

INTERNAL BULLETIN No 92

Defend the Unity of the League!

Democratise the WSL!

An appeal by 8 NC members:

Cunliffe, Gunther, Jones, Levy, Oliver, Parsons, Piggot, Smith,

on behalf of the 51 signatories of the following request for a
Special Conference of the League:

"In view of the rapidly worsening internal situation of the group and the damaging effect of the articles and resolutions in IB83, the following members call for a special conference under the Constitution. The situation has now gone beyond the point where it can be dealt with by the leading committees and must go to the membership.

The subject of the conference is the internal situation in the group and the matter of democratic rights.

We undertake to produce documents for conference within 2 weeks and this to be followed by a two-month pre-conference discussion."

March 25, 1984.

Draft Resolution (For the special conference).

Defend the Unity of the League! Democratise the WSL!

Political differences are nothing extraordinary for healthy political organisations, though they strike fear and anger in the hearts of petty bureaucrats. Any movement aiming seriously to construct a revolutionary party comprising thousands and tens of thousands of workers must recognise the need to work with comrades who hold views distinct from the majority leadership of the day. To do this, they must establish norms and methods of work which enable such minority comrades to play - and feel that they are playing - an active, productive role in the development of the movement and its daily work.

The means to do this were elaborated first and put into practice by Lenin in the Bolshevik party model and the organisational methods of democratic centralism. This same model, defended by Trotsky against its bureaucratic distortion at the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy, was further amplified by the leaders of the early American Socialist Workers Party in the course of their fight for a genuine proletarian revolutionary party against various petty bourgeois oppositions. Democratic centralism combines the disciplined, centralised implementation of agreed majority policies, with structures and mechanisms at each level to assert democratic control and the voice of the party's rank and file - including minority points of view - in the decision-making process, as well as the accountability of the central leadership to the party conference.

Two particular aspects of this democratic structure should be emphasised: one is the need for careful attention to the education of the rank and file (and in particular worker members) to enable them to make their own, independent political assessments of issues in dispute. The other is to stress the collective role of the leadership in the development of policies, statements, documents, and the administration of the party's press.

We believe that, albeit in very different conditions in today's very different WSL, these traditional norms and methods remain valid in general terms as guidelines for our party-building work. But they are in many ways quite the opposite of the present internal norms and methods implemented by the present EC Majority.

The conceptions which tend to lead in the wrong direction were contained - albeit in a fairly obscure way - in Carolan's "Party Building Document" (printed in IB50), which he tried to force to a vote at last April's Conference. It called for "one person management" of the various areas of work, the committees and commissions. This was then placed on the agenda of the August 1983 Conference: but there it was heavily voted down, with the Conference voting instead for an amendment from Gunliffe, which read:

"Rationalise our organisational structures, starting from the top. We need to establish a proper central office, and an organisational machine, implementing the decisions of the leading committees. It is essential that NC members, too, accept their responsibility for the implementation of NC decisions in their areas and the development of branch work. In this respect, the larger areas should reconstruct and reestablish the area committees, which facilitate a productive coordination of branch activity and the development of additional leadership comrades. While branch organisers and fraction convenors will of course continue to be the individual comrades responsible for the functioning of the work, that functioning should be seen in terms of regular meetings and collective discussion and collaboration, rather than individual or unilateral decision-making."

That resolution has never been carried out. The reverse has been the case. "One person management" has been increasingly the norm. Decisions have been taken in direct contravention of the Conference resolution - for example the decision of the Organisation Sub-Committee (which in fact has no constitutional powers at all) selectively to legitimise the exemption of Carolan from paper sales and exempting him also from the discipline of his branch and responsibility for organised branch activities. This is in flat contradiction to the resolution's insistence "that NC members, too, accept their responsibility for the implementation of NC decisions in their areas and the development of branch work". Increasingly we have seen a few leaders at the top pointing downwards to everyone else as the "problem", and implementing only those conference decisions with which they agree.

We believe that Carolan and Kinnell have developed an approach to party-building which is a major obstacle to the building of a party - quite apart from the political positions which they project.

For this reason, Conference instructs the leadership bodies of the WSL to adopt the following norms and methods, which in our opinion offer a framework which can reestablish a healthy party structure which will allow the group to develop and also a framework within which both minority and majority comrades can be confident that their rights will be respected in a common organisation.

