

INTERNAL BULLETIN X103

May 1984.

This IB contains an account of the NC meeting where the 36 expulsions took place (or at least the part of it in which any of the expelled were involved) which was held on Saturday April 11th.

Most importantly it contains the political statement made by Smith on behalf of the 36. Because it was not our wish that one person should speak for the 36 - but that each should have been afforded his or her democratic rights - we did not have a prepared or a written statement. This text therefore is not verbatim, but it does follow, fully, the political line of the statement made.

36 EXPULSIONS.

As everyone in the WSL knows, 36 members (including three members of the NC) were expelled at an emergency meeting of the NC on Saturday April 11th. It was one of the most bureaucratic and cynical expulsions seen for a very long time in a Trotskyist movement which has been so damaged by such actions.

Not that we didn't know what to expect, since only 2 weeks earlier we had been suspended from membership by the same type of kangaroo court, acting completely outside of the constitution of the WSL and which afforded us none of the rights 'guaranteed' by the constitution.

I also received, a few days before the 'hearing', a letter from Kinnell telling the suspended comrades (through me) how the 'hearing' would be conducted. This made it clear that none of the rights of those to be disciplined would be upheld. Individual members would not even have the right to defend themselves at the hearing as the constitution 'guarantees'. Indeed only one of the 36 would be allowed to speak - on behalf of the rest - something not even mentioned in the constitution.

The magnitude of this should really be taken into account. It meant that 36 members were going to be expelled under conditions where they had never been charged with anything, and without ever at any stage being given the chance to defend themselves. With the NC members it was in many ways worse. They were being expelled by the NC after having been elected by the WSL conference. (We have never been able to accept this. It was one of the arguments over the constitution at the time of fusion. We always argued that if you were elected by conference, you could only be removed by conference - except in the obvious cases of security etc. This point was accepted for the first year of the fusion, and then dropped). The situation was clearly unacceptable to those being expelled, and most of those not committed to other things turned up at the 'hearing' to try to convince the NC to overturn what we assume was an EC decision. (Although it now seems to be back to "business as usual" with Carolan simply speaking "for the EC").

BEFORE THE MEETING STARTED.

We arrived before the meeting had started (or even assembled) and went into the room where the meeting was to be held (in the upstairs room of a pub). We knew that the NC was to meet for 15 minutes before the 'hearing' was due to start, and we wanted to ask them to reverse the decision on only one spokesperson. When we walked in, however, we were met with an hysterical response from Carolan and Kinnell. Every time we tried to speak to them - or to anyone else - they shouted at the tops of their voices to drown us out. I was forced to shout our request over the top of all that, and after assurance that our request would be considered, we withdrew to await the result.

(What Carolan and Kinnell were shouting at us was significant, however. We were told, "Get out, you are not members of this movement" - Carolan. And, "Get out, this room is booked for a private meeting" - Kinnell. It did seem to make the 'hearing' something of a formality. Hill's response was just as significant. He told us that if we would not leave the room, it would "prejudice our appeal". Which was interesting, since we were not there on appeal. We were there facing a disciplinary hearing on expulsion charges - the appeal would be the next stage. To Hill we were already expelled.)

Ten minutes later, Keith came out of the meeting to tell us that the NC had decided that we would indeed only be allowed one spokesperson, but they had agreed that one witness could be taken as well. I went in as spokesperson and Jones as the witness.

THE HEARING.

Hill was in the chair, and he explained that we were there to make our appeal, and would we go ahead. We said no, we were not there on appeal - we were facing a disciplinary hearing, and it was up to those preferring the

charges to outline what those charges were, and make their case. This we said had been the procedure in all other disciplinary cases we had been involved in.

Hill then conceded that he had been wrong - that it was a disciplinary hearing and not the appeal stage. (It was however astounding that the NC had decided to limit our representation without being clear on what the meeting was doing - and that Hill as chairperson thought he was chairing a completely different meeting).

Once it was established that it was a disciplinary hearing, we asked for the charges to be read out and the case presented for the 'prosecution'. Was that not normal at disciplinary hearings? Not at this one, Hill said. The 'charges' should be taken as the "same as those used for the suspensions hearing at the previous NC", he said. (This was for failing to give an adequate reply to the NC resolution of , which included the demands that "the faction accepts majority rule" and "the faction leaders cease disruptive agitation").

I argued that those pressing charges of expulsion had an obligation to motivate the charges they were making. Hill said no, this would not be done, and we were forced to proceed without it.

I then asked about the suspension of the constitution of the WSL - since there was absolutely no doubt at all that it had been suspended. (Again, this is something which cannot be stressed too much. Carolan and Kinnell had carried out what amounted to a declaration of martial law in the organisation in order to carry out the expulsions and "reorganise" the group). Hill said he would give no reason for the suspension of the constitution of the group.

