

# THE RECORD OF THE WRP



**Socialist  
Organiser**

## IN COWLEY

THE elections for the Cowley Assembly Plant convenor, held on March 3 1980, saw the decision of Gerry Healy to stand Tom White, a central committee member of the WRP, against the current convenor Bob Fryer.

In the run up to the elections a polemic developed between Socialist Organiser and the WRP daily Newline which opened an attack on Fryer in its editions of February 15 and February 19.

Those articles contained a legitimate criticism of Fryer — that he allowed management to alter the text of a leaflet he intended to circulate to the membership.

Socialist Organiser supporters in the plant also criticised Fryer for that action but continued to give Bob Fryer critical support in the election when faced with the alternatives of the organised right wing on the one hand and the appalling and unprincipled record of Tom White on the other.

We have reproduced the exchange in full in order that readers can judge for themselves — particularly Newline readers who have probably only seen Healy's side of the argument. Readers will note that despite the seriousness of the allegations made and repeated against Tom White by Socialist Organiser, there is no attempt to answer any of them. We hope that Newline readers and WRP members will not be blinded by the venom created inside the WRP against anyone who criticises Healy and draw the obvious conclusions.

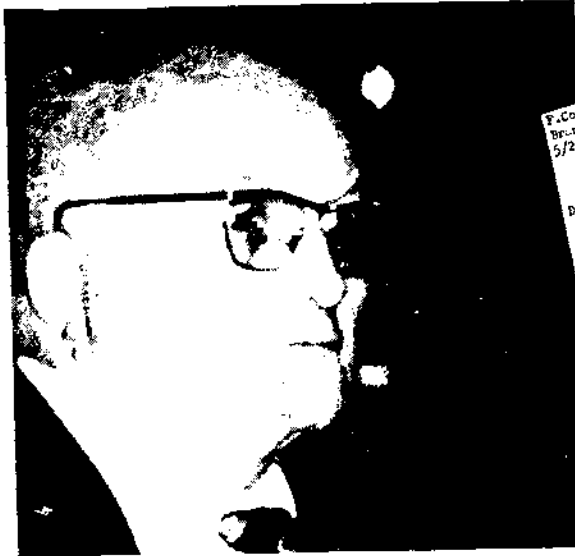
(In the elections for the five deputy convenors held a month later Tom White's vote plunged dramatically, dropping him from first to fifth position. Newline chose not to mention the elections at all).

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## A Socialist Organiser pamphlet

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# Newsline attacks Cowley convenor



Gerry Healy

BY BILL PETERS

THE Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), has a long history in the Cowley car plants. From 1966 until 1974 the WRP and its forerunner, the Socialist Labour League, had a very large group of members in Cowley. They included important sections of the trade union leadership in several plants with a principled record.

Early in 1974 an opposition developed inside the WRP which challenged the increasingly wild sectarianism and paranoid political line of the Gerry Healy leadership. Alan Thorne and Tony Richardson, as leading militants in the Cowley plants, were at the centre of the opposition.

It resulted in their ruthless suppression by the vicious and bureaucratic internal regime of the WRP (see *Battle for Trotskyism*, Folio Books). They were expelled in December 1974 along with 200 others from the WRP's Western Region just before they were to present their views to the WRP annual conference.

## One member

Of the 200 expelled, 70 later formed the nucleus of the Workers Socialist League. Of the rest, a few joined other tendencies while the majority went out of politics after the experience.

At the time of the expulsions the WRP had over 100 members in the Oxford area. Only one stayed in the WRP after the experi-

ence—Tom White, a full-time deputy senior steward in the Assembly Plant.

Since the expulsions Healy has put considerable resources—including frequent visits to Oxford—into keeping his lone Cowley member inside the WRP ranks. He has kept White on the WRP Central Committee to this day despite his obvious inability to rebuild a Cowley Branch. Healy hangs on hoping new conditions will arise where his foothold can be used against the Workers Socialist League.

Now Healy's paper, the *Newsline*, is running a campaign against TGWU Convenor Bob Fryer.

This has centred on a very bad decision of Fryers to allow management to redraft a leaflet he had written: to the membership as a condition of their authorising its distribution.

Socialist Organiser would also criticise Fryer for such an action which undoubtedly creates a very dangerous precedent; but the WRP and Tom White are in no position to take Fryer up on such a matter.

