

DOCUMENTS FOR NC. 31.3.84.

On matters arising from March 10
NC resolution - proposal from
Carolan and others.

1. The basic fact of life in the WSL - now as for many months past - is that the fusion has broken down completely. Within the WSL there are now two organisations at war with each other.

The Oxford faction possesses all the features of a distinct and separate organisation - distinct politics (or what it thinks are distinct politics), hostile to those of the organisation; a leadership of its own; its own finances, literature production, and distribution network; a geographical segment of the organisation (Oxford) which is only notionally under the control of the League and is in fact entirely under the faction's control.

The Oxford faction has in practice refused to accept the political and organisational verdict of last year's three conferences, and refused to settle into the organisation as a disciplined minority.

It defines the organisation as run by bureaucrats "worse than the trade union bureaucrats" and itself as having "fundamental differences" with the majority "on every major question". It believes that no-one in the world Trotskyist movement "will touch us with a barge-pole" because of our politics.

It functions in the organisation to expose, trip up and ambush the 'bureaucratic' leadership, ceaselessly agitating over largely contrived and anyway petty grievances. Its primary concerns, apart from its local work in Oxford, are this internal scandal-mongering and agitation.

At the same time its leaders take no part in the responsibility for running the League. They have consistently refused to back the elected leadership in imposing elementary discipline on their supporters.

Since the August 1983 conference a stream of potentially valuable comrades have gone out of the organisation because they believed what the faction leaders said about the organisation, and acted on it seriously and logically. For whatever reason - general faintheartedness, the lack of a better alternative, or that they don't themselves entirely believe what they say about us - the faction leaders have chosen to remain formally within the organisation. But the only description that fits the way they relate to the work of the League and to the leading committees of the League is internal secession.

Their effect on the League is to sap its morale; to make it difficult and often impossible for its leading committees to function; to clog up its internal channels with the debris of petty recriminations, and make real political discussion impossible; to make its internal life repulsive to new recruits; and systematically to undermine the League's discipline.

2. Prolonged, repeated attempts at conciliating the faction have failed completely.

Cunliffe as joint editor of the weekly paper; more or less free access for their views to the public press of the League; disproportionate representation on the EC; Smith as industrial organiser; etc - they took these major concessions as less than their rightful share, and also either didn't do the work (Smith) or walked out on it (Cunliffe).

After a year during which relations with the faction got progressively worse, and a period of especially rapid deterioration since the New Year, the March 10 NC passed a resolution on the minimum basic rules of functioning for continued

coexistence with the faction.

The faction's national conference of March 25 responded to this resolution in two ways - with an evasive formal reply; and by pretending to dissolve itself (though the NC didn't ask it to, and has no constitutional right to tell it to). The formally convened national conference of the faction decided on its campaign for the next period, on demands it would try to rally people round before the special conference and proposals for the special conference, and then 'dissolved' so that it could more effectively pursue the faction's goals.

This utterly transparent manoeuvre is, in its own way, a very clear response to the NC's resolution. It will be business as usual.

Instead of complying with the NC resolution, and on that basis remaining in the League, they use its implied threat of discipline against themselves as the basis for an utterly spurious and unprincipled campaign for "democracy in the WSL". They use the constitutional provision which allows a minority their size to call a special conference more or less at will to try to compel the organisation to spend the next two months turned inwards, to consume its energies in petty bickering over their alleged grievances - during the miners' strike! Nothing shows their sectarian absorption in internal League agitation above all else as clearly as this does; nothing shows their sectarian degeneration so conclusively.

3. The March 10 resolution was the last chance to avoid an organisational break between the faction and the League. Their refusal to accept it leaves us only one option - the expulsion of the (now secret) faction from the WSL. It is time to put an end to this impossible situation - to recognise that there are in fact two organisations which cannot coexist in one shell, and therefore that we must separate.

We therefore indict the members of the faction for failure to comply with the NC decision and for disruption of the League, and hereby:

a) Suspend them from all their functions, offices, and membership in the League;

b) Give them due constitutional notice that a motion for their expulsion will be brought to the NC on April 14, at a special meeting.

Any individual member of the faction who dissociates from the faction's reply to the NC resolution, and indicates a willingness to comply with that resolution, shall not be included in this decision.

The NC mandates the EC to contact the faction leaders to negotiate over possible areas of practical collaboration following the separation of the two organisations.

4. The NC rejects the argument that it is obliged to call a national conference before taking such action. The purpose of a conference is to decide the perspectives and policy of a single organisation - not to provide an arena for battle between two organisations within one formal structure, especially when that battle is to be over petty recriminations utterly secondary to the real issues between the two organisations. A conference is not a suitable method for organising a split.

The situation with the faction is perfectly clear cut. The NC is within its constitutional powers to demand what it demanded of the faction on March 10 and to take disciplinary action when the faction refuses to comply. The agitation in the organisation for a special conference is a parallel and separate matter. That agitation does not establish that the majority of the organisation believes that a special conference is necessary before the faction can be disciplined. Only a plebiscite or a special conference itself can decide that. The conference rejects plebiscites. Therefore only the verdict of a special conference that the NC should not act could override the power to act which the constitution gives to the NC. The decision how to proceed must be the NC's, and

it has to be taken with due regard to to all the political circumstances inside and outside the League. The NC must either act on its own authority and according to its basic mandate to lead the organisation and protect it from disruption, or abdicate its responsibilities to lead the organisation and ask a conference for guidance.