Finally I asked about the appeals to conference procedure, should we decide to appeal. Would it be policy to allow every expelled member to speak to the conference (as the constitution provides) or would the NC rule, as at this hearing, that there would be one spokesperson covering all the appeals. Hill said no decision had been taken, but he expected it would be the same as today. Later, he said that a decision would be taken, and we would be informed.

I then proceeded to make the following political statement:

It has become increasingly clear over the past 2½ years, and now it is confirmed beyond all doubt, that there were two radically different attitudes to the fusion in 1981.

Rightly or wrongly (and I think rightly), the old WSL had a positive attitude towards the fusion which started from a desire to tackle the damaging fragmentation of the Trotskyist movement and make a contribution towards principled regroupment. We saw another organisation which did not have the complications of international affiliations (which turned out to be a wholly negative factor) and which appeared to be approaching the conjunctural situation in the labour movement in the same basic way. At the same time, we could not see any theoretical differences which should prove an insuperable problem. Comrades can judge whether we were right or wrong in that assessment, but that was our basic approach. (Indeed, in all the discussions we have had that has never been challenged).

The ICL attitude, however, was a very different kettle of fish. Theirs was a destructive operation designed to either destroy the old WSL or successfully absorb the old WSL. All talk about "uniting the strengths of the two old traditions" was cold cynical lies. There was never the slightest intention of accepting any part of the old WSL tradition.

This is not to say this was the attitude of the rank and file members of

the ICL - or even the NC majority. But it was quite clearly the attitude of the three people who controlled the ICL - Carolan, Kinnell and Hill; of that there is no possible remaining doubt. For them it was a deeply sectarian tactic to build the ICL. All talk of a "fusion" was for cynical tactical advantage. We were to be absorbed, and those who could not be absorbed, elbowed out. (This is why the "fusion" discussions were a political cover-up. Since fusion was not the objective, it was all beside the point. The objective was to get us to agree to the fusion, and then the 'absorption' process would begin.)

Major difference quickly emerged - most fundamentally on the nature of world imperialism and world Stalinism in the post war period. Had the fusion been genuine from both sides, however, this should not have been an insuperable problem. It would have required a development, however, since it meant containing a higher level of political differences than existed within either previous group. But that is what the fusion was all about - at least what it would have been about had it been genuine.

It emerged soon after the 'fusion' what the tactics of Carolan, Kinnell and Hill would be. They would take account of our views (for a while anyway) on a range of secondary issues, but they intended, progressively as time went on, to establish their basic politics as the line of the group, and to ultimately make them completely dominant. Nothing short of this would be acceptable to them.

It is of course by no means the first time that the Workers Fight/ICL core members have been involved in this kind of intervention into another group. It is a method which is very central both to their method of party building and to the kind of party they want to build.

Essentially, the Workers Fight/ICL have never been a party of any kind, or even a league. They have always been a faction or a tendency. They were a tendency before we "fused". They were a faction during the 'fusion' and they see themselves as a tendency in the future. In other words, they want, and intend to have, a highly centralised group, sterilised of all significant political differences; or at least any political differences which take on any organisational form or mount any kind of challenge to the leadership.

This attitude is absolutely basic to their politics and fundamentally affects everything they do - not least in the kind of regime they want in any group they build. It comes out as the kind of "one person management" they have fought for in the 'fused' group. It came out in the differences over the constitution just before the 'fusion' (which were mostly concerned with minority or individual rights, or the extent to which the organisation should be vertically controlled).

It is an attitude which affects not just the nature of the group, but also the politics it projects as well of course. Let's take the question of the reconstruction of the Fourth International - quite an important question for Trotskyists. This attitude has led Carolan/Kinnell/Hill into a totally sectarian blind alley in relationship to the general Trotskyist movement - both in Britain and internationally. "Yes they really are all absolutely useless," say Kinnell when challenged. **The implication is pretty obvious: the only healthy Trotskyist forces in the world are in the ICL - and in the ICL there are only two people who provide the theoretical positions of the group - therefore the reconstruction of the FI (or the theoretical regeneration) is down to them.** Carolan and Kinnell are going to reconstruct the Trotskyist movement single-handed. It is as crude and sectarian as that.

It comes directly out of the kind of 'purity' they want. Ultimately Carolan and Kinnell are the only 'Marxists'; anyone who disagrees with them is by definition 'non-Marxist' and therefore 'absolutely useless'.

It leads to national Trotskyism, since if every thing in the Trotskyist movement outside of Britain is "absolutely useless", where do you start? If the sole source of useful theoretical knowledge amounts to two people in one country, where do you go from there? The answer is obvious: first build a group in Britain. (Theoretically this does not rule out international work, but in practical terms it does, since there is no drive for international work. It ends up with a few diplomatic encounters between Carolan and Kinnell and the occasional leader of another group).