Fryer in his 20 years as convenor has established a far better record than Tom White. Fryer stuck to his guns during the 3½ years following his removal from office in 1974—a major move by Jack Jones and the leadership of the TGWU at that time.

Reg Parsons, an extreme right winger was installed as convenor of the plant in the midst of a huge witch-hunt against the left which received national prominence.

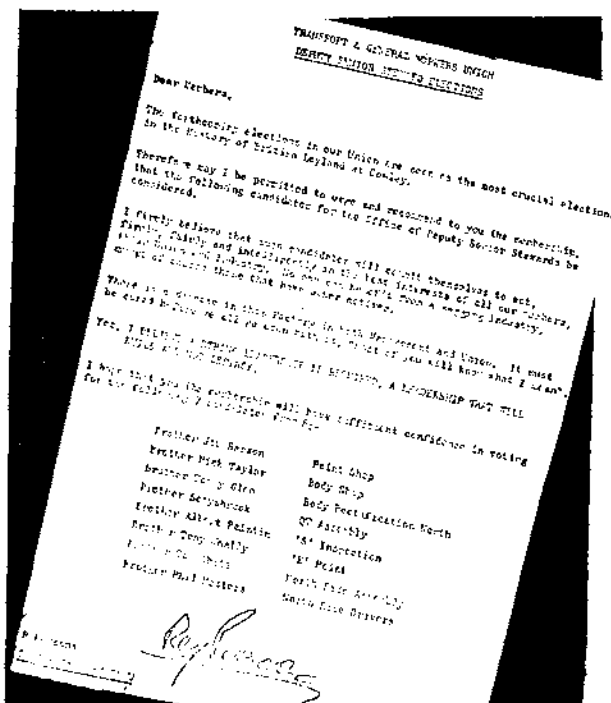
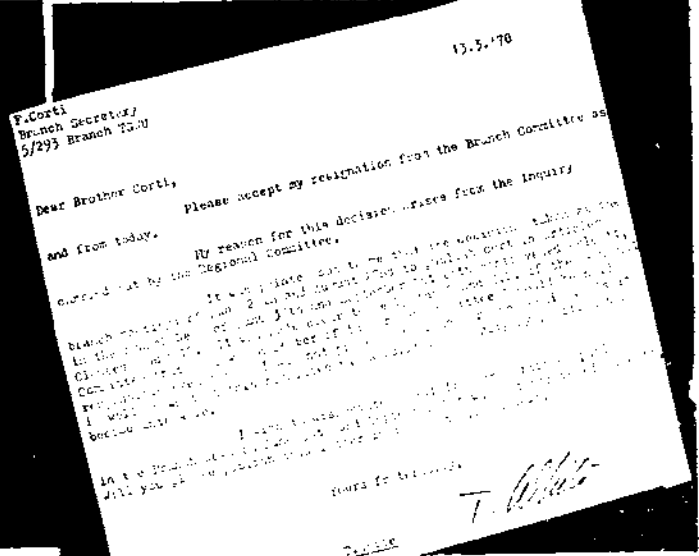
White's record in that period was deplorable. When 'Worker Participation' committees were brought into BL in the Autumn of 1975 the WRP verbally opposed them. But when Healy found that this disrupted his relationship with a leading right wing supporter of Parsons whom he was hoping to recruit, White stood for election for the participation committees and was elected a stand-in delegate—despite the hostility of the labour force to the scheme. Healy's paper at the time, *Workers Press*, carried a whole page article theorising the correctness of White's move.

A few weeks later the WRP supported a Joint Management 'Participa-

tion' Committee set up to investigate 'quality and performance' on the Princess track. Although workers on the track struck and marched to Parsons' office protesting about the joint investigation, the *Workers Press* (November 26) praised its findings.

Such positions didn't go unnoticed by Reg Parsons and the right wing. A few weeks later were the biennial elections for convenor and deputy convenor in the plant.

Parsons won the election for convenor and published a recommended list for the election of the deputy senior stewards. Tom White was on it, with a glowing write-up from rabid anti-Trotskyist Parsons.



White gave out a few copies of a token statement dissociating himself from the list: when it was too late to make any difference and after Socialist Press had challenged the issue.

