

The expulsion of the Thornett group

A selection of documents

THE SELECTION of documents which follows is intended to familiarise the reader with the issues and circumstances of the expulsion of the group around Alan Thornett from the WSL, which took place in April this year and was confirmed by a WSL conference on June 30-July 1.

Some of the documents have been slightly edited. Some pen-names are used in them: 'Smith' is Alan Thornett and 'Cunliffe' is John Lister.

The documents are:

Page 9: 'Enough is enough' — the NC's ultimatum to the Thornett group. This was drafted by Thomas Carolan and circulated in the WSL's Internal Bulletin one week before the March 10 NC, which voted to adopt it.

Page 11: The reply of the Thornett group to the NC's ultimatum. This was agreed at a national conference of the faction held in London on March 25.

Page 11: The declaration of the Thornett group that it was dissolving itself (also adopted on March 25).

Page 11: 'The belated cry for unity'. Written by Thomas Carolan in response to the 'unity campaign' which greeted the NC's ultimatum to the faction on March 10, this document explains why, in the opinion of the National Committee majority, unity, though desirable, was not now possible.

Page 13: The resolution to suspend and then expel the Thornett faction passed by the NC on March 31. This was proposed by a group of NC members to the special NC meeting which had been called to consider the faction's response to the NC ultimatum.

Page 15: 'The basis of revolutionary organisation: worker-leadership or Marxist politics?' The irreconcilable differences which had progressively destroyed the fusion concerned not this or that political question but radically different conceptions of the revolutionary party and its relationship to the working class. No less than three Internal Bulletins under the above title were produced to explain both the problems we had experienced in trying to

coexist with the Thornett group and our own view of what the revolutionary party is and how it relates to its working class members and leaders. The piece here is a comparatively brief statement of the issue. Written by Thomas Carolan, it was an introduction to the first Internal Bulletin under the title, a collection of excerpts from Lenin and from James P Cannon.

Page 18: 'What are the political differences?' Written in April. We repeatedly insisted that the dynamic of the split did not come from these political questions as such. The differences would have been containable within a democratic centralist organisational framework — if we had been able to establish democratic centralist norms of functioning. Nevertheless the political disputes did of course play a part. The reader should find this succinct survey, written by Martin Kinnell, useful in forming an overview of the present political character of the Thornett group, and in particular its inclination to define world politics in terms of imperialist and anti-imperialist 'camps' rather than in class terms.

Page 21: 'The dispute on the TUC'. This article by Thomas Carolan gives some picture of the way the Thornett group conducted their factional struggle during their last months in the WSL. The issue of the TUC's role in the NGA Warrington dispute was formally the most political of the issues they campaigned on in that period. Yet even on that their argument was based on an absurd caricature of the majority view.

Page 24: 'The Thornett group's case' — as presented at WSL area meetings to which they were invited to send speakers, from April through to June, at the WSL conference on June 30, and in a bulletin circulated to all WSL members.

Page 27: 'Leninism and sectarianism'. This is an excerpt from a document written by Thomas Carolan in May in reply to the pro-Thornett group which remained in the WSL until July. It deals with the central political point of the Thornett group's statement — the argument that the WSL is 'sectarian'.