

# The WSL and the Smith group

by Carolan, for the EC

At its special meeting on March 31 the National Committee decided to put an end to the fiction of 'unity' between the WSL and the Smith faction.

By 14 votes to 8, the NC decided to suspend all members of the Oxford faction, and to give them due constitutional notice of expulsion proceedings in two weeks' time.

The NC rejected the faction's declaration that it had 'dissolved', in face of the evidence that the faction had merely gone underground. The NC found that the faction's response to the March 10 NC resolution, together with the faction's decision to pretend to dissolve, were a clear rejection of the March 10 resolution, which the NC had passed as the last chance of avoiding an organisational break with the Oxford faction.

The NC resolution made provision for any member of the faction who wants to break with the faction and stay in the WSL on the basis of accepting the March 10 resolution (without surrendering or changing their political views) to do so by making a simple declaration.

36 known members of the faction (listed below) are involved. While many of these could have been very valuable members of the League under different circumstances, the actual relation of the faction to the work of the League over recent months means that their departure is little loss to our work.

Only formal members of the Oxford faction have been suspended, and thus the faction's satellite Cunliffe remains in the League. So does Parsons, though he has declared that he will be joining whatever organisation Smith and Jones now set up.

The March 31 NC also decided to bring forward the regular League conference previously scheduled for the end of August/beginning of September. Because of the need to orient the League immediately to the miners' strike, the NC did not set a precise date for the conference, but adopted the following formula: Conference will be held six weeks after the end of the miners' strike or 3 months from March 31, whichever is the earlier.

The NC also decided to schedule aggregates in each area at which representatives of the faction will have an opportunity to put their case. (The faction additionally has a constitutional right to have written appeals against its expulsion circulated in the League).

## THE SUBSTANCE OF THE MATTER

Only in form is this an expulsion. In essence it is simply recognition and resolution of a situation which has been a fact for some time - that there were two distinct organisations inside the shell of the WSL.

It is highly significant, to our minds, that in a long series of speeches representatives and sympathisers of the faction on the NC did not deny that the fusion had broken down. Indeed, they emphasised that it had, by accusing us of being bureaucrats and/or hand-raisers, etc. In one speech Jones compared us to Stalin, Gerry Healy, and 'Big Brother' of 1984. The bitterness is perhaps understandable. But it makes nonsense of the idea that we could continue in one organisation. The only question was how we would separate.

For months there has been a cold split, and the Oxford faction has practised

a sort of internal secession. It has remained in the League and on its leading committees, while more and more withdrawing from its work. Its primary concerns in the League for months have been internal agitation, culminating in the attempt by the faction to turn the organisation inwards to bicker among ourselves while the miners' strike is raging in the world outside. (The faction can call a special conference more or less at will, since it disposes of close to the required quarter of the organisation).

For many months, little has been left of the 1981 fusion but the Oxford faction's special rights to conduct factional warfare on the WSL from within our borders.

The rational solution would have been a more or less amicable agreement to 'divorce', as Jagger proposed to the EC. But for their own reasons the rather demoralised Smith faction believed that their factional interests were best served by a more drawn-out and messy separation. So the NC had to decide to eject them from membership in the League.

The 2000-word NC resolution (IB 99) explains the NC's reasoning in some detail. Comrades should also consult the March 10 resolution (IB 87); the document which accompanied it and motivated it, 'Enough is enough' (IB 83); 'The belated cry for unity' (IB 98); and IB 94 (forthcoming), which explains in detail why the faction's announcement that it had 'dissolved' could not be believed.

#### THE APRIL 1 MEETINGS

On the day after the NC, April 1, some 15 members of the faction held their advertised national faction meeting at Camden Town Hall. At the same time, in another room in Camden Town Hall, there was a meeting of Parsons, Cunliffe and Levy with six other members of the League in support of their latest agitation for 'democratising the WSL'. A representative of the NC, Keith, addressed this latter meeting; the faction meeting refused to allow him to address them.

