a demand for an ALTERNATIVE WORKING-CLASS SOCIAL-PLAN.

HOW TO ARRIVE AT SUCH A PLAN.

The 'alternative social plan' could be the ideological keystone of our fight against the cuts. In many areas the labour left has not been slack in developing the policies which they hoped their newly elected left-wing councillors might be able to implement. Thwarted through lack of an effective industrially based national fightback against the cuts, these plans have often got lost in the finely worded manifestos on which these councillors were elected. However, many of these local policies, certainly those developed in Lothian, were themselves progressive. Essentially they attempted to remove resources into the housing estates and towards the local working class communities. Combined with freezes in rents, rates and the prices of services, these policies contained within them the potential of rapid clashes with the government and also the embryo of what local services should contain from a socialist point of view. If we add to such an approach the dynamic of more workers and community control and include within the perspective the Nationally run services such as British Rail and the N.H.S.then this would be the bare bones of an alternative social plan. But the details of such a plan would need to be worked out through discussion within the Labour movement. However we are in a position to examine the services in general labour manifestos and other plans for improvement and come out with a set of GUIDING PRINCIPLES which would SIMPLIFY the picture, and clarify the direction of the fight for better services as one with which working class people would be able to IDENTIFY.

NATIONAL CUTS STRATEGY.

The diffusion of the fight against the cuts by the dropping of rates freezes, and the sabotage of the fight by the leaderships of the Labour Party and T.U.C. has isolated councils into reformist back alleys. Therefore we argue that the idea of a plan is only progressive in so far as it holds within it THE DYNAMIC OF THE FIGHT TO ACHIEVE IT. Plans for improved services, even if based on principles in line with working class interests, can be used to diffuse a fightback if put within a reformist framework and gutted of the requirement of a workers mobilisation. The need for a national strategy in this fight against the cuts is paramount - and our challenge is that we clarify this strategy for as large a section of the labour movement as we can realistically reach at this stage of our own development.

M.C. CALLS FOR A DAYSCHOOL.

In October I presented, along with other resolutions referred from conference, a proposal that we start discussion on the development of our programme. It called for the demands of the transitional programme, such as the sliding scale of wages and hours, to be campaigned for through M.C. and T.U. conferences and in SX. It argued for us to raise the 'alternative plan' demand. It also called for a dayschool on how we should raise these demands. These proposals were agreed without discussion, with an E.C. amendment calling for discussion within I.E's before the dayschool.

I had proposed that we examine the programme in the light of the various political changes which have occurred since the late '30s ..indeed, since the ICL manifesto of the late '70s. I had particularly wished to focus on the practical aspects of how we relate the programme to the class struggle because here, if anywhere, we might fruitfully discuss our differences and have the chance to develop a common approach. It seemed to me at the time that the ex-ICL leadership had, to a large extent, dropped the actual use of their programme as a result of their emphasis on relating to the 'lefts'. The ex-VSL faction seemed to sense this problem and offer criticism, but, in my view were wrong to overemphasise the importance of the NAME of the party as the hallmark of political profile, and to argue that the M.C. emphasis was a NECESSARY CAUSE of the problem. They also seemed, in the pages of SX, unable to express the programme in a practical, and comprehensible way.

SHIFTING OUR EMPHASIS.

In one sense we are the people with answers, if we get a bit more educated in the traditions of our trotskyist heritage. However, that, in itself, is of little use unless we are and appear to be LEARNING from each event which occurs and each person we work with. Quite often, we have to suspend our assumptions of how to proceed and get on with THE TASK OF LISTENING. I am of the opinion that we can do this whilst asserting a VERY INDEPENDENT POINT OF VIEW.

• Why limit ourselves to slogans and proposals and tactics which we know will achieve a certain resonance within the left in the labour movement? Surely it is the very absence of a strategy which could succeed which differentiates these people from ourselves. I am not talking about denunciation or hairraising difference of tactic in M.C. campaigns. I am talking about our need to present OUR alternative in an independent and inspiring manner, with confidence. This may sometimes cause the most massive bear-fights in the M.C. and T.U.s. At others we should spend less time on arguing differences and spend more of our energy recruiting new people into the M.C. and unions. Hence we need a new popularly presented paper that relates to the common experiences of groups of working class people.

STARTING POINT OF REORIENTATION.

Our greater profile gained through the forthright and central argument of these strategic policies as well as others developed from the programme need not cut us off from figures like Scargill and Benn. We will rather be in the position that we are offering answers to the questions which they have failed to answer. The transitional strategy immediately and inevitably poses the need for a general strike for the implementation of the alternative plan of production. To implement the plan we would need not only to kick out the Tories but ALSO fight for a WORKERS GOVERNMENT based on the mobilised power of the working class. We are thus central in offering answers not only to militant workers but also to those who look to Benn and Scargill. We can also relate to those who are not militant because they can sense the uselessness of militancy without any overall strategy.

A central reorientation of our own politics is necessary... if we are to gain ground... and leave our own addums behind. These ideas are, I suggest, a starting point.

Jim McInnis.

Edinburgh....9/4/84.

HOW SMITH WAS "DENIED ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC PRESS"

THE ILLUMINATING TALE OF THE "SUPPRESSION" OF THE FACTION

Carolyn

"Let us sit upon the ground and tell sad tales about the death of Kings". I come now to the story of how comrade Smith was refused access to the League press.

