

Statement on WSL 2nd Annual Conference

Democratic Centralist Faction

1) Having met to consider our balance sheet of the Second Annual Conference of the Workers Socialist League and assess the implications of the bureaucratic expulsions of 35 comrades which were ratified by that conference, we, the undersigned members of the Democratic Centralist Faction, have formed the view that it would be unprincipled to remain in membership of the new organisation that has now been constructed by Carolan/Kinnell over the dead body of the fused WSL.

We have arrived at this verdict after pursuing the struggle within the WSL right up to and throughout the two days of the conference. We had decided in advance that we would participate fully in that conference, including the election of Faction representatives onto the National Committee before making an assessment of our relationship to the WSL. Having implemented that decision and arrived at a considered position, we have to state clearly where we stand.

2) In our view the expulsions represent a fundamental breach from the methods and traditions of Leninist democratic centralism, and a lurch down the road back to the sick, sectarian practices of countless degenerate "Trotskyist" and far left groupings.

This telling symptom was confirmed and underlined by the additional evidence of political decay which we saw in the superficial "debates" and proceedings of the conference after the expulsions, not least on the second day.

3) It was obvious from the behaviour of the Carolan/Kinnell leadership before and during the Conference that they are no more willing to tolerate our Faction as a loyal, organised opposition than they were the dissolved Faction of the expelled 35. Throughout the preconference period we were subjected to vicious campaigns of slander and character assassination. An illustration of the shape of things to come was given in the torrent of abuse, open threats of physical violence and unconstitutional "Executive" threats of expulsion used by Carolan, Joplin, Kinnell and Hill against DCF members and cde Levy, the full-timer responsible for the books, on the Saturday evening of Conference.

Of course these methods of intimidation and abuse are not new or exceptional for the leadership; they have previously been used against individuals at the Centre. But they show quite clearly that the newly reelected WSL leadership is incapable of viewing any serious opposition as anything other than a hostile, opponent organisation.

Further evidence of the core leadership's refusal to accept or uphold majority decisions with which they disagree was provided in cde Hill's intervention in the conference on the Sunday morning, seeking to overturn an amendment carried the previous day which was critical of the dishonest methods of polemic employed in documents by cde Carolan and of the wild behaviour of cde Kinnell in leadership meetings. Similar unprincipled manoeuvres have become the common coin of Majority cdes on the NC when they occasionally fail to get their own way.

Anyone who believes that in the aftermath of the expulsions and with a new NC reinforced with additional handpicked Carolan loyalists, there will be any room for serious political debate or organised opposition - no matter how loyal to the WSL - will certainly find themselves to be seriously mistaken.

4) The conference, supposedly a "normal" annual conference of the League, saw a further decline in the political level of the movement. Freed from any obligation to answer an opposing faction, and therefore argue to convince members of their line of politics (and determined above all to give themselves a "free hand" to do as they wish in the next 12 months),

Carolan, Kinnell and co tabled only the most derisory and inadequate documents for discussion. Few branches met to discuss them at all beforehand (the conference was in reality a special conference simply to endorse the expulsions and give the leadership another 12 months without accountability).

In the event, Kinnell's disgraceful and dishonest "Organisation Report" was referred back. The British "Tasks and Perspectives" document - supposedly outlining the League's work for the next 12 months - was moved, amendments taken, "discussed" and voted upon inside 45 minutes: surely one of the most contemptuous and least adequate discussions ever staged.

Most significantly, no attempt was made to draw up an assessment of the state of the left in the MO and of the broad group tactic. This left it open to the incoming NC, should they wish, to scrap the major orientation of the WSL since fusion without a full and educated discussion amongst the membership.

Only slightly better treated was the piecemeal compilation "International Report", which further exposed the almost total lack of international work or serious solidarity work in the newly purged WSL.

What new members made of such proceedings can only be guessed. Possibly they would feel extremely disillusioned with the limited political and theoretical scope of this self-proclaimed Leninist "ideological workshop". Possibly they were instead simply miseducated by accepting the norms and methods now employed by the Majority. In either case no useful lessons, political or practical, could have been learned by the large number of new, younger comrades for whom this was their first experience of a League conference.

The leadership and those blindly following their line saw the Conference quite cynically as a "clearing of the decks" of any opposition, in which political perspectives for the purged organisation were at most secondary, if not irrelevant.