The same month, the elections for the officers of the TGWU 5/293 branch were held.

This was the branch which had been set up at the time of the 1974 witch-hunt and been used as a right wing base against the left. A left victory therefore would be a major blow against the right.

Alan Thornett was standing as the left candidate with a very good chance of winning.

There were 140 members at the highly charged meeting with the press and TV outside. There were three candidates for President—Thornett, Albert Paintin—a Parsons supporter, and Tom White of the WRP.

### Support White

After hasty discussions on the odds, Parsons & the right wing decided to withdraw Paintin and throw their full support behind White!

They figured that White would stand a better chance since his past left-wing record might split a few votes from the left, whilst Paintin would only get the right wing vote.

In the event the whole left vote quite clearly went to Thornett and the whole right wing, including Parsons personally solidly voted for White, giving Thornett victory by 77 votes to 64.

Because the elections were given national coverage by the media, millions of readers of the national press saw reports that "Trotskyist" Alan Thornett had defeated "moderate challenger" Tom White.

Thornett's victory at the branch was followed two years later in December 1977 with a complete victory for the left in the convenor and deputy convenor elections. Fryer was re-elected convenor. Promptly Jack Jones and the TGWU bureaucracy, who had originally installed Parsons, laid trumped up charges in a move to expel the new leadership from

the union and put the defeated Parsons back in control.

Nine stewards—including Tom White—were charged. One of the reasons White was included was because he had been elected as a member of the 5/293 committee and most of the charges were based on articles written in the 5/293 Branch Report which was published in the plant at the time by the branch committee.

By March 1980 it looked as if the victimisation would succeed. Jack Jones and the bureaucrats in Region 5 were absolutely determined, two kangaroo courts had been carried out, the defendants found predictably 'guilty' and the sentences announced.

The only problem was the support the nine had amongst the membership in the plant and the broad campaign which had developed throughout the TGWU including a successful conference in defence of the nine—which the WRP refused to support.

Then, at the most crucial point of the struggle, Tom White wrote a letter to the TGWU officials resigning

from the branch committee and denouncing the other eight as guilty as charged!

He fully accepted that the Branch News articles were contrary to rule 11, under which the nine were charged and absolved himself by saying he had been faced with a built-in majority on the committee!

Such a treacherous and cowardly letter could only be intended to get Thornett and the others expelled from the union and therefore sacked from the plant.

Before the Newsline talks about "dangerous precedents" they should comment on the precedent involved in White's letter. And before they criticise Fryer for allowing management to censor his letter they should say why they approved of TGWU bureaucrats censoring publications like Branch News by the use of rule 11?

White's letter was the result of a decision taken at the highest level in the WRP. It was designed to use the right wing TGWU leadership and BL management to eliminate those with whom they disagree.

Fortunately they failed.

## A welter of evasion

THIS WEEK'S 'Socialist Organiser' carries a long, a very long, 'account' of events which are alleged to have taken place in the BL factory at Cowley, Oxford.

It purports to demonstrate that the Workers Revolutionary Party supports the right-wing in the factory! ('WRP record of support for right wing', 'Socialist Organiser', February 18, 1982).

The author of this slanderous nonsense is one 'Bill Peters'.

After all the convoluted story-telling, there is just one thing that the author forgets to mention: that 'Bill Peters', better known as Mr Alan Thornett, is supporting Mr Bob Fryer in the election for convenor.

This is carefully omitted because to make a public admission of this would politically expose them in front of Cowley workers and the trade union movement at large.

Mr Fryer, who is being opposed by deputy senior shop steward Tom White, recently sent out a circular letter to the membership after it had been brutally censored by management.

Without a whimper of protest from Mr Fryer, the letter was distributed. It was a major concession to the management and undermined the independence of trade union shop stewards to communicate direct with the membership without company interference.

If Mr Fryer is willing to submit to the company censor with such ease now, what will it be like if he manages to hold onto the convenor's job after the election?

Thornett's 'Socialist Challenge' has given him total confidence. But when the leadership contest goes to ballot, the Cowley workers may well decide otherwise.

# Labourite back-scratching

THE 'Socialist Organiser' is a weekly paper specially catering for such people as the left and right-wing members of the Oxford Labour Party.