It was Tuesday, March 27 1984, four days before Saturday March 31 when the NC suspended Smith from the WSL and told him he would be expelled two weeks later. Smith had been telling people for the previous 17 days that he was about to be expelled. For the sake of future historians of late 20th-century tyrannies and future biographers of comrade Smith, I will add that it happened at about 6 in the evening on a cold winter's day.

Kinnell called me to the phone to talk to Smith on the line (from Yorkshire, I believe). Smith had talked to Kinnell in the afternoon when I was out, and I had misunderstood from Kinnell that Smith had been offering a report on the miners' strike from Yorkshire. This report would have been welcome.

Now, in a voice expressing crisp no-nonsense urgency, Smith demanded to know - did I "want it"? Smith's tone and manner made me ask what exactly he was proposing to write. He was offering "a political analysis", he said. In the same insistent manner and tone, he demanded an immediate yes or no answer: would I publish it?

In response to this I said something like, "Well, if you are playing your usual games, I don't think it's a very good idea".

This was a provisional and tentative reply to his hustling manner and the fact that he was evidently engaged in an "exposure" game. I didn't have a chance to weigh the pros and cons. Smith solved the problem for me by immediately hanging up. He had got what he wanted - a "rejection". And Levy had got a cause to be indignant about - "the industrial organiser not being allowed to have space for his political analysis".

Quite probably if Smith had given me the chance I would have said no to his article, for the following reasons. For nine months Smith had written nothing for the paper (other than a few short reports from Cowley) except factional pieces. (He had frequently - though obviously less so as time went on - been asked, in as friendly a way as possible, to write on other matters, but he never did). It was very late in the paper's schedule, and I had as little inclination as time to mess about with Smith, who was obviously trying to prove a point. He knew and I knew that his expulsion would be moved at the forthcoming NC meeting. He was trying it on.

Anyway, as it happened, Smith put the phone down. If you call that a rejection, then it was the first and only time that Smith had ever had anything he wrote or proposed to write rejected for the League press.

THE TRUE RECORD

The Smith group had always had access to the public press when it liked, for what it liked, without even serious editing of their articles.

Exceptions?

Cunliffe was barred by the EC from writing for the paper in the three weeks before the March 10 NC (after the NC the ban expired). He had given the NC an ultimatum, and when it was rejected he had refused to work on the paper as an editor or in any other capacity. (He seems to have lied to the Control Commission that he offered to do technical work). The EC decided to refuse to let him develop alternative relations of his own choice with the paper until after the March 10 NC had decided what to do about him (it removed him from the EC). The EC decision may have been right or wrong, wise or foolish, but the idea that it was any form of political limitation or suppression would be laughed out of court in even a formally anarchist organisation. In any case it was in no way a routine matter typical of the treatment of the minority.

Jones twice had short letters refused: one which denounced us for allegedly slandering the IMG (on Poland), and another which denounced us for allegedly slandering the WRP (on Libyan money). In both cases the principle was that freedom of debate in the public press must not be used to compromise the integrity of the organisation as against our enemies. Jones seems to have conceded the point: neither time did he pursue the issue.

Hunt had a letter refused on the same principle: his denounced us for allegedly slandering the IMG on the South Atlantic war.

Smith's 6000 word piece on the TUC (IB 80) was not rejected. He was asked to cut it. I was attempting to exercise a limited editorial control over what was in my opinion an over-long, badly-written, factionally-motivated, Smith-boosting article expressing the general view of the minority on the EC.

What other examples could the Smith group cite of their exclusion? There are no other possible examples for them to cite! These are the hard facts on which they based their charges of exclusion.

Apart from them they had nothing to complain about - and how they complained! - except the captions and labels under which their factional material appeared in the press.

Smith complained bitterly about a little introductory blurb to a 'discussion' piece (published in full) in which Smith argued that the Falklands war was really 'behind' the invasion of Grenada. In fact the blurb was written jointly by Cunliffe and me. Essentially Smith's objection here was that the article was presented as a minority viewpoint. He took the agitation as far as the NC.

Before he took it to the November NC Smith spent many weeks on a campaign of agitation against the paper's reporting of his speech at the September 17 conference. He had been nominated by me to be one of our main speakers at the conference, in an attempt to establish working relations to build a common organisation with the faction. He had used the occasion to present highly personal views to the conference. Nevertheless his speech appeared in the paper, in full.

He created a stink because it was not presented in the paper as the main event of the conference - and because it appeared without his photo, on a page in which the back of my head was shown in the corner of the only photo we had of the full gathering. That, he said, was to present his speech on the same page as a photo of me "presiding over the conference"! I kid you not, as they say.

Smith brought motions of condemnation as far as the NC, and there was the usual stupid, nerve-wracking, time-wasting nonsense.

Smith also complained about the fact that his speech was printed under the heading 'Discussion', thus allegedly downgrading it. In fact the whole page, which included other material too, had the general heading 'Industrial discussion from the September 17 conference'. This heading, 'Industrial discussion', is also, for example, what the SWP's magazine Socialist Review used to use for the whole trade union/industrial section of the publication, which mainly includes SWP position pieces.

For Smith's ridiculous lie that the EC took a recent decision to ban the minority from access to the public press, see the IB article, 'The Problem of Poison Gas'.

So with trivial exceptions, nothing of the minority's had been rejected, out, held over inordinately long, or even more than cursorily subbed. If you think about it, this is proven by the fact that Smith felt confident enough last autumn to devote many weeks and much EC and NC time to agitation about the details of how his September 17 speech was presented.

