

The central difference the Thornett group had with us in the formal political disputes place them firmly within the current of so-called 'Trotskyists' who see the main conflict in the world as not between classes but between imperialism and the Stalinist bloc. Such politics flowered in their group during the faction fight. But many of the things they said were said for factional effect, and as a mechanical negative response to what we were saying (or what they thought we were saying).

To try to map the Thornett group's future course by way of political extrapolation from such positions would be to misunderstand its nature. Besides, on this too the Thornett/DCF fusion will include people whose formal politics are very different from Thornett's — and, in fact, identical to ours.

The Thornett group is primarily a personal grouping, whose governing politics are arrived at not by working through any political logic but by way of a consensus, averaging-out the varied views of those who at any given moment are prepared to accept the arbitration of the 'worker leadership'. It is therefore unlikely that they will go where their main political differences with the WSL point them to, the uncritical Castroite wing of the USFI.

### 'BEYOND THE FRAGMENTS'

For the Thornett group the general political questions are not decisive. They determine neither what they are nor what they do.

It is the 'personal' character of the group, with its self-designated 'worker-leadership', which is decisive. As a result of its distinct history, the Thornett group has many special features and aspects peculiar to itself. But the federalist, consensus, lowest-common-denominator politics which the 'worker leadership' needs to sustain itself link it firmly to the general current of anti-Leninist sentiment that has grown up on the British Left in recent years — most boldly expressed around the 'Beyond the Fragments' grouping, and more discreetly in many sections of the Labour Left (which include quite a few ex-SLLers and ex-SWPers).

For Thornett's irresolvable basic difference with us was on the nature, character and methods of functioning of the revolutionary party which we jointly said the fusion was a step towards building.

On this question the Thornett group share with the broad anti-Leninist current a common root: revulsion against the bureaucratic 'revolutionary parties' like the SLL/WRP which they spent the best years of their lives working for, combined with failure to analyse exactly what was wrong with them from a Marxist point of view.

Those who in a decade have managed only a partial and unstable settling of accounts with the SLL/WRP on the broad political questions could hardly be expected to have worked out exactly how and why the Healy regime differed from the Leninist model. Instead, they recoiled against it, and turned its centralism inside out. They maintained the method of a fixed, designated leadership, but constructed round it a loose consensus regime in contrast to the WRP's authoritarianism.

### ANTI-LENINIST

The old WSL was always to a serious extent a loose federation of disparate local groupings, with semi-autonomous local chieftains, tied together by the prestige of the 'worker leadership'. True, this was something that happened to them rather than something they created. But it was no good for working out Marxist politics: and its general liberalism could turn into vicious intolerance against those who stepped outside the consensus — as one member of the old WSL who was not even allowed to publish his minority opinion (on Ireland) in the Internal Bulletin found out.

The exigencies of the Thornett group's factional struggle against the new WSL majority finally pitched Thorn-

ett and 'Jones' more or less explicitly into the camp of federalism and anti-Leninism, and made them argue explicitly for what they had merely practised in the old WSL while paying lip-service to Leninism and Trotskyism.

The revolt they led against the terms of the democratic-centralist constitution they agreed at fusion, and the semi-federalism they advocated for the WSL, place them squarely in the camp of the anti-Leninists.

### MISUNDERSTANDING SECTARIANISM

It is richly ironic, but there is reason to believe that one of the misunderstandings that led them into the fusion was their belief that the method used by the I-CL to put together broad alliances on the Left on the basis of 'roughly adequate class-struggle platforms' had for us replaced the Leninist method of strict ideological accounting and sharp political definition in the work of *building our own organisation*. Sectarians like Workers Power, whose politics consist so largely of malice-blinded commentaries on other people's activity, saw our broad labour movement work that way, and Alan Thornett seems to have believed them. But where they put a minus sign he saw a plus. Two or three of the few former I-CLers who now support Thornett's version of the revolutionary party probably had the same false understanding of the turn the I-CL made in the late 1970s.

In his statement to the WSL area meetings and the conference, reprinted in this magazine, Thornett grandly says that fusion became possible because the I-CL had become 'less sectarian'. The reader who remembers that the old WSL was still making bone-headed blanket denunciations of the Labour Left a few months before the fusion, and who reads the account of the dispute between us and Thornett on the TUC last December, will know how to assess this self-aggrandising comment of Thornett's. His underlying thought, however, probably refers to a genuine misunderstanding of our attempt to combine political clarity with the minimum of *stylistic and organisational* obstacles to integration in the broader labour movement.

For Thornett, to be sectarian is not needlessly to counterpose oneself to the broad labour movement or to the existing reformist Left. It is to think or to argue a question through, to try to define matters clearly, to attempt sharp definitions and conclusions. It is what Lenin and Trotsky — and ourselves following after them as best we can — would define as the elementary activity of Marxist politicians.

### THE FUTURE

Such a grouping has no political future. Indeed it has no clear politics. It may exist for a long time, but it will do nothing useful.

"I have never put a low value on small organisations merely because they are small... The mass organisations have value precisely because they are mass organisations. Even when they are under patriotic reformist leadership one cannot discount them. One must win the masses who are in their clutches: whether from outside or from inside depends on the circumstance. Small organisations which regard themselves as selective, as pioneers, can only have value on the strength of their programme and of the schooling and steeling of their cadres. A *small* organisation which has no unified programme and no really revolutionary will is less than nothing, is a negative quantity".

(Leon Trotsky, Open Letter to an English Comrade, April 3 1936).

THOMAS CAROLAN  
July 26 1984.