For the NC to choose to do that - to turn the organisation inwards in a futile manner for the next two months during the miners' strike - would be to admit its own bankruptcy and an irresponsibility towards the work of the organisation in the class struggle on a par with that of the leaders of the faction and their fellow travellers.

The NC therefore chooses to exercise its constitutional authority and discharge its duty to act immediately against the faction; to protect the organisation from disruption now; and to turn the League decisively towards work round the miners' strike in the period ahead.

5. The constitution stipulates that when 25% of the members want a special conference then it shall be held. This NC believes that the spirit of the constitution - the spirit of the class struggle and of revolutionary Bolshevism - allows the NC a certain leeway in interpreting the constitution to take account of major events in the class struggle like the miners' strike.

On the question of a conference, the NC therefore resolves to bring forward the date of the regular conference (at which any resolution, documents etc. can be put, and a new NC will be elected). The 1984 conference of the WSL will be held not more than 6 weeks after the end of the miners' strike, or not later than 3 months after March 31, whichever falls the soonest.

6. If expelled, the faction members have the constitutional right to have material relating to their appeals (if they choose to appeal to conference) circulated within the League. The EC is also mandated, after the next NC, to organise meetings in each area at which a representative of the expelled faction shall be given the opportunity to put their case.

7. The NC reaffirms its commitment to the democratic rights of political dissent within the WSL. Our objection to the faction is not its political views on various questions, but its disruption of the work of the League.

Comrades within the WSL who disagree with the conference or NC majority have the right of access to the Internal Bulletin; to put their views in branch, area and committee meetings and in the forthcoming pre-conference discussion; to form factions and tendencies; to propose alternative slates and nominations for the NC; to get representation on the NC in proportion to the strength of support for points of view; etc. All these rights have been exercised, and will continue to be available. The only limitation is that such internal debate should be conducted in such a way as not to disrupt the practical work of the organisation.

We urge comrades who agree with the faction's politics yet are responsible about building the League to remain with the organisation on these terms.

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Reply from the faction to
the March 10 NC resolution

Having been instructed by the EC majority to respond to the NC resolution of March 10 on 'resolving the situation one way or the other' by the next NC, we as former members of the now dissolved faction declare:

1. We opposed on March 10 and still oppose the bureaucratic attempt of the resolution to prevent the special conference which has been duly called by the required numbers under the appropriate provisions of the constitution,

but will now plainly be held if at all only after the 'next NC'.

2. We have always made clear our willingness to carry out our constitutional obligations within the WSL and that remains our position. As far as the implicit insinuation of clauses b, c, d, and e are concerned, they are deliberately misleading suggestions which have nothing to do with the real attitudes that the comrades have.

3. We in turn ask the NC of March 31 to state unambiguously whether or not it intends to carry out its constitutional obligation to convene a special conference within two months and to uphold the right of political minorities within the WSL during that period.

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Statement to the EC on the disbanding of the faction

We declared a faction on April 27 1983 (IB 59) because we became a minority under conditions where it was clear that the majority was moving against us and we had to protect our democratic rights. "Comrades Carolan, Hill and Kinnell, who now control the majority leadership of the organisation, have a hardened factional approach to those now in the minority. This is exemplified in IB 35, IB 58, their voting in relation to the Glasgow resolution which called for the leaders of the IT at the conference to be expelled, and the far-reaching 'party building document' which they attempted to get on the agenda without prior discussion. Amongst other things, this document appears designed to outline the way the new majority leadership will take control of the organisation over the coming months. This situation cannot be countered other than in an organised way".

We formed the faction to protect ourselves under these conditions and to advocate the politics of the conference documents which were the political basis of the faction.

Events since then have more than confirmed all our fears.

Now we are faced with probable expulsion (or steps towards it) at the NC on March 31. Under these conditions we have decided to disband the faction in favour of the call for the conference and the draft document to be put to it by the eight NC members and the 51 comrades who have endorsed it. We will join together with any comrades who are prepared to defend democracy in the WSL and hope to create new conditions and a different regime under which we can again argue for our politics.

Smith. 28.3.84.

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Resolution to the EC on the Control Commission report (referred to the NC by the EC 29.3.84)

That this EC calls upon the NC to release the Control Commission report to the membership for the following reasons:

1. That the Control Commission report is quite clearly an important part of the present internal situation and members need to see it if they are to have an informed opinion of what is going on.
2. At the moment the members have only seen the NC minutes which are seriously misleading. They contain Kinnell's resolution on the report without carrying the report itself. (Apart from the four points at the end giving the impression that that is the report).
3. The only possible motive for suppressing the report at this time is because the majority feel it may vindicate the minority in some way.

4. Now the report has been to the NC (and rejected on most points) it clearly becomes the property of the members. Any other interpretation would mean that the Control Commission is completely ineffective and could never defend an individual member of a minority against an NC majority - they could simply reject the report and destroy it if they didn't like it.

Smith. 29.3.84.

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Resolution from South West
London branch

This branch calls on the NC not to expel, or start proceedings of expulsion, against the faction without full consultation with the membership.

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Resolution from Coventry
branch

Coventry branch notes with concern rumours of expulsions to be initiated at Saturday's NC meeting. We call on the NC to:

1. Oppose any expulsions before the special conference has discussed the internal situation;

2. Censure the comrades of the EC majority for attempting to split the movement.

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