Recently, almost an entire page was given to one 'Bill Peters' who concocted a set of distortions about the history of British Leyland's Cowley plant at Oxford.

'Bill Peters' is none other than Mr Alan Thornett who has applied to join the Oxford Labour Party so that he can be near his 'old ma'e' Bob Fryer, who has been accepted as an esteemed and respected member by that party.

The article calls the Workers Revolutionary Party a right-wing party, when everybody knows that it would be hard to find a more discredited right-wing body than the Oxford Labour Party.

The importance of the article is not in what it says but in what it doesn't say.

## COMMENT

It omits, for example, to mention that its publication is timed for the election to decide the Cowley convenorship.

This is a matter of excruciating importance to the aforementioned 'Bill (Thornett) Peters' whose man in the election is Labourite Bob Fryer, the current convenor, though he does not admit it in the article.

This is because of Mr Fryer's recent unfortunate behaviour in the factory.

He allowed the management to censor an important letter from the stewards to their members in the factory. Whole paragraphs were dropped and others were rephrased in a form more acceptable to BL top brass.

It grossly violated the stewards'

right to communicate freely on trade union matters with union members.

This capitulation, reported in News Line on Tuesday, February 9, is completely ignored by 'Socialist Organiser'. Instead, Mr Fryer is fraudulently presented as the champion of workers' rights at Cowley!

And 'Bill (Thornett) Peters' hopes he can get Bob Fryer elected to carry on the kind of work so much appreciated by the Cowley BL management.

In return, Thornett hopes that Fryer will persuade the right-wing Oxford Labour Party to accept Thornett as a loyal member, which he certainly will be.

Cowley workers will soon have their own opportunity to give a verdict on Mr Fryer so the matter can be left in their hands.

As for Thornett, he is just lying about the WRP as usual.

*Socialist Organiser, Thursday February 25, 1982 Page 15*

## Newsline attempt to refute SO

TWO replies in Gerry Healy's and Tom White's Newsline (Saturday 20th and Monday 22nd) have conspicuously failed to answer or even to refer to any of the questions that I raised in last week's Socialist Organiser.

Since then Tom White has been nominated as a candidate in the election for the TGWU convenor of the Cowley Assembly Plant.

In response to a campaign in Newsline against the current convenor, Bob Fryer, I posed four questions from Tom White's record in the plant, showing that he is in no position to criticise Fryer.

1. That Tom White stood for election for the participation committees in 1975, an action which was defended by Workers Press (forerunner of Newsline).

2. That Tom White and Newsline supported a joint management/ participation inquiry into productivity on the Princess track (which

was opposed by the workforce, and led to the victimisation of a young Asian worker).

3. That Tom White was on Reg Parsons' (extreme right wing) recommended list of deputy convenors for the December 1975 plant elections.

4. That Tom White resigned from the 5/293 branch committee during the campaign to defend the Cowley 9, and wrote to the

TGWU officials denouncing the other 8 as being guilty of breach of rule.

The Newsline has nothing to say about these four serious allegations against the WRP's candidate for convenor of the plant.

In fact, the embarrassing weak reply (reprinted inset) is the best proof that Healy and White have no answer at all.

Saturday's article says no more except to confirm (in advance of the nominations)

that Tom White will be standing.

Healy is reduced to a few fatuous and factually wrong points about the Oxford Labour Party, like the assertion that Alan Thornett has applied to join it. The Oxford Labour Party would be the first to confirm that no such application has ever been made. Not that Alan Thornett has much choice in the matter, given the atmosphere in the Oxford party in the recent period.

The left has been fighting for the reinstatement of those expelled or blocked by the right wing. The WRP has never been part of that fight. The sectarian stance of the WRP means that neither Healy nor White have the slightest idea what is going on inside the Oxford Labour Party or any other Labour Party.

If Healy wants to criticise Fryer's involvement in the

Labour Party, it should be from the point of view of what Fryer does, what policies he supports, not that he is a member!

Healy should drop the smokescreen and answer the questions I have raised.

In fact, much more could be said about Tom White's record, since his record becomes an issue now he is aspiring to the leadership of the plant.

For example: last year

the WRP distributed a leaflet in the Assembly Plant which implied that Alan Thornett was working in the plant as an agent of Scotland Yard. Tom White at first expressed reservations about the leaflet, but was then pulled into line and began defending it.