(1) Leading Committees: We need to define the responsibility of the leading committees if we are to establish democratic control and accountability, and stop the process whereby the leadership of the organisation is becoming confined to ever-smaller committees of full-time people.

The annual conference of the WSL, its highest body, delegates authority between conferences to the NC, which in turn delegates its authority between meetings to an elected Executive (which normally comprises both full-time and non-full-time members). The Executive has established in turn an "Organisation Sub-Committee" (OSC), consisting solely of some full-timers, which is not a constitutional committee of the WSL. (This subordinate status was decided by Conference, which abolished the original "three tier" - NC, EC, OC - structure established at fusion, and replaced it with a two-tier - NC, EC - system). The job of the OSC is strictly to implement organisationally the political decisions taken by the NC and EC.

It is essential that this restriction on the scope of the OSC should be upheld, if the League is not to find a growing number of important political decisions being taken not by the larger and more representative political bodies, but by a tiny group of full-timers, whose meetings have not been and are not now reported or minuted for EC or NC scrutiny. This opens the door to decision-making not by open discussion but purely on the basis of individual pressure and persuasion.

It must be recognised that the authority of leading bodies rests in part on the extent to which they are seen to be accountable to the party membership, and are seen to be carrying out the political tasks allotted to them by the Conference and the NC. With this in view, written or verbal reports on the implementation of Conference and NC decisions should be presented by the EC and full-timers to each NC meeting, along with agreed minutes of EC meetings, while each area leadership should also be required to present a report on work done to the regular NC meetings for endorsement.

Full-time workers are appointed as necessary by the NC. Their work can at all times be called into question by the constitutional committees of the WSL. They are subject to recall at any time. It must be made

clear that full-timers do not derive authority from the fact that they are full-time, but only from the elected positions which they may hold. The specific duties of full-timers must be made clear to the membership if they are to be effectively accountable.

At the same time, full-time workers must be linked both with their local League organisations and actively involved in some aspect of work in the wider labour movement. In this way we combat the emergence or consolidation of damaging elitist conceptions and any separation between the League's leadership and its rank and file.

In this way we can hope also to avoid a situation where in some cases comrades least involved in the implementation of policy are the most influential in formulating it. That is the almost inevitable outcome of a drift into centralism without democracy.

2) Political Development: The changing political situation at home and internationally, and the need continually to check, update and develop our policies and programme in the light of our experience in the work, require a branch, area and national structure of political reports and discussion. In addition the clarification of political differences within the League, and the development of analysis and policy on new questions also calls for a reinvigoration of the internal life of the organisation.

We have seen successive major shifts in the general situation (in Britain: the General Election, the clashes with the Tebbit laws, a new round of cuts and closures, and Chesterfield; internationally: Central America, Southern Africa, France, Argentina, Lebanon, Iran/Iraq, Ireland) all go past us with no serious prepared discussion at any level in the WSL. Instead, leading committees have been transformed into largely a-political arenas for the moving of disciplinary and organisational resolutions. This lack of political discussion and analysis has practical implications.

Instead of carrying out centrally-discussed, unifying campaigns and policies, all too many comrades - new recruits or old hands - at branch level have found themselves left to their own devices in their day-to-day work in the unions or MO. Instead of leading the work, the WSL leadership winds up depending upon the instincts, initiatives and good fortune of individual members. This makes it extremely difficult for the organisation as a whole to pull together in a constructive way.

The League should be continually analysing new developments, assessing possibilities, checking the success or problems of campaigns and slogans, and from this deciding the way forward. We should be the ideological workshop of the working class, not its empirical camp-followers. To achieve this objective, Conference lays down the following norms:

(a) League leading bodies and advisory commissions must focus their agendas on political discussion and the development of political leadership with the necessary organisational follow-up. First item on each agenda should be a current political report, with every comrade being urged to participate in discussion.

(b) Area and national aggregate meetings must be held periodically to widen and open up discussion: area aggregates at approximately 2 month intervals, and national aggregates 3-4 times per year. Agendas for these aggregates must combine up-to-date political assessment and progress-chasing on campaigns with wider issues of international politics or internal discussion.