So: the air was filled with screams that murder and grievous bodily harm was being done to the faction - yet no blows had been struck. The organisation

was filled with frantic agitation: Look! look! terrible things have been done! You look - and there was nothing to see! Nothing had been done to them.

SUPPRESSING THE MAJORITY

The elucidation and exploration of this strange business will tell us some very important things about Smith and the faction. But before that the mystery, as they say, will have to deepen further.

Not only had they not been suppressed, they had been the suppressors. More than that. Not only had they tried to suppress me, and in part succeeded, but every time the question of free access to the paper was discussed and voted on in general and in principle - at the NC, at the EC, and at conference - they voted for limitations on freedom of access to the paper. Every time, without exception. The last time was at the August 1983 conference, where they fought for the Parsons resolution, which was passed: it demanded "an avoidance of debates being carried in the paper - except under the most controlled fashion as directed by the NC..."

What about that resolution?

A few days after voting to limit discussion in the paper at the August conference, Smith submitted a factional, controversial, and in my opinion extremely silly article on the Cowley witch-hunt (see the controversy in the paper).

That immediately showed that the conference resolution was unworkable unless very loosely interpreted - and I used Smith's "factional provocation" to establish that this was so. The EC resolved: "The decision to restrict debate in the paper should be interpreted liberally, i.e. as applying to full-scale debates rather than details of articles, letters, etc." (IB 76).

For it had to be one of two things. If there could not be free right of reply, then the editors would have to try rigorously to exclude pieces that went any distance beyond formally agreed committee decisions and might generate controversy. That would gut, sterilise and cauterise the paper. And the editorial team would have a massive privilege. Somebody is always likely to find what you write controversial. Since the resolution did not propose to abolish the paper, a strict interpretation would give massive privileges to those on the spot over those who might afterwards want to object.

To exclude controversy that was predictable would mean excluding Smith's article (unless, improbably, he could get it adopted as formal policy by a committee). The alternative? Smith, Parsons, Cunliffe etc. would have to agree in advance - and in fact they did agree in advance - that if Smith's article went in there would be a right of reply and no-one would invoke the conference decision to stop that.

Smith's article was published, and I wrote a reply to it. He replied to that, and I came back at him with as much force as I thought was needed to make him abandon the field. He did abandon the field: he never tried to reply to the letter in which I exposed the Oxford-centred view of the world and his other sillinesses (as I saw them).

THE SMITH GROUP'S RECORD

Until the publication of the Document of the Eight, the Smith group had a consistent record of opposition to a liberal regime on the paper. Recently Smith has quoted one of the resolutions in which our views were expressed, arguing for a liberal regime in opposition to Smith, two years ago. Smith tries to draw an alleged contrast with our alleged recent illiberal attitude, but the facts make nonsense of this gambit. We haven't changed our position.

In fact I know of only one person in this organisation who has had articles rejected because of their politics in the last three years - and it wasn't Smith or Jones or Cunliffe. It was me.

I had a number of articles on Ireland and on Poland suppressed because the

leaders of the present faction didn't agree with them (Ireland), or because they claimed a monopoly on writing 'heavy' articles on a given subject (Jones on Poland), or - and this is the constant, underlying thread - because they were very suspicious and uneasy about me writing for the paper on anything. (As a full-timer I could spend a lot of time writing articles, they said, and I had an unfair advantage over Smith and Jones).

On Poland, if there was a majority and a minority, I represented the majority and Smith/Jones the minority. The NC endorsed my views on Polish self-determination in December 1981 and rejected Smith's and Jones's. So the minority suppressed the majority.

Now, contrary to the lies Smith and Jones spread, that I write what I like without reference to committees or to the effect on the organisation, I let them suppress me. I reacted with the interests of the organisation in mind, and let them suppress me, or suppressed myself, whenever I thought that was the best thing to do to buy peace or the hope (usually vain) of constructive collaboration.

I probably didn't have to. In most of the cases, one of the editors, Kinnell, had a different attitude from mine, namely that it was better to publish and face the furor. But I did allow myself to be suppressed - and without bawling and yelling about it.

WHY THE CONTRADICTIONS?

So the Smith group made an outcry about suppression when there was none - and at the same time advocated an illiberal regime in general and enforced it whenever they felt strong enough.

There is a further paradox of the same order in the Document of the Eight. They want a general right of access of minority views to the public press: at the same time, on certain specified issues, notably Afghanistan, they want a regime so illiberal that it prohibits access even to the majority view (which, is, moreover, the personal view of at least four out of the Eight!)

What is the explanation? Cunliffe is the only one who has come near to hinting in writing at what it is all about, in IB 78.

"Even the working agreement we used to have on industrial questions appears to have collapsed, with Carolan making a point of taking a different line from Smith on anything and everything".

"Indeed the factionalism emerges in the pages of the paper, where supporters of the EC majority sit on the edges of their seats waiting for an article by a minority supporter to appear, so that they can rattle off lengthy and vituperative replies..."

If there are disagreements, it is because we perversely "make a point of" disagreeing with Smith, who is the fixed starting-point and lode-star of all political discussion. What Cunliffe is objecting to is that Smith (and others, but primarily Smith) do not have the right to say what they like in the paper without being contradicted. What the Smith group object to is that we have - and have chosen to use against them - the same rights in the paper as they have, including the right to make them look like idiots, as I did (so I believe) to Smith over the Cowley witch-hunt. That is what they actually mean - and feel - when they talk of suppression. What they object to is that we have the right of reply, and have since the September 17 conference dispute taken to using it.