If Healy is prepared to sink to lies of that sort about other people, he should not object when some of the truth begins to be told about Tom White.

BILL PETERS

## COMMENT

# Leyland workers at decisive turning point

MASS UNEMPLOYMENT and relentless Tory attacks on living standards has created a mood of deep anxiety and apprehension in the working class. This uncertainty has been fuelled by the cowardly retreats of the trade union leaders in the face of this Tory class war offensive.

At the same time the Labour Party has been irreparably split by the right wing while the fake 'lefts' have no policy to fight either the Tories or the right wing at the top of the party.

This has led to a vacuum in working-class leadership which is almost without precedent in working-class history. Reformism cannot answer the fundamental problems facing the working class in terms of saving jobs, protecting wages and conditions or defending basic democratic rights.

The whole character of the wages and jobs struggle has been altered by the onset of the world slump and Tory-inspired mass unemployment. Purely trade union struggle has proved that it is unable to save a single job or to meet the political attack of the Thatcher government.

This was painfully demonstrated in the struggle at Leyland Vehicles Limited's bus and truck division where Sir Michael Edwardes demanded the sacking of 4,000 workers. After prolonged resistance at factory level, the union leaders imposed a return to work at Leyland in Lancashire which led to a collapse at Bathgate in Scotland.

Further evidence of the mood in the working class can be found in the Department of Employment's statistics of days lost through strikes since the Tories came to power in 1979.

The number of days lost through industrial action in 1979 was 29,474,000; in 1980 it was 11,964,000 and last year the total was 4,196,000. The 1981 figure was the lowest in 15 years and was less than a third of the annual average of 13,000,000 for the past 10 years.

The revisionists conclude from this downturn in industrial struggles that the working class has been defeated. They throw up their hands in despair and declare that the Tories are invincible.

**The Workers Revolutionary Party totally rejects the pessimistic and impressionistic conclusions of the middle-class revisionist groups. We remain profoundly confident in the power and strength of the working class as the only progressive force in society and in the revolutionary role it will play in the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist Britain.**

This perspective arises from our Marxist analysis of the death agony of the capitalist system and the complete bankruptcy, parasitism and historical outmodedness of British capitalism.

What we are in fact witnessing today is the working class in transition. While the Tories are gloating about their apparent 'victories', the decisive struggles are still in front. The working class is being pushed and shoved into a corner by arrogant Tory ministers, High Court judges, police chiefs, newspaper barons, bank managers and tyrannical employers.

**The situation is building up for a shock followed by a class explosion.**

It is against this background that a crucial ballot was held this week for the convenorship of the BL plant at Cowley, Oxford. Mr Bob Fryer was re-elected by a clear majority over the right-wing candidate Frank Corti and Tom White of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

White's decision to oppose Fryer was completely principled and correct. He stood in order to expose the collaborationist policy being pursued by Fryer with the BL management.

The vote for Fryer does not express any confidence in his leadership, but reflect the hesitations that are present in the working class as they face the most momentous struggles in their history.

What is absolutely certain is that BL management will now press their attack against Cowley workers and that Fryer will be tested in the fight against Edwardes' plans to smash trade unionism in the combine.

We are not very hopeful. Recently he allowed management to censor a letter which he sent out to the factory membership. A convenor who allows the company to edit letters to the unions is not going to lead a fight against victimisations, job cuts or attacks on working conditions and wages.

**BL workers should be given an immediate warning of the opportunism of the Thornett group in the plant. It defended Fryer over the management-censored document and backed him to the hilt against White in the election.**

This is a group which knows only too well Fryer's record of retreats in the plant over the past two years. Its argument for backing him is based upon a recent meeting in which Fryer said that he would 'reform' himself. In the coming weeks the Thornett group could well rue the day that it sowed the seeds of its own unprincipled destruction.

But this group is capable of any opportunist amalgam because its sole motive since its formation in 1974 has been hatred of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

In the coming weeks BL workers will have every opportunity to test out the leadership of Fryer and his hangers-on from the Thornett group. They can be assured in advance that the Workers Revolutionary Party will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them through every struggle in which they engage.

