

CONSTITUTION OF THE WORKERS' SOCIALIST LEAGUE

The Workers' Socialist League is a revolutionary socialist organisation, whose aim is to organise the working class for the seizure of power and the communist transformation of society. All its activities, its method and internal regime are subordinated to this aim and are designed to serve it.

Only a self-acting and critical-minded membership is capable of forging and consolidating such an organisation and of solving its problems by collective thought, discussion and experience. From this follows the need of assuring the widest party democracy in the ranks of the organisation.

The struggle for power organised and led by a revolutionary party is the most ruthless and irreconcilable struggle in all history. A loosely-knit, heterogeneous, undisciplined, untrained organisation is utterly incapable of succeeding in this task. A revolutionary organisation has to unconditionally demand from all its members complete discipline in all the public activities and actions of the organisation.

Leadership and centralised direction are indispensable prerequisites for any sustained and disciplined action, especially in an organisation that sees its aim as leading the collective efforts of the proletariat in the struggle against capitalism. Without a strong and firm leadership, having the power to act promptly and effectively in the name of the organisation and to supervise, consolidate and direct all its activities without exception, the very idea of a revolutionary organisation is a meaningless jest.

It is from these considerations, based upon the experience of international class struggle, that we derive the Leninist principle of organisation, namely democratic centralism. This principle is embodied in our Constitution and guides us in all our organisational activities.

In any case where the Constitution does not give precise indications, the organisation shall be guided by the established traditions of democratic centralism, and particularly by the resolutions of the April 1940 Convention and the May 1953 Plenum of the Socialist Workers Party of the USA.

1. AIMS.

a) The WSL bases its policy on the theory of Marxism as developed by Lenin and Trotsky, the decisions of the first four congresses of the 3rd International and the Transitional Programme, the founding document of the 4th International.

b) The WSL fights for the political regeneration and organisational reconstruction of the 4th International.

2. MEMBERSHIP.

Members must:

i) Agree with and be committed to defend the basic aims and programme of the organisation in words and deeds.

ii) Engage in regular political activity under the discipline of the organisation.

iii) Be a member of their appropriate trade union. If there is no trade union at a member's place of work, then he or she must, if possible (from the point of view of victimisation, etc) attempt to form a union branch.

iv) Sell the paper regularly, especially at their place of work, if this is possible.

v) Commit themselves to developing an understanding of the theory and traditions of revolutionary communism.

vi) Pay regular dues to the organisation as laid down by the NC.

3. CANDIDATE MEMBERSHIP.

The conditions of membership must not only be adhered to by means of verbal agreement but also in reality. For this reason, new members will, as a general rule, be required to join the WSL as candidate members. Any exception must first of all be agreed to either by the Executive Committee or the National Committee.

i) Candidate members have all the rights and duties of full members except as restricted by other sections of this Constitution.

ii) New members are admitted as candidate members either by the collective decision of the branch they join or by the NC.

iii) Normally a candidate member is expected to go through a basic education programme with a full member of the WSL before being admitted to full membership.

iv) Candidate members do not have the right to vote, either at branch or national level.

v) There shall be no formal time limit on the period of candidate membership, but such membership will be reviewed initially after 3 months.

4. FULL MEMBERSHIP.

A candidate member who has satisfied his or her fellow comrades that he or she has fulfilled the conditions of membership shall become a full member.

i) Full members shall be elected either by the branch or the NC.

ii) Full members have a responsibility to play an active part in the decision making processes of the organisation through the various bodies which the organisation has established for this purpose.

5. NATIONAL CONFERENCE.

The National Conference is the supreme policy-making body of the WSL, and can override any other body in the WSL. Its decisions are binding on all members.

- i) The National Conference shall be convened annually.
- ii) Every full and candidate member has a right and a duty to attend and speak.
- iii) Every member or group of members (e.g. branches, NC, fractions, factions) can submit resolutions and amendments to the Conference.
- iv) The Executive Committee is responsible for convening and arranging the Conference.
- v) A Special Conference may be called by the NC when it wishes. A Special Conference must take place within two months of the receipt of a demand for one supported by at least 25% of the full members of the WSL.
- vi) A Standing Orders Committee, elected by the previous Conference, shall be responsible for the running of the Conference. The term of office of all other elected committees of the WSL ends at the beginning of the Conference.

6. THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE.

The National Committee is the sovereign body in the WSL between Conferences. It is responsible for political decision making and group organisation. Its decisions are binding on all members.