Analyse what this persecuted minority was actually saying, compare the facts of their privileged access to the paper with their bitter cries that they had a raw deal and their all-too-genuine anger that we submit the mighty Smith to public reply - and what do you have when you translate it out of its superficial form of angry and incoherent nonsense into sense? You have bitter anger by the minority that they had to tolerate the majority in the public press of the organisation! Bitter anger that they did not have a monopoly of the public press, expressed as ridiculous lies that we had or claimed a monopoly.

Everywhere and every time you probe the faction, you will find the same core attitudes behind many different questions: the demand for privileges, or rather the self-righteous demand that there be general recognition that they are special people, the 'worker leadership' - and that they are the measure of all things.

What we have in their agitation is implacable, incoherent and hysterical rage at their own condition of (a) being the minority, and (b) having to tolerate the majority which tolerated them and gave them the privilege, rare in democratic-centralist organisations, of public equality or as close as you can get to it without abandoning the idea that there is a League line.

I mean hysterical as literally as I understand the word - they express powerful emotions of hatred and aggression and chagrin and narcissistic self-love and contempt, not rationally but focused through and on statements and charges which are nonsensical in themselves.

People who were not suppressed but were privileged, whose grievance was that they had to tolerate the majority in the paper as equals and couldn't suppress them, people whose central demand for privileges is alloyed in every question they raise and is always close to the surface - these people express all their powerful complex of emotions in the charge that they were suppressed.

APPENDIX: WHAT WAS WRONG WITH THE 6000-WORD ARTICLE?

What, in my opinion as editor, was wrong with Smith's article? Assessments of articles are a matter of opinion, and usually there is room for more than one opinion. But as editor I must in most cases be guided by my own judgement, initially at least.

The article consisted of three distinct parts. The first part, perhaps 1000 words, was a rather skimpy survey of recent events, containing Smith's doomsday account of the NGA betrayal and defeat. (How does all that impressionistic nonsense look now, comrade Smith?) It contained, indeed was structured around, a number of references to what Smith had said at the September 17 conference.

Its purpose was to take the EC disputes and discussions about the NGA struggle into the paper, putting Smith's views. The references to what he had said on September 17 were a continuation of his embittered dispute over the presentation of his speech in the paper.

The way I suggested to Smith that the article could be shortened was by splicing together an edited version of this first part (shorn of the more overt factionalism and the references to "what I said on September 17") with the last third (an unfinished conclusion), linking them by means of a summary of the long quotations from year-old TUC speeches which formed the middle part. I suggested to him that perhaps this middle part could be made into an article for the magazine, or possibly later use in the paper.

But Smith does not seem to be able to grasp that it is ridiculous and invidious to have someone in the public press narcissistically admiring "what I said last September". His impulse was to reassert himself against his internal opponents. But how would it look to the reader? That we were some sort of Smith cult; that we couldn't edit a paper; that there were for us the words of the prophet; that we were such a weird bunch that we would give a big chunk of the paper to someone whose main concern was to light penny candles to himself.

This sort of self-loving self-glorification is counterproductive anyway. It would fill most readers with some revulsion and much contempt. If my attitude to Smith and his views were pixilated adoration, I would try to protect him from this course of action, and I would certainly try to protect the organisation from it. In fact my assessment of Smith was that he was a very subjective man pursuing a political vendetta and more concerned with that than either with establishing a true picture of reality or with building the organisation.

I told Smith that the first part of the article was a factional try-on; the self-glorifying stuff was incompatible with the character of the paper, as well as being a factional try-on; and that I would not agree to it going in the paper in that form.

The second part of the article (3000 words perhaps) is an analysis of speeches made by TUC leaders at the TUC special conference. By way of a number of long quotations Smith proves that they departed from pledges to take action. The quotations are inordinately long and would take about two pages of the paper to prove something that does not take us very far anyway and would not be news to those readers likely to wade through an article of that length. The thing reads like a first draft in which all the material is thrown together, later to be pruned, cut, and refined.

Smith had not got beyond the first draft, as far as I could see. The quotations were interesting, certainly - but the whole exercise, in my opinion, was not worth the effort or the space.

The third part tried to tie it all together. It was unfinished and skimpy (I thought - Smith thinks so too). It read like a first draft, or as the result of not having quite worked through what Smith wanted to say. I'd guess the latter was the problem: Smith wasn't sure what he wanted to say (except in the first part!) During the December crisis Smith had been all over the place (see IB 90). In the article he wasn't sure what he was saying. All he was sure of was the he wanted to boost himself and felt, even a month after the crisis was over, that the worker leadership should speak.

Taken as a whole the article was massively too long for what it said, and a bit of a mess (though usually Smith is technically a very good writer).

It had the additional problem that it was stale and late. All the issues thrown up in December had been dealt with adequately and at length in the paper already, in editorials and in long articles by J. McI. (J. McI.'s material, as it happened, had been cut quite drastically to fit the space). Even if Smith's stuff had been in my opinion brilliantly put together and written, and politically OK, it was still very late. Its main interest would be: "This is Smith's view. Our readers have spent the last month in deep thought, and this is the result". That is not what we publish the paper for, though.

Despite all this I seriously considered letting the whole thing go in as it was, for the sake of peace. But by then I knew that no such concession would buy peace. So I told Smith that my attitude was, to sum up:

- a) The factional coat-trailing and ridiculous self-glorification would have to go;
- b) I was not prepared to devote about two pages of the paper to reprinting and analysing old TUC speeches to prove that they had ratted on their pledges;
- c) I was prepared to agree to an article by Smith putting his views in a reasonable way at reasonable length (or in 3000 words, which is more than reasonable).