**We invite BL workers in Cowley to attend the national conference of the All Trades Unions Alliance, the WRP's industrial department, in Birmingham on Sunday, April 4, and to join the WRP as the central step in the fight for revolutionary leadership in BL.**

# Left-wing victory in Cowley election

by Bill  
Peters

BOB FRYER was re-elected TGWU convenor of the BL Cowley Assembly Plant last Wednesday. Fryer received 710 votes in the secret ballot held in the plant.

The right wing candidate Frank Corti received 216 votes and Tom White of the Workers Revolutionary Party received 129 votes in a 45% poll of TGWU members. (The poll was slightly below average - its size reduced by the strict administration of the ballot which required attendance at a polling station at an appointed time and the production of a current contribution card).

Despite White's position as a leading member of Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party, the result was an important victory for the left. It represents the biggest majority for the left candidate in the convenors elections in the plant since the secret ballot was introduced in 1974 in order to remove the left leadership and install the right wing.

The WRP's daily newspaper 'Newsline' has struggled to cover Tom White's humiliating defeat, since in previous elections he has topped the poll for the deputy convenor positions and WRP members have been led to believe that he was about to win this election for convenor.

Thursday's 'Newsline' ducked the issue, simply printing a few obscure words reporting Fryer's victory and noting that Tom White got "over 120 votes".

On Friday, Healy recovered himself and produced a lengthy "theoretical" rationalisation of White's defeat for the consumption of bewildered WRP members (who may have got hold of the voting figures).

Fryer's victory, he said, "represents the hesitations that are apparent in the working class as they face the most momentous struggles in their history."

(Still no voting figures are given - this time Fryer is said to have won by a "clear majority").

To blame the workforce and point to hesitation is wrong from every standpoint. The reality is that following repeated sell-outs,

BL workers are looking for firm leadership. But this aspiration does not lead them to vote for Tom White.

Far from it. The fact is that White has worked long and hard to develop a base amongst right wing activists in the plant. He has become inseparable from a number of leading right wing stewards and ex-stewards who were ardent and loyal supporters of Reg Parsons and active supporters of the witch-hunting of the Cowley 9 in 1977-8.

## Both camps

These people openly campaigned for him throughout the election. White, therefore, was trying to do what he had successfully achieved in the past in the deputy elections - draw votes from both camps.

He wanted to pull a substantial part of the right wing vote and at the same time pick up votes from militant who have been alienated from Fryer by the bad positions he has taken on a number of issues in the past year.

In the event, things went very differently. The right wing ORMO campaign (Organisation Representing Moderate Opinion) backed Corti. And the importance of the convenor position brought the spotlight on White which had not happened before.

The right wing ensured that his membership of the WRP, normally kept out of sight, received publicity. At the same time attention was drawn to White's appalling record in the plant which prevented him from receiving any support at all from left activists amongst the stewards.

(The only left support he received was from the SWP who mass leafleted the plant on the day before the ballot with a leaflet which could

only be interpreted as heavy support for White.)

As a result, he lost the left vote and the hard right wing swung to Corti.

Socialist Organiser published four serious allegations against Tom White which are documented and irrefutable (and which the SWP should think about).

1) That Tom White stood for election for the participation committees in 1975 - an action which was defended by Workers Press, forerunner of the Newsline.

2) That Tom White and Newsline supported a joint management/participation inquiry into productivity on the Princess track which was opposed by the workforce and led to the victimisation of a young Asian worker.

3) That Tom White was on Reg Parsons' recommended list of deputy convenors for elections in December 1975.

4) That Tom White resigned from the 5/293 Branch Committee during the campaign to defend the Cowley 9 and wrote to TGWU officials denouncing the other 8 as being guilty of breach of the rules.

Newsline has failed to mention, let alone answer a single one of these allegations against somebody they have acknowledged since the elections is a WRP candidate.

Newsline simply said that the Socialist Organiser allegations were lies. But they didn't reveal to their readers who are strongly discouraged from reading the press of other movements, the content of these "lies".

The only aspect of the SO article referred to by Newsline was a claim that SO supported Fryer's decision to allow management to censor his letter to the members, some weeks earlier.

SO readers will know that in fact the main SO article on February 18 roundly condemned Fryer for that incident.

SO supporters will continue to give critical support to Bob Fryer, as long as he is prepared to offer a principled resistance to the offensive of BL management.

They certainly will not support anyone as unprincipled as Tom White.

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