The meeting of League members apparently decided to campaign in the organisation for the 'reinstatement' of the faction, condemnation of the NC for expelling the faction, discussion of their document, etc. etc.

They are entitled to argue within the League for these things, provided they keep within the constitution and provided they abide by the NC decision on the faction and do not collaborate with the faction. Any member who wants to is of course free to move at the forthcoming conference the 'Document of the 8' (IB 92), which in our view rather incoherently proposes a federal WSL.

The League members' meeting apparently also decided to launch a petition in the League in support of their goals. A petition is not forbidden by the constitution, but it is deeply repugnant to it. It is a variety of privately-organised plebiscite or referendum. Our view is that of Cannon and Trotsky when the Shachtmanites raised the cry for a plebiscite in the SWP-USA in 1939.

"Can we recognise the referendum as a normal method for deciding issues in our own party? It is not possible to answer this question except in the negative...

"... Instead of a convention it is sufficient to introduce a counting of local votes. The party as a centralised whole disappears. By accepting a referendum the influence of the most advanced branches and most experienced and far-sighted comrades of the capital or industrial centres is substituted for the influence of the least experienced, backward sections, etc... The system of referendums or imperative mandates... completely kill(s) the party as a whole".

('In Defence of Marxism', p.40-41).

In any case the organisation will not allow itself to be paralysed. The conference 'not later than 3 months after March 31' - at which a new WSL leadership will be elected - will be able to express itself on the NC action

against the faction - reinstate the faction, expel those responsible for expelling the faction, or kick them off the NC, whatever it likes. Until the conference the NC decision stands. (The refusal of the faction meeting - where most of those present were not at the NC - to hear the views of the NC representative suggests that their desire for 'reinstatement' is not very serious, and will not prove very stable).

### BUILDING THE WSL

At the conference and in the pre-conference discussion we will have to analyse and assess the failure of the fusion. It is, of course, a major tragedy that the fusion which began with such high hopes should have ended like this. Nevertheless, it has done. There is nothing we can do about that. We tried for a long time to find some way of repairing the fusion, and we failed. The resolution of the March 10 NC was the last thing we thought might provide a basis for coexistence.

The 1981 fusion failed a long time ago, and we have been living in the debris and organisational chaos ever since. The split from the Oxford faction is a separation from hopeless and by now completely pointless internal bickering - which had increasingly become their central concern. This is a regrettable split, but nevertheless it is a necessary - and overdue - division of two organisations that had become incompatible.

The formal separation of the two organisations will allow us to put the WSL in order - to sort out our finances, repair and tone up the fabric of our organisation, and turn outwards to the bracing and inspiring events of the class struggle now.

It also frees the internal channels of the WSL from the debris of scandal-mongering and clears the way for genuine debate on the many political issues we need to discuss. The second part of the March 31 NC, discussing the miners' strike, was the most fruitful political discussion we had had on the NC for a very long time.

The split liberates the WSL to turn outwards, and we must now do that.

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Members of the faction (list given to EC by Smith, February 12 1984)

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| Oxford    | London    |
| Maddox    | Johnson   |
| Bryan M   | Nuran     |
| Barry M   | Karen H   |
| Smith     | Mary W    |
| Jones     | Graham S  |
| Geoff H   | Steve G   |
| Stan A    | Coventry  |
| Piggot    | Martin J  |
| Perry C   | Leeds     |
| Eddie C   | Hotchkiss |
| Bill S    | Wendy F   |
| Hannah C  | Hull      |
| Rowena J  | John S    |
| Steve A   | Jane A    |
| Ken W     | Ian D     |
| Jo C      | Gerard H  |
| Teresa M  |           |
| Michael D |           |
| Sanders   |           |
| Basil H   |           |
| Jim B     |           |
| Andy M    |           |
| Ann M     |           |