(FINAL NOTE: I have not checked the IB version of Smith's article against the version submitted in January, a copy of which is probably still at the centre. This may be unwise, but time is short and I have more rewarding things to see to.)

We seem to have settled on 'petition group' as the name for them, but I begin to think that 'petty details group' or the 'people-with-no-sense-of-proportion group' would be better - at least for Gunther and Oliver.

These comrades seem unable to relate to the major political issues in the League right now. They concentrate instead on things that are of second-rate or even tenth-rate importance - Oliver on his beloved NC standing orders and on the bad clerical and administrative services provided by our badly overworked centre; Gunther on such trivialities as exactly when the resolution presented to the March 31 NC was written.

They are like people who have been traumatised, disoriented by shock into losing all sense of balance and proportion. They seem to have lost the ability to tell the difference between what is important and what is mere detail and secondary matters.

It happens that they even get the petty details that obsess them wrong. (I'll explain how the NC resolution was prepared below). But suppose they were right. It wouldn't count for anything. To go on about alleged breaches of standing orders at an NC meeting in the middle of a split instead of relating to the major political questions behind the split shows the complete lack of a sense of proportion.

In fact standing orders weren't breached. The resolution on March 31 came up under 'matters arising' from the decision of March 10 and the faction's response to it. But Gunther, going on about when the resolution was written and when the lock was changed at the centre, instead of relating to the political issues in the split, is equally off-beam.

THE MARCH 31 RESOLUTION

Both these comrades are suffering from serious political disorientation. And people in that frame of mind really shouldn't trust themselves to establish accurately even the secondary details.

Take the March 31 resolution (IB 99).

Gunther says (IB 108): "There are two witnesses to the fact that this resolution was being produced (not merely written!) on Thursday 29th before the EC took place. Who are the liars and deceivers?"

More to the point, who are the "two witnesses"? In fact, not two but 8 people (not counting the arch liars and deceivers Kinnell and Carolan) can testify to the exact time and manner of that resolution's origin: Collins, Callaghan, Fraser, Hill, Lewis, Joplin, Keith, Whettling.

For that resolution was put into shape at a meeting of ten NC members which started at 8pm on Friday March 30.

In such a fundamental matter it was important to work out exactly what should and could be done at the NC, so we convened this caucus of NC members who shared our view that we had come to the end of the road with the faction, to discuss exactly what to do the following day. We excluded the faction and its fellow-travellers, including Parsons, for obvious reasons. Jagger, Matthews, Parkinson, and Strummer supported the expulsion proposal but couldn't make the caucus. There was some talk of broadening the meeting out and inviting both Gunther (who we knew was working that evening) and Oliver (who was in hospital part of the week), but in the end we didn't.

I wrote the first draft of the resolution between 6.40 and 7.30 on Friday evening in the buffet at Kings Cross station, just down the road from where the caucus meeting would be held. There was nothing new in it - nothing, apart from details, that everybody on the NC hadn't heard before. It was a precis of the stuff set down in IBs.

I read it out to the meeting. The meeting made additions to it, rejected my

proposals on the exact mechanisms of throwing out the faction, and replaced the relevant section of my draft with the term of the expulsion motion carried at the following day's NC.

(I tried telling them that this was lese-majeste, and reminded them that their function in the organisations and on the NC was to be my 'handraisers'. They told me I'd been brainwashed by Smith and Parsons).

So this resolution which the "two witnesses" saw at the centre on the Thursday came into existence between about 6.30 and 9.30 the following evening, in a process of drafting, discussion and amendment involving 10 people. It was typed up by Kinnell on the Saturday morning, before the NC. It was perfectly in order to put that motion to a meeting at such notice: it came up under 'matters arising'. There was no question of anyone being taken by surprise: it was a special NC meeting called primarily to discuss the question of the faction, and the faction had been frantically campaigning in the League about the possibility of them being expelled for the previous three weeks.

At the EC on the Thursday, Kinnell, Hill, Parkinson, . . . and I certainly knew what we would argue for at the caucus meeting on the Friday evening, but we did not have a common line on the details and it had not yet been determined exactly what we would do on the Saturday. In the circumstances we could hardly have had a friendly chat about the possibilities with Jones. We did make some last attempt to see if there was any possibility of the faction turning back towards the WSL, but as far as I was concerned it was plain that Jones was a member of a hostile organisation.

Jones and the faction had been agitating for three weeks that they were going to be expelled, but on the Thursday I got the strong impression that Jones did not quite believe it. I saw no reason to put him right and thus give him extra fuel for agitation. The NC is entitled to make up its mind in an atmosphere of calm deliberation, without outside pressure. But nevertheless I did say to Jones that there would "probably" be "a resolution".

If the Smith group now say that they didn't expect the expulsion resolution, then they convict themselves of dishonest agitation for the previous three weeks. I understand that they expected us to expel the leaders, but not the whole faction.

But there is another twist to the story. If the 8 witnesses do not convince Gunther, we can call another to the stand - comrade Jones himself! IB 99 contains not only the expulsion resolution but other documents for the NC. Anyone can see from looking at it that it was all produced as a single unit (the items follow directly one after another, instead of each item having a new page). Two of the items included are documents from Smith. They were handed to Kinnell by Jones on the Thursday evening. IB 99 therefore could not have been produced on Thursday.