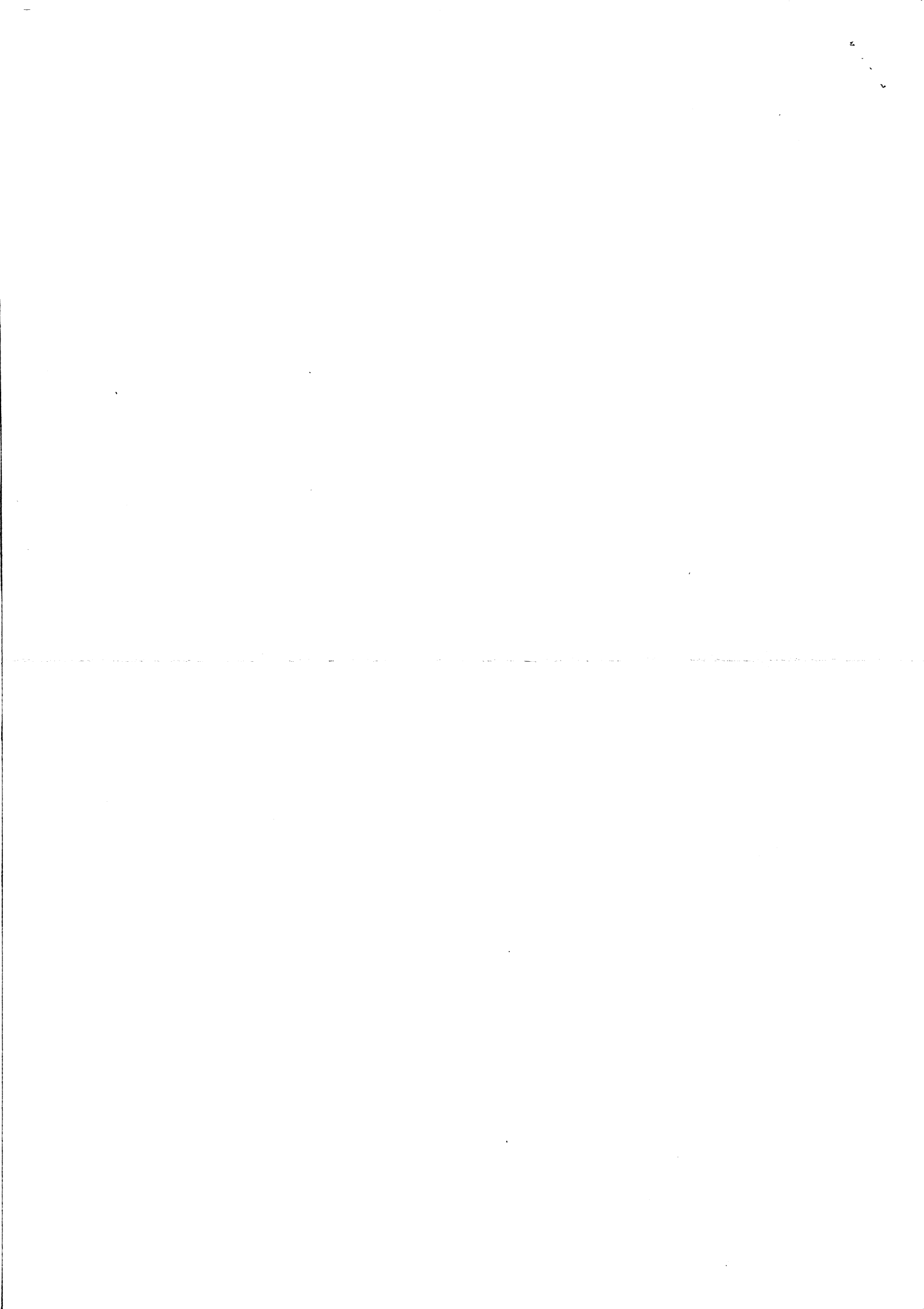
5) The changing composition of the WSL has indeed been a major factor in enabling Carolan and Kinnell to carry through and complete the split with 35 bureaucratic expulsions. A brief look at the figures is of interest here.

The vote for the expulsions was 72-27, with four abstentions. Yet 35 comrades had just been expelled and were therefore denied a vote. This means that the potential majority in a full conference would have been no more than 10. In reality it would have been less. It must be remembered that a fair number of comrades, although they accepted that the expulsions were bureaucratic, voted (wrongly!) to accept them on the grounds that they were a "fait accompli" and could not be reversed. This would not have been the case if the "split" had been put to a full conference of the WSL. Here we see the reason why on two occasions the NC unconstitutionally rejected demands by more than 25% of the membership for a Special Conference to decide on the question of the expulsions. The arithmetic of June 30 proves that Carolan could not have expected to win at such a conference.

Just as significantly, perhaps, a number of newly-recruited members - not least from Manchester, Sheffield and Stoke - turned out to have been swiftly "made up" from candidate status to full, voting members; and all but one of them voted to expel the 35 former faction members, whom many of them had never met. This shows how cynically new members can be used by such an unprincipled leadership.