(c) The non-prioritisation of League branch meetings is a major problem in some parts of the organisation. We need a major change of attitude towards this. It is crucial both for the effective functioning of the

work and for the effective operation of democratic centralism that the branch is seen as central at a local level. It is the main contact that the members have with the organisation; as such it is the key to mobilising to carry through party policy, but also the place where the membership's democratic rights can be exercised in the organisation. Through their branch, members can influence the organisation by moving resolutions and by discussions with members of leading committees who are in the branches.

Branch meetings must focus on giving direction to the work of individual comrades in their workplaces, union branches, MO and other organisations. On this basis we can seek ways and means to improve the distribution of SX and widen our base of contacts and recruits. Branches must give special attention to the proletarianisation of the League, the need to recruit fresh working class forces, and critically appraise their own work in relation to local workplaces and factories, and the involvement in the struggles and concerns of working class people.

3) Editorial Board: Conference recognises the right (indeed the obligation) of the League's leadership to argue for and defend the adopted positions of the League in our press. However Conference also recognises that:

(a) The present weekly paper is not a "party press" in the sense of the term used by Cannon or Lenin. It seeks out and regularly contains contributions and views of non-members and even opponents of the League. This raises special problems of editorial line and control which are not dealt with under the historical norms of democratic centralism.

(b) Many of the issues over which there has been dispute in terms of coverage in the paper (eg analysis of the TUC's position in the run-up to the "Black Wednesday" betrayal of the NGA) are not issues on which the League has had any adopted policy. The exclusion of "minority" points of view on the part of League members on such issues, or their presentation as oppositional "discussion" material, is therefore also a complex issue falling outside the historical norms of democratic centralism.

(c) Other questions - Afghanistan, imperialism, etc - are known to be substantial inner-party differences, most of which pre-date the fusion of 1981, and were deliberately left aside for more leisured and comradely discussion inside the joint organisation. To pursue debate on these issues in the public arena of our weekly press in front of the whole British Left, before carrying out even the most basic internal discussion within the League simply exposes our weakest face to the workers' movement and does little to educate our comrades in Bolshevik norms or the politics involved.

(d) The lack of regular political reports and discussion (most markedly on international issues) on leadership bodies, and the largely a-political subject-matter of most NC and EC agendas, means that an increasing number of developments in the class struggle take place without any leading committee adopting even a tentative analysis or position on them.

A central part of the answer to such problems must be the establishment of an Editorial Board to which the Editor will be responsible and accountable. The EB should function within the guidelines of adopted policy of the League as a whole and its leading bodies, but it should draw in comrades active in trade union, MO and international solidarity work, and represent a political cross-section of the viewpoints within the League as a whole. Through a process of weekly collective discussion, it should endeavour to develop coverage in our press which adequately reflects the potential strengths of the League. In this context, it should end the present exclusion of minority viewpoints and offer access to minority positions on issues where there is no established WSL majority line.

Similar EB provisions should be made to govern the running of the projected "broad" magazine and any future League-run publications.

4) Education: A decisive move to intensify educational work in the WSL would be a profoundly democratic proposal; it would equip the party membership with a more systematic knowledge of Marxism, enabling comrades to judge political disputes more critically and more independently.

The present parlous state of education in our cadre should be cause for serious alarm. Few branches are carrying out any regular or systematic educational classes even on the most basic aspects of Marxism - while in the course of the factional debates the EC Majority comrades are happy enough to pressurise individual members to take stands on some advanced and highly complex political issues - Imperialism; Ireland; Afghanistan (questions which the EC Majority prioritise chiefly as a defence of their own political culture and tradition). Perhaps worse, comrades are receiving little or no background guidance on other current issues of world politics (such as Central America or the crisis of the world Trotskyist movement) which - at least potentially - involve them in conflicts with other "Trotskyist" tendencies.

We should turn with urgency to the promotion of a programme of education aimed not at "lecturing" members or bureaucratic imposition of the present EC Majority's point of view and crushing of dissent in "one to one" encounters, but at the cultivation of a more advanced level of debate and discussion, ensuring that all our comrades, whatever their views on disputed questions, assimilate the basics of revolutionary Marxism. This can be accomplished by a combination of the following:

(a) League classes/schools on a local/area/national level, open to members only; in which the fullest, frank debate should be encouraged but structured to ensure that it is not allowed to obstruct the development of newer and less confident comrades.