DETAILS AND LOGIC-CHOPPING

The locks at the centre were changed on Saturday morning after it was clear that a majority of the NC had determined that the faction was going to be put out of the WSL. To be sure, all these goings-on are not quite 'normal'. But that's just another way of saying that we were organising the ejection of the Oxford faction. That's the decisive question - was it necessary, and therefore right, for us to do that?

It is impossible to answer that question by way of a deep philosophical inquiry into the implications for League democracy of changing the locks at the centre before there had been a vote at the full NC meeting. Things like that are the petty details, the small change, the mechanics.

Gunther elevates the small details into big issues and treats the big issues as if they were the small change - or as if an attitude on the big issues could be read off from the petty mechanics of the split, like the changing of the locks.

Gunther also indulges in nonsensical logic-chopping. For example: I wrote

in IB 105: "Until the conference the NC decision stands" - i.e. until the conference only the NC could decide, and not the petition then being launched by Gunther with others. Gunther says that when I wrote that all the NC had done was give notice that a motion for expulsion would be put on April 14. He concludes: "Carolans abolishes the role of the NC at a stroke".

But how can saying that the NC decides be 'abolishing the role of the NC'? Moreover, the NC on March 31 did not just give someone permission to bring a motion for the faction's expulsion to an NC meeting on the 14th. It suspended the faction and gave notice that they would be expelled on the 14th, after the constitutional two weeks' notice. I wrote a circular explaining that decision. Abolishing the role of the NC at a stroke of the pen, indeed!

THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE

No, the NC did not 'ignore' the call for a special conference. It decided to hold a regular conference at which the comrades can propose whatever they like. In other words, it incorporated the special conference into a full conference also discussing other things. On April 14 the NC also decided that a full day of the conference would be devoted to the internal organisational issues which Gunther and others are concerned with.

In general the charge that we have been unconstitutional is thrown around a lot. There is no truth in it. Everything the NC did was within the constitution. The right to a special conference does not constitutionally cancel out, suspend, or override the NC's right to 'legislate' for the organisation, including on relations with the Smith group.

The NC decision to hold a full conference "six weeks after the miners' strike or three months after March 31" is within the competence of an NC trying amidst the difficulties created by the faction to lead the organisation in its primary class-struggle work. The maximum delay of one month beyond the two months schedule for a special conference is (a) comparatively trivial, and (b) not in any serious way a refusal to allow members access to constitutional rights. In fact, the decision to call a regular conference gives those who wanted a special conference something they would not otherwise have had - re-election of the NC.

Only people with no sense of proportion or perspective could talk about the NC "tearing up the constitution". The NC has discharged its constitutional responsibility to lead the organisation. The membership will have a chance to pronounce on the way we had led it within a few short weeks. That should be the end of the matter.

THE MINERS' STRIKE AND THE FACTION

Gunther says that it is "a lie" to imply that those calling for a special conference are not interested in working around the miners' strike. He recalls that conferences were held during revolutions and world wars.

Now in fact the US had not joined World War 2 at the time of the SWP-US conference in 1940. But that's a detail. More seriously, Gunther misses at least two important points.

Those who proposed a special conference involving the Smith group and the WSL in the middle of the miners' strike in fact - whether they understood it or not - proposed to turn the organisation inwards for a two months' brawl which could not conceivably have served any constructive purpose for the League. It would have tied up our energies and could only have been an extremely messy and expensive form of a split.

In the period before such a special conference, the elected leadership of the organisation would have to choose either to let the future of the organisation go hang, dutifully beavering away at the external work while the faction ran

rampage in the organisation - or else to fight to save the organisation to the detriment of the proper external work of the organisation in the miners' strike. A terrible choice, and one which left us no option but to cut the Gordian Knot by abolishing the pretence of a common framework with the Oxford faction.

I did not say, and would not say, that all those who supported the call for a special conference "weren't interested" in working around the miners' strike. I do say that the faction was more interested in pursuing factional goals within the WSL than in the WSL's ability to function in the miners' strike (an attitude which is understandable enough considering what they said about the organisation). I say that those like Gunther and Oliver who backed the faction didn't know what was good for the WSL; that the NC knew better; that it was elected to make such decisions; and that it was right to act as the League leadership it was elected to be. Only the NC could make a choice between resolving the situation with the faction quickly, or letting the organisation be paralysed. To "take it to the membership" would imply a decision to surrender the organisation to paralysis and disruption. It would have been a decision to let the factional minority decide what the League would do in the miners' strike - the faction which had its own considerations and calculations, and which for many months had been utterly irresponsible towards every aspect of League work. Or, more precisely, to the the faction and those like Gunther and Oliver - people who in the NC majority's opinion are deeply confused and disoriented - decide. That is not democracy.

The choice the NC faced was either to act as a leadership, or to let the elected leadership of the organisation collapse ignominiously, mouthing pathetic pseudo-democratic phrases about "the membership" deciding. That would not have been "the membership" deciding, but a muddled and gutless NC deciding in favour of chaos. The membership elected the NC to take responsible decisions on such matters, not to abdicate when real difficulties arose.

Taking all this into account, the NC had every right to use its own judgment on such matters as the timing of the conference. It had the right to choose to have a regular conference minus the Oxford faction rather than a special conference "with" the Oxford faction followed by the inevitable open split. It had the right not to treat the letter of the constitution as a religion. It had the right to refuse to let the organisation get trapped in an impossible situation where the NC's right to lead and legislate for the organisation against the Oxford faction could be "overridden" by an irresponsible minority using a call for a special conference, which the Oxford faction could decide to have more or less at will.