What of the composition of the conference by political tradition? A headcount showed that on the day of the expulsions there were 10 surviving members of the old WSL present, and between 40-50 former members of the pre-fusion ICL. A total of only 50-60 pre-fusion members out of a conference of 103 full members.

When we remember that of the expelled 35 cdes the vast majority were from the old WSL, it is clear that the surviving cadre from both pre-fusion groups had been reduced by almost identical amounts since



fusion. And out of the pre-fusion members present at the conference, nearly HALF, some 25 comrades, voted with the DCF against the expulsions.

In other words, not only did Carolan/Kinnell's successful expulsion of the 35 rest upon preempting a full conference and presenting the movement with a fait accompli, but it rested equally upon the votes of post-fusion comrades, and most decisively upon a new layer of recruits brought into the movement only in the last few months, with no knowledge of the issues involved in the fusion, and little knowledge of the minority they were voting so obediently to expel.

6) In our view it is no accident that in the fight against the expulsions the DCF was able to group together not simply leading comrades and rank and file members of the old WSL, but also long-standing and experienced comrades whose history was in the old ICL and Workers Fight - such as Oliver, Gunther, Gaines, Mellor, Butler, Williams and Armstrong. It is because these comrades were most seriously committed to the fusion. They remembered and took seriously the old ICL's commitment to political regroupment of the Trotskyist movement, and they were prepared and confident enough to take a stand when Carolan/Kinnell turned their backs on that perspective.

In a real sense the DCF in the course of the struggle has shown itself to be the present-day embodiment of the fusion as it was fought for by the most serious comrades in 1981.

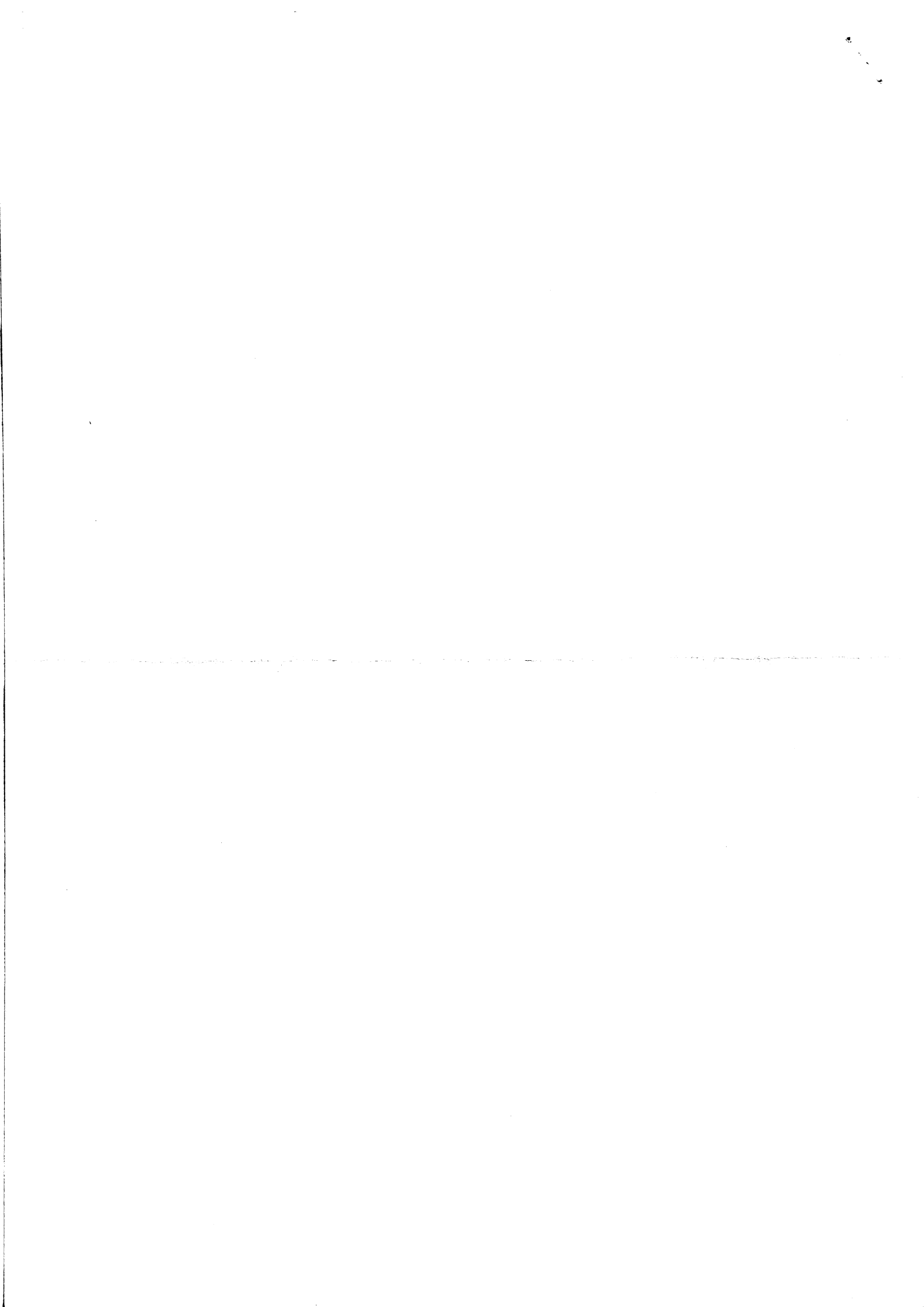
7) We argued consistently, and remain convinced, that the differences of political programme that emerged in the post-fusion WSL could and should have been containable within a single organisation.

