

ourselves from being yoked and spangled to these people.

A constitution regulates and orders the relations between individuals and groups within a common organisation; a split registers the fact that coexistence is no longer possible, and the rules in the constitution can no longer mediate between groups in conflict. Concretely, the constitution and the leading bodies set up under it plainly no longer had the power or authority to regulate relations within the new WSL in conditions where the Thornett minority were not prepared to accept the verdict of the three 1983 conferences, accept minority status, and allow the League to function normally.

In general, to make a fetish of constitutionalities in discussing a split is to misunderstand what is happening. A 'constitutional' split is like a 'constitutional' civil war. In reality, the constitution, which has broken down, becomes a weapon on one side or the other. This is useful to one side, but not fundamental to either. In this case the constitutional legality was on our side, as it happens, but it would not matter too much if it had not been: we would still have split the organisation.

Such a split can only be judged politically: was it necessary? could it have been avoided? does it free the healthy part of the organisation to work and develop? who, in the light of the relevant preceding period of the organisation's history, was responsible, or mainly responsible? These are the decisive questions.

Nevertheless, in view of the intention of the Thornett group to malign and defame the organisation, it is as well to be clear that, as it happened, *everything was done constitutionally*.

BUREAUCRATIC EXPULSION?

It is difficult to know exactly what the Thornett group means by 'bureaucratic expulsions'. Unless it can be specified what precisely was 'bureaucratic', this is no more than an emotionally-loaded cant expression vaguely connoting brutality and the image of an entrenched power bearing down on an opposition.

What actually happened? The majority acted unilaterally against an entrenched but very alienated and very hostile minority whose leaders refused to live according to the rules they had negotiated at the 1981 fusion or to agree to separate from us 'amicably'.

Is every expulsion not decreed by a full conference bureaucratic? But then everything else any minority does not like which is done by the National Committee is also 'bureaucratic'. Any delegated authority or representative democracy is 'bureaucratic'. The logic here points straight to anarchism (but the Thornett group rarely follow through any question logically).

Engels once said that nothing is more authoritarian than a revolution. Maybe, if 'bureaucratic' is used to mean 'authoritarian' and nasty, then all expulsions are 'bureaucratic' for those expelled. But this is not what the word 'bureaucratic' normally means for Marxists.

So the charge of 'bureaucratic expulsion' is meaningless emotional cant. But that was always one of the big problems. Emotional denunciations of our alleged 'capitulation' to reformism or to imperialism; of our supposed 'liquidationism'; and of our claimed 'anti-communism' on questions like Afghanistan — all of it more or less devoid of serious political argument — this was the Thornett group's staple until even that made way for petty and usually contrived organisational grievance-mongering, from August 1983. Their final claptrap about 'bureaucratic expulsion' is therefore completely in consonance with all that went before.

The NC decision to expel the Thornett faction was necessary, right and constructive — in the same way as the removal of a malignant organism is constructive for the body afflicted by it, if it survives. And the WSL has survived.

I think Thornett and Lister are mistaken that they can scandalise the new WSL, though I do not underestimate either their abilities as liars and fabricators, or their will, indeed their need, to have a go.

But most non-malicious observers on the Left will understand that divorce is sometimes necessary, and in this case that it was much better than the 'unity' we had with Thornett. They will recognise that, faced as we were in March with the lunatic prospect of an intensified and pointless faction fight with Thornett rather than turning to the miners' strike, those who said 'enough is enough' were the healthy side of the organisation. We had a right to separate ourselves from those who had become hopelessly disoriented.

May Thornett's and Lister's campaign to malign the WSL prove therapeutic for them — and may it help restore to them the capacity to do something more useful than they have been doing these two years past.

PROSPECTS OF THE THORNETT GROUP

What prospects does the Thornett group have once it has reconstituted itself? Very bad prospects.

Though of course Thornett and others have participated in the solidarity work of their local Trades Council, throughout the miners' strike their group has done nothing as a *political tendency* except give 'external' support to the DCF. Their separation from the WSL freed us from their demoralised factionalism, but evidently it did not free them from their own demoralisation.

The Thornett group will most likely fuse with the DCF, claiming that together they represent 'the spirit of the fusion'. They may also manage to regroup with a few of the sectarians who have separated from the WSL over the last 18 months. All their manoeuvrings, regroupments, and fusions will no doubt be accompanied by as much fanfare as they can manage. None of it will matter much.

They will at best have a fraction of the forces they had in early 1975 when they separated from the WRP. There will be no boosting welcome for them in the USFI press comparable to what they got in 1975 and after from people eager to use them against the WRP. Above all, they themselves are older and demoralised, and they have completely lost the neo-Healyite verve and self-confidence that served them then.

The famous Cowley group is important, and certainly the new WSL has lost a potentially very valuable industrial nucleus. But nevertheless the claims for it are at least 50% fictional. It was never integrated into the new WSL, and in political terms scarcely into the old WSL either.

In political terms they will be a real hodge-podge. Quite a few of them on one side of the Thornett spectrum are sectarians, and others are committed to the old-style Healyite politics of literary denunciations. On the other side the group will include what used to be the extreme right wing of the new WSL (and of the old WSL). The right wingers include people who, in practice at least, disagree with the new WSL's opposition to rate rises.

Thornett himself is, I think, instinctively with the right wing, but he remains half-imprisoned by mid-'60s SLL/WRP formulas and tied to people who are more thoroughly imprisoned by those formulas, like his close comrade-in-arms 'Jones'. Symptomatic of the current politics of the Thornett group was Thornett's vote against expelling or publicly dissociating from a member of the new WSL — an old WSLer — who is prominent in local government and in that capacity had sided against the council workers in a pay dispute. (This member should have been expelled long before: we waited until we had no alternative because he is basically a decent man with 20 years in what he thought was the Trotskyist movement who has collapsed ideologically into municipal 'socialism').