MINIMISING THE DISRUPTION

No, comrade Gunther, we didn't choose this time to sort out the faction. The faction made the running with their agitation. Their agitation for a special conference to discuss their petty grievances did not arise out of the resolution passed at the NC on March 10: they merely used that resolution as a "good reason". Nor did the agitation come out of the proposals in the 'Document of the Eight'; on the contrary, they first decided that they would agitate for a special conference, then later decided what they wanted to propose at it (the 'Document of the Eight' came out later, on the 25th).

Their agitation for a conference started in January, and was certain to become a call for a special conference once the NC voted down the faction on March 10 - whatever we did. They forced us to act against them, or to let the factional tail (which had just enough support to call a special conference when it wanted and on any pretext) force the League into that particular way of having the inevitable split which would be most advantageous to the faction and most disadvantageous to the League.

The timing was not of our making. All we did after March 10 was to conclude that the break was inevitable, and decide to organise it in the most economical

and least disruptive way.

The notion implied in much of the agitation that we were 'frightened' to go to a special conference for fear of 'losing' or that we needed to expel the faction to ensure a majority is simply stupid. Neither the Oxford faction, nor the Oxford faction in combination with either the Morrow/RWL faction or the Parsons group, won any of the decisive votes at last year's three conferences. (The only major 'opposition' victory was the February conference's rejection of the FI document drafted by Cunliffe). Since then the RWL faction has split, the faction has graduated quite a few supporters out of the League (Hunt, James, Todd, Andrea C. etc.), and some of Parsons' former sympathisers have learned a thing or two (for instance, Strummer and Jagger voted to throw the faction out). The Smith/Parsons bloc would not have won any important vote either at a special conference, or at a regular conference.

Aside from the rabid factional irresponsibility of wanting such a conference during the miners' strike, our basic objection to the special conference was that it was an abuse of the constitution by the faction. They were attempting to use the constitution in order to have the inevitable split in the way most advantageous to them and most disadvantageous to the League. They were trying to use clause 5(v) of the constitution to force the organisation to place the faction's petty grievance-mongering centre stage. Nothing constructive could possibly come of it.

It was an attempt to turn the constitution's safeguard clauses, designed for the protection of minorities, into a tool for minority rule - into a mechanism whereby the minority which in practice had refused to accept the results of last year's three conferences could constitutionally override the majority, devalue and downgrade the NC, and make proper majority rule impossible. They were attempting to impose on the organisation their own ideas about frequent conferences (once every 3 or 4 months, says the Document of the Eight) and a weak NC, without having won the organisation to those ideas. They were flagrantly abusing the provisions in the constitution for a special conference.

In this situation the notion that the NC had no proper option but to let the faction and their allies - including anti-democratic-centralists like Parsons - interpret the constitution, could only occur to people who want or half-want the headless organisation implied in the Document of the Eight. But that, comrades, is not the WSL we have got right now.

The decision of the faction to impose on the organisation its fifth conference in 18 months, with no possible constructive purpose, would in any circumstances have forced us to answer the question: can we continue in (what is alleged to be) one organisation together with these irresponsible people. The fact that things came to a head during the miners' strike made it impossible for us to reach any other conclusion than the one we did reach.

It is not demagoguery to talk of the miners' strike, or to say that the faction didn't give a damn about our ability to function in the miners' strike. Of course we have had to waste time and energy in the last few weeks! But we would have wasted a lot more in a two months pre-conference period followed by a probably prolonged and messy split. And, to repeat a point, since they were dragging the organisation into a pre-conference period and a crescendo of internal agitation, we did not have the option of 'leaving them alone' until after the miners' strike.

THE PETITION

No, comrade Gunther, we haven't 'torn the organisation apart'. Far from it. Quite the opposite. We have freed the organisation from a malignant organism, and the signs are that we have done it without much damage to the basic tissue of the WSL.

I'm not surprised that you have found 32 people - including the faction fellow-travellers - to sign your petition. But I'm not very impressed either.

What your petition means is that the big majority of the WSL understand what the NC did and support it. Most of the 32 will come to understand that too. Even if a few more comrades go out after the faction, that still won't be "tearing the organisation apart".

Yet again, I find Gunther's reasoning hard to follow. He says: "After rejecting resolutions calling for no expulsions before conference, after rejecting the call for a special conference, Carolan then attempts to use Trotsky against those who are still attempting to prevent the wrecking of the WSL as if we wanted WSL policy decided by referendum! Carolan has the audacity to quote 'In Defence of Marxism':

"Instead of a convention it is sufficient to introduce a counting of local votes'.

"Comrades, we called for a convention. This was rejected by the NC majority. Trotsky's quote cannot be used to tell us that black is white".

But, comrade Gunther, the NC has not only "called for" but scheduled a "convention", before the end of June. The petition is about trying to override and reverse the NC before the conference.

Obviously you are entitled to think you know best about how to "prevent the wrecking of the WSL". You are even entitled to the bizarre view that our decision formally to separate out the hostile and disruptive Oxford faction from the WSL is "wrecking the WSL". But the NC majority is also entitled to think it knows best, and to think that right now you are getting under the feet of those who are in fact stopping the WSL getting wrecked and you are helping those who are trying to wreck it (whatever you may intend).

