

that such general labelling was beside the point and irrelevant, they replied: 'There, that's the root of the problem. All these months you have secretly believed that we were not Marxists!'

The fuss they made about our alleged description of them as centrist emerged in the same way — with even less justification. In fact we didn't and don't characterise them as centrist. Though such a description of them would not outrage our theoretical consciences, it is not very useful. They are a group of once very sectarian revolutionaries undergoing a prolonged process of political disintegration. Anyway, as a matter of fact and contrary to those who build an interpretation of the failure of the fusion on it, we never called them centrist!

Thornett's co-thinker John Lister put it more candidly: "given... a change in the majority control of League leading bodies, it would be possible to unite in a democratic centralist relationship and a common party with the expelled 35". The root of the split was the Thornett group's inability to accept any status in the WSL except that of a majority. But they were only about 25 per cent of the organisation.

### THE COLD SPLIT

For months they had been operating an 'internal secession' and cold split in the League. They had retired from all organisational responsibility in the League: Thornett had never performed the work of industrial organiser, and their representative as joint editor of the weekly paper walked out of the job at the beginning of January 1984. They had for many months operated as an extremely hostile — indeed, almost Spartacist-like, if it were not for their lack of political drive and self-confidence — internal faction. Their main business in the League was agitation and denunciation of the majority in the style made notorious on the broader left in the '60s and '70s by their mother organisation, the SLL/WRP. For example, they denounced the majority leadership as "worse than the trade union bureaucracy".

This agitation, and the breakdown of practical collaboration, escalated decisively from December 1983. From January they campaigned for the League to turn inwards to hold its fifth conference in 18 months (the previous one was in August 1983). This campaign culminated, after the miners' strike had started, in the call for a special conference 'on the internal situation'.

When Thornett was asked on the Executive Committee what proposals they wished to put to this special conference, he replied that they had not decided and in any case would not tell us. Some two weeks later they came out with their proposals — vague and unclear, but essentially proposing to turn the organisation into some sort of federation. The major demand was for League conferences — or 'aggregates' which could on demand be turned into conferences — every three months.

The substance of the agitation about the 'internal situation' was grievances that they had been agitating about for months, like the claim that Thornett was being 'suppressed' when he was asked to cut a presentation of his minority view of the TUC and the NGA crisis from four full pages of the weekly paper down to two full pages! All the normal rights of a minority — access to the Internal Bulletin and to internal meetings, representation on leading committees, etc. — were and had been theirs without dispute. And Thornett had never had anything rejected for the weekly paper. Essentially, the charge that they were being 'suppressed' expressed Thornett's resentment that others had the right to reply to and criticise his views in the weekly paper. Here, as on most issues in dispute, the core demand of Thornett and 'Jones' was for privileges and a recognised special status.

They had no chance of winning anything important at a special conference, and they didn't think they would win

anything. They needed a conference to keep the factional pot boiling and to keep their people together. Many of Thornett's supporters who took his wild denunciations seriously, and were therefore extremely alienated from the League, had dropped out of the organisation in 1983.

Clearly the Thornett group placed their internal factional concerns above the League's capacity to function in the class struggle.

But the decision by the majority that things had to be sorted out with them one way or another transformed them overnight into shining champions of 'unity' and 'the fusion'. On that basis they rallied a few people outside the ranks of their faction and launched a 'unity campaign'.

On March 25 they met as a faction in a national conference and decided what the faction would do in the next period. They decided that they could do it best by formally dissolving as a faction, while of course the Thornett group would continue to exist. Then, jointly, with a few of the faction's fellow-travellers and others who were in general politics opponents of the faction, they launched the unity campaign.

At the same time they amalgamated into the unity campaign a series of proposals for the special conference. As noted above, though muddled formulated, these proposals meant transforming the organisation into a loose federation. There would be three or four 'national aggregates' a year. There would be a constitutional right (or something very close to it) of access to the public press for minorities — combined with recognition of a special status for two key issues on which Thornett was in a minority, Afghanistan and the theory of imperialism. On these not even the majority could publish its views in the public press!

In fact, according to the custom and practice brought into the new WSL by the I-CL, minorities normally could put their view in the public press. This practice was resisted and opposed by the Thornett group before they became the minority, but it existed and they used it liberally. However, to give minorities a constitutional, or quasi-constitutional, right to such access would be to destroy the possibility of the League speaking with one clear voice whenever the leading committees thought it necessary.

### AN EXPULSION IN NAME ONLY

The Thornett group did not, to be fair — and the careful way they expressed themselves showed it — seriously deny that a split was unavoidable. They based their agitation against a split on the proposition that only a full conference of the League could decide to expel them. But the constitution they had helped draft said otherwise, and the National Committee chose to exercise its constitutional right to deal with them. The alternative would have been for the NC to abdicate its delegated responsibility and let the League dissolve into factional chaos — just as the miners' strike was opening up the biggest working class battles in Britain for many years. Such a culmination of the fusion — paralysis in the miners' strike — would inevitably have resulted in the unavoidable split by another route.

The last possible basis for a salvaging of the fusion agreed in July 1981 had been the terms laid down to the faction by the NC on March 10. As far as the majority was concerned, they would either agree to those terms or part company with us. By their collective decision to pretend to dissolve and to become an underground (and therefore illegal) faction, they gave a clear collective answer to the NC.

And so we ejected the Thornett group from the WSL. It was an expulsion in name only. In substance the fusion had long ago broken down, leaving two irreconcilable groups within the framework of the WSL. The June 30-July 1 1984 conference of the WSL, after listening to Thornett and 'Jones' speak and answer questions for an