Far from providing the starting point for the "theoretical regeneration of the Fourth International", this attitude seriously distorts any theoretical contribution that Carolan and Kinnell might make. Any serious attempt to tackle the theoretical degeneration of the Fourth International must at least draw upon the efforts and experiences of the best elements within the world movement. It must be done as a part of the mainstream debate within the world movement as a whole. It certainly cannot be done whilst cut off from those debates and whilst isolated to a national Trotskyist situation in Britain. How can a programme be reelaborated and redeveloped for the working class of the world from such a situation? Such a thing is ridiculous.

The attitude further distorts the theoretical positions they develop, since they reject any contribution made by anyone considering themselves Trotskyist and are attracted instead to (at best) the more peripheral strands of the movement. It is a process which takes them ever further from the Trotskyist tradition.

This has been the basic political position of the Workers Fight/ICL and where it has been taking the group.

These expulsions, however, bring something new into it. What we are witnessing now is a sectarian degeneration of the group which comes out of the past attitudes but going far beyond it.

This means that the group that Carolan is going to establish after these expulsions are completed is something more sectarian, more overcentralised and undemocratic than has been established in the 'fused' group. A glimpse of this can be seen in Carolan's proposal to 'reorganise' the Control Commission. Presumably it will not have the 'independence' it is supposed to have under the existing constitution of the WSL, and will be tailored to the requirements of life inside a faction.

It is not difficult to see what that regime will be like. The justification for suspending the constitution of the WSL in order to carry out these expulsions was that the continuation of the old WF/ICL tradition stands higher than the constitution. (At this point several members of the NC were openly nodding their heads, so strongly did they agree with it.) It is an incredibly cynical thing to do. Enter a fusion on the basis of a democratic centralist constitution, knowing that you will only honour that constitution as long as it serves your political ends. As soon as it doesn't, suspend it and do as you like. Since "the WF/ICL tradition" = the views of Carolan and Kinnell, it means that any group they form cannot have any kind of constitution which means a thing. As soon as it conflicts with the requirements of their views, it will be pushed aside as fast as the constitution of the WSL was pushed aside.

Comrades are being persuaded to stay with the ICL on the basis of the argument, "Where do you stand on the political questions?" (like where do you stand on Afghanistan or the EEC, for example). They are being told to decide their positions on the basis of these "political questions", and not on the questions of regime or democracy or democratic centralism - which presumably are non-political questions.

Comrades pressurised in this way should think carefully about it. These

"non-political" questions are in fact some of the most difficult political questions facing the Trotskyist movement. How does democratic centralism operate in small Trotskyist groups in today's conditions? (I think for example that it cannot simply be transposed from the model of big parties to today's small groups). What kind of regime is necessary if political differences of any consequence are going to be contained within a single group? What kind of regime is necessary to recruit members of the working class into it? How does such a group tackle the problems of the reconstruction of the Fourth International? How does it relate to the crisis-ridden FI as it is today?

If there is no answer to all these questions, then there is not much value in having the same opinions as Carolan on Afghanistan.

In our opinion, the sectarian line of Carolan and Kinnell on all these issues excludes the possibility of them building anything serious, whatever views they project on anything else. Carolan, in one of his IBs, says for example that "splits are the small change of the Trotskyist movement". How sectarian can you get? That can only be said by someone who sees splits as a valid method of building a group. The Sparts see it that way - that is their method of 'building' a group.

Finally, can I say that we will fight this sectarian degeneration as long as we are able to do so. This means that we will appeal against these expulsions if they take place today. We will appeal to conference, and we will take advantage of any opportunity we get (such as the meetings proposed in IB 83) to argue our positions within the WSL in the preconference discussions.

Smith.

April 20th 1984.

NB

It appears that a meeting of ICL members of the NC took place on Friday (evening) April 10th - the night before the expulsions. Various resolutions were discussed, including one calling simply for the expulsion of Smith and Jones, which apparently fell in favour of a resolution from Keith calling for the expulsion of the whole of the faction.

It is a remarkable situation. We are accused of being a "party within a party". We are told repeatedly that the majority are not a faction. Yet here they are, meeting in secret session and deciding to do exactly as they like, irrespective of the constitution.

APR 17th 1984

Dear cd Smith

In line with the resolutions passed at the WSL NC on March 31 and April 14, I am writing to propose discussions on possible practical collaboration between your group and the WSL.

Please let us know when would be a convenient time for a meeting.

Fraternally,

Kinnell

MAY 2ND 1984

Dear cd Kinnell

I have received your letter of April 17th proposing discussion on possible practical collaboration with us.

Can I say that your proposal seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the situation. We are 36 expelled members of the WSL who have elected to exercise our right of appeal against the expulsions to conference. The first thing therefore is for this process to be carried out - hopefully with more democracy than has been evident up to now.

This being the case there are two points: Firstly could you answer the question I asked at the disciplinary hearing as to whether each expelled member will have the right to defend himself or herself at the conference or whether this will be restricted as it was at the NC? Secondly we would be pleased if you would notify us as soon as possible of the times, dates and venues of the preconference meetings in order that we can attend and make a statement in line with your commitment to that effect.

Yours Fraternally

Smith.

