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Statement of resignation from the League and the broad groups, from Roger, Chelmsford

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Statement from Roger

It has been clear since the debate over the Malvinas that the fusion between the I\*\* and the W\*\* has been in danger of disintegration. It is now clear to me, and I suspect clear to a number of other comrades, that the fusion exists now in name only. I have therefore decided to resign from the League and the broad groups, as I have no wish to join either the majority or minority faction in presiding over the death agony of the League. The immediate reason for my decision to resign is the contents of IBs 78 and 79. If the majority and minority cannot even cooperate in the production of the organisation's press, it is clear that we do not have the nucleus of the revolutionary party in the form of the League, but two competing organisations, with a formal split being inevitable sooner or later.

It is also my deeply-held view that the ex-leadership of the I\*\* must take the lion's share of the blame for this state of affairs. I, like a small number of comrades in the I\*\*, was dubious about the broad groups tactic. I saw it as the beginnings of a Militant-type entryism into the Labour Party, and an abandonment of the shallow entry tactic initially carried out by Workers' A\*\*\*\*. I was concerned as to how the I\*\* would maintain a presence outside of the LP, and therefore as to how the organisation would argue the case for an independent revolutionary party.

However my disagreements with the tactic (which I expressed at the conference where the I\*\* decided to establish the broad groups) came to an end when the I\*\* and the W\*\* fused. This was because the essential basis of that fusion was the building of the new League into a revolutionary party, along with the essential task of contributing to the building of a new revolutionary international. The immediate practical consequence of this was that the new League would have the same type of public profile as the old W\*\* had, and indeed the original I\*\* had, for the first few years after its creation in 1975.

As comrade Cunliffe makes clear in IB 78, this political basis of the fusion was reneged on by the leadership of the ex-I\*\*, and in retrospect the liquidation of the new W\*\* started after the October 1981 rally. Alongside liquidationism in relation to the party, we have liquidationism in relation to the method of the Transitional Programme. This again is a process which began in the latter years of the I\*\*'s existence, and was most clear in the context of our work in WF.

I was for several years in the late 1970s in the SWP and for most of that time trying, unsuccessfully, to build a faction for the I\*\*. During that time I had a number of meetings with comrades Hill and Carolan where it was made clear to me that the raising of transitional demands in the context of the day-to-day class struggle is an indispensable part of the activity of a revolutionary organisation. With the collaboration of comrade Hill I wrote an article for the IB (SWP's) about the need for Women's Voice to adopt a programme of transitional demands. The contents of this article were quite similar to the arguments of Workers' Power and the old W\*\* at the second WF conference in Birmingham. I was therefore staggered and concerned when I realised that as a member of the I\*\* I had to vote against arguments/positions

which I believed to be those of the I\*\*. Again with the fusion of the I\*\* and the new League, I anticipated a hardening up of the organisation around the question of the Transitional Programme, both in WF and the broad groups. The reality, of course, has been the reverse. Not only are transitional demands never raised in WF, but also they are no longer raised in the paper (except in small print in the Where We Stand column). Much of the pre-fusion discussion centred around the Transitional Programme, and amendments were made to the original broad groups 'programme' to meet the arguments of the old W\*\*. Again, in hindsight, it is clear the ex-I\*\* leadership agreed to this to facilitate fusion, not because they agreed with the politics upon which the amendments were based.

I therefore believe that liquidation of party and programme are the present politics of the majority of the W\*\*. I do not believe that comrades Carolan, Kinnell and Hill, etc have consciously abandoned revolutionary Marxism - that would be a nonsense (of a sort, I am afraid, that the faction around comrade Smith often resort to). What I do believe is that comrade Carolan sees O. work as the basis of building a large organisation, and is prepared a la Tony Cliff to abandon programmatic principle for organisational gain. This I believe is why we have a change of line on Ireland. Surely comrade Carolan you must know in your heart of hearts that your more recent statements on Ireland have more in common with Cliff and Grant than with your own excellent articles in Workers F\*\*\*\* and Workers A\*\*\*\*\* (and from which many of us learnt). It is also the reason why the ex-I\*\* leadership ps now prepared to force the remnants of the old W\*\* out of the organisation - because they are now seen as an obstacle to O. work.

I have thought about joining the Smith/Jones faction, but I have decided not to as I believe the faction fight is no longer being waged at the level of politics, but at the level of personal insult and slurs and I have no wish to be part of such a faction fight, which in any case, I venture to predict, will be terminated later this year. However I am not leaving politics or deserting the class struggle. I refuse to accept any longer the discipline of the W\*\*, but may be prepared to join whatever organisation comrade Smith and his faction join/form after they are kicked out of the W\*\*.

Why has the Majority wound up our international work? - Cunliffe.

You may well have missed it. But as a result of a misleading resolution pushed through the November 19 National Committee meeting by the Carolan/Kinnell leadership, the Workers Socialist League is currently involved in no serious international work at all.