And the NC majority has rights that no minority can have - the right to decide. The NC's choice to exercise that right cannot licence your attempt to substitute a semi-plebiscite for our democratic norms; nor does it elevate your semi-plebiscite into a form of democratic consultation which people who take our tradition of democracy seriously can respect. In fact you are trying to do to the NC what Trotsky specifically pinpointed as one of the main reasons why the revolutionary party would not tolerate plebiscites: paralyse the party.

"We demand a referendum on the war question because we want to paralyse or weaken the centralism of the imperialist state. But can we recognise the referendum as a normal method for deciding issues in our own party? It is not possible to answer this question except in the negative... The party as a centralised whole disappears..."

('In Defence of Marxism', p.40).

WHERE NOW?

Gunther says that my assertion that the political discussion at the March 31 NC after the faction left was "the most fruitful political discussion we have had for a long time", was part of an "extremely cynical" section of IB 105.

Yet Gunther seems to agree with my assessment of that discussion. Good. He should think what it implies about the rights and wrongs of expelling the faction.

Gunther just wants to claim some credit for the discussion for himself, Levy and Cunliffe. I'd give Levy some credit. Cunliffe's contribution was to move a sneaky little motion indirectly attacking the paper. He got knocked back. Gunther himself did a very revealing political volte-face when he attacked the position on 'General strike to kick the Tories out' which he has held and defended for about 10 years.

People change their minds, of course. But Gunther scoffed at it, as if only an eccentric could hold our position. Gunther evidently has a drive to cut himself off from his own long-held political attitudes - on this issue, and on organisational questions, as he did when he signed that manifesto of muddled federalism, the Document of the Eight.

Me, if I found myself doing such a wholesale revision of attitudes and positions I had held for many years, I would not rush into committing myself in the middle of a faction fight. I would give myself time to think about it.

Oliver, like Gunther, cannot rise above a few petty details to the real issues.

Both Gunther and Oliver are not functioning according to their own basic politics. Both of them concentrate on the trivia because they can't give themselves a frank account of what they are doing politically - because their implicit answers to the major political questions posed in the League now, the answers given by their deeds and alignments, flatly contradict the principles and norms that they have spent much of their lives (in Oliver's case, over half his life) defending and practising.

Both of these comrades have been in revolutionary politics a long time - Oliver not far off a quarter century, Gunther for perhaps 15 years. Gunther has been part of the WF/I-CL tendency for about 10 years, Oliver since late 1967. They know better than the muddled federalism they put their names to together with six other NC members.

It is quite possible that most of those who support that document - including the pretentious but inexperienced Jones and Cunliffe - really believe that loose federalism is more democratic than the regime embodied in the WSL constitution. But Oliver doesn't. He knows better. He saw enough in IS between 1968 and '71 to make it impossible for him not to know better. That is, if he allows himself to think about it.

He knows, because he has seen it in action in IS/SWP, that the sort of loose federalist structure advocated (or certainly implied) in the Document of the Eight would lead to organisational arbitrariness and increase, not lessen, domination by groups and cliques and factions declared or undeclared.

It would make honest politics and honest political accounting impossible. It would destroy the authority of the NC. But the full membership meeting every three months could not directly run the organisation. So either the organisation would fall apart or you would get a de facto leadership holding it together by manipulation - an organism which would be a very great deal less accountable than the present NC and EC. Oliver knows all this as well as I do, because he saw it in operation in IS/SWP in the late '60s, just like I did.

STOP AND THINK

But Oliver - like Gunther - chooses not to think about the political issues. Like Gunther scoffing at a position which he has held for 10 years as if only an idiot could hold it, Oliver chooses to forget his own experience. He chooses to orient blindly, in defiance of his politics, steering himself

on

the hand-holds of secondary details.

He makes general, sweeping condemnations of the I-CL 'regime', yet he never specifies anything more horrendous than badly serviced NC meetings. (And he's wrong about that, too. WF/I-CL had a very good service of EC minutes considering its resources, and 'minutes/matters arising' was a regular item on NC agendas).

I challenge him to spell out what was wrong with his and my general conception, or what was undemocratic in the way we ran the organisation for 14 years before July 1981.

Others can happily talk about "Carolanism". Oliver knows very well that we invented nothing basic on organisational questions and that we have always consciously and deliberately represented a tradition not of our own making - Trotsky's and Cannon's tradition. He knows that the only thing we ourselves added to that tradition was the libertarian twist which allowed access to the public press for minorities and insisted that minorities would not have to denounce their own politics publicly, etc.

I can think of a lot more to say to Oliver - who combines ridiculous and extremely subjective stuff about 'bureaucratic centralism', defined as a bad service from our badly-overworked centre, with consistent refusal to support it against the disruptions of Cunliffe and the Oxford faction. But for the moment, here too enough is enough.

Both Oliver and Gunther will, if they don't catch themselves on, wind up turning their backs on what they have between them spent about 40 years working for and wind up in some pathetic centrist enterprise like the Chartists or Smith's new outfit - or worse (I can think of worse). They will wind up themselves practising politics they have spent all their political lives despising - Oliver, perhaps, as a free-wheeling labour movement 'personality'.

You set yourself higher goals than that once upon a time, comrade Oliver - to build the revolutionary party that the working class desperately needs.

For a mixture of utilitarian and sentimental reasons, and from a general belief that both these comrades are a lot better than the role they are playing in the WSL now would lead you to think, I hope they stop and think about what they are doing and where they are going. Catch yourselves on, comrades!