- i) The NC is elected by Conference. The NC may co-opt additional non-voting members.
- ii) The NC will, as a general rule, be bound by the decisions of the Conference. Changes in the objective situation are the only criteria for reversing Conference decisions. If between Conferences events occur that are thought by the NC to necessitate a change of line then the NC will have to account for this to the rest of the organisation.
- iii) The NC must meet at least every two months or within one week of receipt of a written request for a special meeting signed by at least 25% of the full members of the NC.
- iv) NC members must fight for the implementation of NC decisions within the WSL, except where they have deep and declared political differences; and in this case they must at least maintain discipline.
- v) NC meetings will be prepared for and convened by the EC.
- vi) Any member, branch, sub-committee, fraction or faction can submit a resolution to the NC. These must be sent to the Organising Committee before the deadline for resolutions.
- vii) The NC will normally meet in closed session. The NC has the right to discuss individual comrades in their absence. In open sessions of the NC, non-NC members may not speak without the permission of the NC unless they are defending themselves from a disciplinary charge or proposing a resolution.
- viii) Minutes of NC meetings shall be available to all members of the WSL. Minutes must normally include the full text of all resolutions and amendments put, together with details of the discussion and the vote. Skeleton minutes may, however, be circulated where security requires it.

ix) Relations with other tendencies as such or with members of other tendencies shall be entirely under the control of the NC and those bodies and individuals appointed by the NC to conduct these relations.

x) The NC has the right to structure discussion within the WSL so that maximum political clarity may be attained. The NC may stop debate on an issue, but only after full discussion has led to a decision. Under no circumstance does this override the right of the membership to hold the NC to account at Conferences.

7. NATIONAL OFFICERS.

i) The NC shall elect National Officers and delegate to them the authority necessary to carry out their functions (under OC, EC and NC control).

ii) The appointment, pay, terms of reference, and dismissal of full-timers shall be decided by the OC, subject to ratification by or (if factional victimisation is alleged) appeal to the NC. In the event that an appeal is to be made to the NC, the OC's decision will not come into operation unless endorsed by the NC.

8. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

The EC is responsible for the day to day implementation of NC decisions; for reacting to events that require immediate action; and for political leadership.

i) The EC shall be elected by and responsible to the NC.

ii) Minutes of the EC shall be circulated to all NC members and to other members at the discretion of the EC. They must include the full text of all resolutions and amendments put, together with the vote.

9. ORGANISING COMMITTEE.

The Organising Committee is responsible for the day to day running of the WSL between EC and NC meetings.

i) It shall be elected by the EC and responsible to the EC and NC.

ii) The OC and EC, operating under NC control, have the right to issue binding instructions to all members, branches, fractions, etc. of the WSL.

10. BRANCHES AND FRACTIONS.

i) Branches in geographical areas or workplaces and fractions in areas of work shall be recognised by the EC. They are responsible for organising the activity and carrying out the policy of the WSL in their area.

ii) Each branch shall elect an organiser, chairperson and treasurer. The organiser is responsible to the WSL and subject to the political and administrative supervision of its leading committees for the overall functioning of the branch and for ensuring that WSL policy is carried out.

iii) Branch or fraction organisers can give binding instructions to members in their areas on all day to day matters.

iv) In any WSL activity the right to take decisions and give instructions belongs normally to the branch or fraction organiser responsible, or other comrade delegated to be responsible. In the event of a serious political issue needing an immediate decision, the organiser can be overruled by the senior NC or EC member(s) present.

11. AREA COMMITTEES.

i) The definition of areas will be decided by the National Committee.

ii) Area Committees shall consist of one or more representatives for each branch in the area. The committee is responsible for the overall work of the area and for the coordination of the work of the branches. Each committee will elect an organiser who is responsible for the work of the area between meetings. Area Committees shall meet at least once a fortnight and more frequently if necessary.

iii) Area Committees shall be elected at area aggregates at least once a year.

iv) Area Committees may co-opt representatives necessary for their work.

v) Aggregates in each area shall be held at least every 3 months.

12. DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS.

i) All members are obliged to support the majority decisions of relevant League bodies in action. They also have the right to express dissenting opinions, to gain a fair hearing for those opinions, and to organise within the WSL to change WSL policy.

ii) Members do not have the right to organise outside the WSL for minority views. This does not mean that they should pretend to hold beliefs contrary to their real ones. Minority comrades have a right to state that they hold a minority position, and to give a brief explanation, but without making propaganda against the majority line. They have a duty to state to the best of their ability what the majority line is. And in any vote or practical action they must support the majority line. Members do not have a right to take internal organisational disputes outside the WSL in any way.

iii) Any member must first raise a political difference on the highest body on which he or she sits - branch, Area Committee, National Committee, Executive Committee. The matter must go to the National Committee for discussion if it is not resolved at the level raised. If after full discussion with the National Committee no agreement is reached the member has the right to inform the National Committee that he or she is taking the issue to the whole membership or is constituting a minority faction. Both the majority and the minority have a political responsibility to fully discuss any disagreement before such a step is taken.

iv) In WSL internal debates, equal speaking time at area meetings, NCs, conferences etc. shall be allotted to all the different points of view represented. Representatives of minority points of view have the right to demand relief from part of their normal WSL work-load and financial assistance if these are necessary to enable them to travel to meetings, prepare documents, etc. In any dispute between a minority point of view and the NC, EC or OC, both the minority and the leadership have equal rights to use the organisation's apparatus.