Few of our members find any opportunity or encouragement to investigate, discuss and develop analysis of international issues in the class struggle, the current crisis of the world Trotskyist movement, or develop the programme of our movement for the political reconstruction of the Fourth International. The structures within the League which should promote such work have been dissolved; the publications that should carry such material have been trivialised (SX) or wound up (Workers Socialist Review), or exist only as vague platitudes in NC resolutions (an "international bulletin" in English and French!) Little in the way of League resources is directed towards seriously building international solidarity work, which only survives at all through the tenacity and dedication of individual comrades. Our organisation is becoming mired ever deeper in the sludge of nationally-limited politics.

I believe that this is completely unacceptable for a Trotskyist organisation, and that sections of the NC and the membership have been cynically misled into endorsing this situation, some plainly believing that there is, somewhere and somehow, some degree of international work being carried out behind the scenes by the leadership. If this is the case, then it has been successfully concealed even from the Executive Committee.

The November 19 NC resolution, on the face of it, appeared to represent a commitment to some form of international work. But, as I pointed out at the time in voting against it, the whole proposal put forward by Kinnell was a sectarian recipe for the abandonment in practice of any serious effort towards the reconstruction of the FI. The resolution committed the NC to:

" Set up some sort of organised liaison between ourselves, the (American) PTT and (Australian) SF;

" Propose a joint international bulletin, to be produced by the WSL in English, French and German ( and if possible other languages)...;

" Through written discussion and occasional international meetings, we attempt to develop joint documents with PTT and SF on major political questions. The three groups should also discuss the work of all of us on our home arenas;

" We seek contacts and dialogue with other forces, including those Trotskyist groups we already have some relations with;

" The international bulletin will be edited with a view to being a tool for intervention in relation to the USFI...;

" Prior to any approach to the USFI for fusion discussions, we should attempt to formulate a clear principled outline assessment of the USFI and its place in the world Trotskyist spectrum, in the WSL and jointly with the SF and the PTT;"

(See IB 77)

That there should be joint work and ongoing discussion between ourselves and the PTT (now WSL!) and SF was never and is not now in dispute. Nor is there any doubt that we should discuss much more on the politics of the USFI. The difference centres - since the demise of TILC last Spring - on the form of such work, its orientation, and its place in the context of a longer-term and wider perspective. Discussions between us, SF and WSL/USA is not a viable perspective for international work. Different attitudes on this question will produce a different assessment of the seriousness of Kinnell's proposals for bulletins, written discussions and international meetings.

Pulling Down the Shutters.

By the time of the November 19 NC we had already seen evidence of the actual attitude to international work of the Carolan/Kinnell leadership. They

have always seen this as the prerogative and business of a top-level elite within the League. From the time of fusion onwards the present Majority's determination to exclude the membership from significant participation in regular discussion and theoretical work on international questions was symptomised by their initial opposition to the old WSL's system of international commissions which had - with some success - carried out a level of educational, theoretical and practical work on various key issues and areas of international politics - for example on Turkey, the Middle East, South Africa, France and Latin America. Through the commissions, rank and file members of the League had been able to play an active role in developing our programme and the policies of the League. Now, with the commissions having long ago been stifled and killed off, there is no such avenue open.

We have seen the EC - which in the old WSL used to focus on political discussion, including international reports and a monitoring of our international work - virtually abandon any political discussion, and obviously abandon any up-to-date political reports or detailed analysis of international developments, all of which now play second fiddle to organisational wrangles and manoeuvres and the piecemeal approach of the Majority. But while the EC has been turned into a virtual "no-go" area for politics or objective discussion, the EC has of course been far worse for even longer. And comrades from the Majority, who scarcely troubled to conceal their pleasure at the collapse of TILC last year have made no effort whatever to open up any fresh international work or discussion.

In practice, by the time Kinnell moved his resolution on November 19 there was no regular, established forum even at leadership level where international (or national) political questions could be seriously discussed. There is not even an Editorial Board to discuss the content of the paper!

Predictably, the main casualties of the depoliticisation of the leading bodies of the League have been the "cinderella" areas of political work: work amongst the specially oppressed at home, and any work at all "abroad". International work requires time, effort and encouragement at leadership level if rank and file comrades are to be kept informed and drawn into participation. Instead of this, the League has seen the disappearance of any systematic educational programme which might equip newer and less confident comrades to deal independently with international questions.

#### An Empty Proposal.

Kinnell's resolution of Nov.19 boils down in essence to sporadic correspondence and occasional top-level get-togethers between leading WSL comrades and the leaders of two tiny organisations which both already to a greater or lesser extent accept the current politics of the WSL. Only a handful of people would be involved in this work at any stage, or even aware of the work between set-piece international meetings. The proposal for an international bulletin sounds very fine, until the practical questions are asked: who would write it? Would anyone be involved in discussing its contents? How would it be sold? To whom?

Given the constipated silence on international developments in the pages of SX since the New Year, it is open to some doubt what the "International Bulletin" might find to publish. Since it would be a party publication and not a notionally "broad" paper like SX, presumably only the Majority's views would get a look in. Maybe they would reprint some old ICL documents?

In any event, as the bulletin of a tiny, introspective and increasingly insignificant grouping with no serious orientation towards dialogue with the other segments of the world Trotskyist movement, such a bulletin would be hard-pressed to establish a definite purpose and direction. Why would anyone be bothered to read it, unless through idle curiosity?

There are still no answers to these questions, three months after Kinnell's resolution was carried by the EC, and no sign of any efforts to implement it.