(b) Broad Group classes, which would aim to develop a basic grasp of Marxism, and recruit the most responsive contacts to the League.

(c) The Summer School, which should cater for the combined and uneven development of the League's cadre by offering a variety of basic and more advanced classes, and seeking also to tread some new ground on selected political/theoretical questions, encouraging free and open discussion. This is a vital stimulus to the theoretical life of the League.

5) International work: The present line of international work (restricted to pursuing some form of dialogue with the American PTT(now WSL) and Australian SF) excludes rank and file League members from any form of participation. There are no reports on international questions or on the League's international work given to any of the leading committees; there is no organised forum for comrades to discuss or participate in aspects of international politics in which they are interested. This is neither democratic nor scientific: it has brought complete stagnation in the political development of our organisation on the international level. And it leaves all decision-making on policies for world events in the hands of the Editor.

Quite obviously this problem overlaps to some degree with the question of education. But we do have comrades in the League who can and should be involved in developing our politics on specific international questions. To make this possible we need:

(a) To implement our March 10 NC decision mandating every Branch to select at least one field of international solidarity work, and to do it seriously - thus ensuring that every comrade is in some way involved in international politics.

(b) To reinstate the system of commissions on selected international questions, areas or countries, drawing together comrades interested in serious work and making some contribution to the movement's analysis and

policies. A modest initial list of topics would include the five areas singled out by the NC for solidarity work - Ireland, Palestine, Turkey, South Africa and Central America.

(c) A further commission should bring together comrades with linguistic skills to furnish translations of particular documents from other Trotskyist tendencies, or background documents (eg on Central America) where sources are hard to find in English.

(d) Leadership committees should include international work on their regular agendas, and allocate sufficient resources to restart this area of work, which is so vital to the political health of the League.

6) Discipline and norms: Under a democratic centralist regime all members are obliged to work under the direction of leading bodies. But between the letter and the spirit of this stipulation there is a potential gulf. This can on the one hand enable demoralised or alienated members to scrape by, doing only a tokenistic minimum of "work" (at worst, simply allowing their standing orders to remain in operation, covering their dues and paper money); on the other hand the same formal structure can also allow a leadership selectively to harass or intimidate its opponents, putting down demands which are unreasonable or unjust, and following them up by disciplinary action which is only thinly disguised discrimination.

Against the first danger - political demoralisation and silent abstention - the movement can only defend itself by seeking politically to convince the membership of the correctness of its line and the need for their active commitment. This requires the kind of steps towards politicising and democratising the movement which have been spelled out in this Resolution.

Against the second danger, the Bolshevik movement has consistently erected an organisational defence of the rights of minorities and individuals in the form of a Control Commission, independent of the leadership bodies and the full-time apparatus, elected by and accountable to the rank and file of the movement. It is the task of such a Control Commission to investigate complaints made by members against leading bodies or by one member against another. The Control Commission, hopefully along with, but if necessary in conflict with the NC, is also the guarantor, between Conferences, of the movement's Constitution, which spells out the rights and obligations of every member and of leading bodies.

This Conference upholds the Constitution adopted at fusion in 1981; rejects attempts by the EC and NC to assume additional powers to impose summary disciplinary measures on individual members except as laid down in the Constitution; and reaffirms the unfettered right of the Control Commission as an independent body, accountable only to Conference, to investigate and report without EC interference upon complaints laid before it by comrades under the terms of the Constitution.

7) Membership Voice: It has been suggested by the EC majority that perhaps a "negotiated split" might be the best solution to the political differences that exist in the WSL. They have asked the minority Faction to consider just such a proposition, first floated by Jagger, and now published in IB87. Jagger himself has been allowed to canvass the idea around London branches: just imagine what would have been said by the EC Majority if anyone among their opponents had proposed such an idea!

Elementary democracy demands that were such a serious step to be taken, the membership as a whole, whose organisation is being discussed, must have the collective right to be consulted - not simply cornered one by one - on the planned dismemberment of their movement. Maybe in

the course of an open discussion on the political issues involved the EC Majority might convince a majority of the members that a split is the correct course. But what is quite unacceptable is to view such a split as simply a subject for top-level negotiation between opposing comrades on the EC or NC without the involvement of the members.