13. INTERNAL BULLETIN.

The Internal Bulletin shall serve as an instrument for:

- i) Promoting theoretical and political discussion in the WSL.
- ii) Providing a means of generalising on the lessons that have been learnt from activity in a particular area, industry, union etc.

To this end:

- i) The IB shall be produced at least once every 2 months.
- ii) The OC, or an IB editor appointed by the OC, is responsible for the production and distribution of the IB.
- iii) The editor has no right to refuse for publication any article submitted before the deadline unless he or she has received permission from the NC in accordance with section 6 (x) of the Constitution. He or she can, however, ask for a contribution and/or labour towards the production of articles over 3,000 words, and insist that any document over 4,000 words appear as a supplement at the expense of the author(s). In the event that the author(s) of such a document lack money, they can appeal for financial assistance through the Control Commission or OC.

iv) Every member shall receive a copy of the IB.

v) The IB and its contents shall not in any way be communicated to non-members without the express permission of the OC or another leading body.

vi) Any comrade submitting a polemical document of less than 3,000 words shall have the right to insist it be circulated within two weeks.

14. DISCIPLINE.

i) In the event of a breach of discipline or action contrary to working class principles, measures including fines, reprimand, censure and suspension of membership may be taken by a branch, Area Committee, National Committee, EC or OC against a member or members covered by that body. In all cases the Organising Committee must be informed immediately of the circumstances.

ii) Suspension will be for a period not exceeding 6 weeks.

iii) Any member has the right to defend himself or herself before a decision on disciplinary action is taken against him or her, except in the case of fines for absence or suspensions where the WSL's security and integrity is at risk. Any member subject to discipline must have written notice of the charges against him or her and the time and venue of the hearing.

iv) Candidate members may be expelled by their branch, the EC or NC. One week's written notice of the charges and an opportunity for the member to defend him or herself shall be given. He or she can appeal to the NC, but not to the Conference, unless the Control Commission so decides.

v) Full members can only be expelled by the NC or Conference. Two weeks' written notice of the charges and an opportunity for the member to defend him or herself shall be given. Any full member who is expelled may appeal to the Conference and may have the material relating to his or her appeal circulated by the National Committee throughout the whole party within 14 days of receipt. The disciplinary action is meanwhile upheld.

As an interim measure the following rule will apply until the first Conference: NC members can only be expelled by a Conference.

vi) Where members have become inactive without adequate cause, and there is no dispute on this fact, they may be lapsed from membership with no more formality than a week's written notice. Members who allege invalid lapsing may appeal to the NC.

vii) Previously expelled members may not be re-admitted without the approval of the NC or Conference.

viii) When members resign from the WSL the OC must be informed immediately.

ix) Branches may grant total or partial leaves of absence for periods of up to two months, always subject to ratification by the OC.

15. CONTROL COMMISSION

i) The Conference shall elect a Control Commission annually. It shall independently investigate disputes of fact relating to disciplinary cases, disputes between comrades or complaints against leading committees or functionaries which are referred to it by any of the parties of the dispute, the EC or NC. It has the power to subpoena witnesses and have access to all information and documents relevant to the matter. It shall consist of three full members who are not on the NC. Any member of the Control Commission who is involved in a dispute which is referred to it

shall be excluded from the Control Commission for the investigation of that dispute. The Control Commission shall report to the NC.

16. FACTIONS AND TENDENCIES

Any group of members has the right to form a faction or tendency to fight for a particular point of view within the organisation.

The WSL recognises a tendency as an ideological grouping organised for an ideological discussion within the organisation. The WSL recognises a faction as a grouping which sets out to fight either to change the policy of the organisation on a particular issue or to replace the existing leadership by members of the faction.

i) Members wishing to form a faction must circulate a platform explaining their differences with the group's positions, signed by all members of the faction.

ii) The conditions of membership for factions differ in no way from the conditions laid out in section 2 of the Constitution except that candidate members cannot be recruited to a faction.

iii) Factions can produce their own publications for circulation within the organisation, can hold internal meetings to put over their position, and can put members up for election on a factional platform. All faction meetings and documents must either be strictly internal to the faction, or open to all members of the group. This clause cannot be used to restrict private conversation or correspondence between individual members.

v) A faction must not carry its platform outside the organisation without the permission of the Conference or NC. If it does so then its members are subject to disciplinary procedures.

vi) Factions have a right to proportional representation on the NC.

vii) The same rules apply for tendencies as for factions.

viii) Members must not use political differences as an excuse for inactivity or organisational disloyalty. Any member who does so is liable to be expelled, under the procedures laid down in section 14.

17. CONSTITUTION.

The Constitution can only be changed by a Conference.