In supporting the democratic norms and reforms proposed in the above Resolution (and summarised below), Conference rejects as unprincipled any such call for an a-political, bureaucratic split, which would once again wall off the membership - some of them for all time - from any voice in decisions, and which has been put forward as an alternative to a full political debate and political conference of the movement on the disputed issues. It is proposed and tacitly or actively supported now by comrades who on the EC and NC have opposed the suggested convening of the League's annual conference.

Our call is for democracy, for Bolshevik norms within a common organisation. Sooner than concede these legitimate demands, the EC majority prefers to threaten the movement with an unprincipled split. It is between these two alternatives that comrades must choose.

Cunliffe, Gunther, Jones, Levy, Oliver, Parsons, Piggot, Smith.

March 25, 1984.

Summary proposals.

1) Political decision-making to remain in the hands of the constitutional leading bodies; the informal OSC to be confined to organisational implementation of NC and EC decisions. Standing orders to be adopted by all leading bodies and upheld.

Full reports on work done by EC, full-timers and area leaderships, with agreed EC minutes, to be presented to each NC for endorsement. Full-timers to be linked to local area work and involved in labour movement campaigning.

Events must be planned well in advance to mobilise the membership, contacts, delegations, etc, whether this be for our own events (Conferences, Summer School, etc), our intervention in Annual events (MO and Youth conferences) or demonstrations. The paper should be used to stress the importance of events and create enthusiasm for campaigns, meetings, plans, targets, etc.

2) League leading bodies must focus agendas on political discussion, with first item being a current political report and discussion.

Regular aggregate meetings at area and national level; every 2 months for area aggregates; 3-4 times per year for national aggregates, which will take a political reports, chase up campaign work, and include wider topics for discussion.

Branch meetings to be regularised at least fortnightly, prefaced by political report, and focussed on guiding work of branch members in the labour movement. Special attention to be paid to recruiting workers and intervening in disputes and workplaces.

Documents for Conferences, Aggregates, NCs etc to be out well in advance in order to maximise discussion.

3) Conference instructs the EC/NC to take immediate steps to establish an Editorial Board to include representation from the EC as well as other comrades from various viewpoints in the League who can contribute to the paper, to begin functioning as of the next issue of SX. This EB must meet every week that SX is being published, and at such times (normally weekends) that trade union comrades and members outside the London area can attend (some possibly as alternate members if they cannot guarantee weekly attendance). The EB - which must function within the

guidelines of the adopted policies of the League and its leading bodies - should collectively plan the general content of the paper, discuss the editorial line and its presentation on the main issues of the day, and in this way strengthen the paper. The EB will provide a focus that will assist in structuring the hitherto anarchic run-up to production, and will also plan in advance for non-urgent feature articles and centre-spreads.

Similar provisions must be made for an EB for the projected magazine and any other League-run publications.

4) An urgent programme of education aimed at equipping League members to take their own independent stance on issues of dispute, including:

(a) Closed League classes/schools on a local/area/national level, enabling full debate.

(b) Broad Group classes, for basic education and recruitment.

(c) The Summer School, offering a combination of more advanced and basic education, seen as high point of theoretical work, offering open climate for discussion and new ideas.

5) Implement NC decision on turn to international solidarity work at branch level.

Reestablish international commissions, to draw rank and file comrades into discussion and contribution to international work, from which they are presently excluded.

A further commission to organise translations of useful material.

Leadership committees to include international work on agendas, and allocate resources to restarting it.

6) Uphold 1981 Constitution; reject any moves by EC and NC to assume extra-Constitutional powers to impose summary penalties on individual members (any fines to be imposed on recalcitrant payers of dues and paper-money should be decided properly through the disciplinary provisions of the Constitution); reaffirm rights of Control Commission to defend Constitution and pursue inquiries without EC interference.

7) Reject call for unprincipled, a-political and bureaucratic "negotiated split" which would exclude membership from any voice in the fate of their organisation. Restate demand for the establishment of Bolshevik norms as the basis for differences to coexist in a single, Marxist organisation.

Gunliffe, Gunther, Jones, Levy, Oliver, Parsons, Piggot, Smith.

March 25, 1984.

There will be a MEETING open to any full member of the League who supports this document and the call for a Special Conference, at

2pm, Sunday April 1,
Camden Town Hall.