On our present orientation towards the British labour movement and on international questions, we share a large measure of formal agreement with the WSL. So, we believe, do the expelled members. The reputation of Trotskyism within the working class will not be enhanced by the presence of a new organisation with politics similar to those of the WSL. But the responsibility for this further fragmentation and proliferation of groups lies with the WSL leadership, who pushed through the purge of the expelled members.

We would be in favour of a re-fusion of the WSL, including the expelled members. But to make that possible would require a regime seriously based upon democratic centralism, and a leadership which itself rejected and fought against the sectarian methods and tendencies to bureaucratism which have so damaged and derailed the post-war Trotskyist movement.

The large majority for the expulsions; the flippant, dishonest polemics; the prolonged campaign of slander and personal vilification aimed at members of the expelled grouping and against the DCF; and the votes at the conference which give this bureaucratic and oppressive leadership a free hand to lead the movement as they wish in the year ahead, all show that no such inner reform is possible in the WSL in the foreseeable future, nor are there serious forces outside the DCF prepared to fight the present methods. The conference will be taken by Carolan/Kinnell as a vote of confidence in their bureaucratic methods; and having knuckled under to this in the votes at conference, it is unlikely that individual comrades will feel confident to wage an isolated fight in the year ahead.

8). Accordingly, our fight to build a healthy revolutionary party must be taken up outside the present, degenerating, WSL. Our Faction will develop its politics, and will also be taking part in discussions with the expelled former Faction cdes. Together we make up a similar number to the rump WSL; qualitatively, we would be a far healthier and more experienced group.



9) Members of the DCF all had their various political disagreements with the expelled comrades, which meant that we were not members of the disbanded faction. We have not abandoned our own political positions or the fight for clarity in our relations with other comrades. Nor do we demand that the expelled comrades renounce their positions as any precondition for discussions.

We will continue the debate on issues of policy, programme and perspective with the expelled comrades and with others - including ex-WSL members - who wish to work with us to launch a healthy Trotskyist organisation in this country. We are committed to a rounded and consistent intervention in the labour movement and international class struggle as part of the fight for a mass revolutionary party, seeking political regroupment on the basis of programmatic agreement and the reconstruction of the Trotskyist Fourth International.

10) As Trotsky put it, in a quote so often misconstrued by Carolan "The significance of the programme is the significance of the party." Even the most perfect political positions on paper are worth little or nothing in the training of a cadre and building a vanguard party if they are coupled to a degenerate, bureaucratic regime.

In reality, as we have begun to see in the WSL's orientation (or the lack of it) towards international work; the dissolution of the Broad Groups and the lack of attention to MO and trade union industrial work, the internal degeneration of the League is linked also to a sectarian political degeneration of the group as it has embraced the traditional methods of Healy, Cliff and Grant.

There is no useful purpose to be served by a prolonged struggle inside the rump WSL after this watershed conference. Too much time has already been lost, too much energy wasted, too many lies and slanders endured, too many new, young members cruelly misled and miseducated on a diet of lies and deference to the Carolan/Kinnell leadership. Our case has already been clearly and consistently argued for three months in the movement. Our predictions have been proven accurate; those of the Majority false. Our Faction has steadily grown in numbers and in confidence as the Majority's case has been refuted.

We have fought to convince anyone willing to listen. We remain willing to talk to League members who have had second thoughts over their vote for the expulsions, and to those who were courageous enough to vote with us or abstain despite the massive pressure to conform.

We now intend to go forward and fight for the type of organisation we have argued for and have tried to restore in the WSL. We resign from the Workers Socialist League. We urge you to follow our example.

July 8, 1984.

Signed

Gunther, Mellor, Hedges (Brent)

Butler, Paul (S.London)

Armstrong, Mason (Birmingham)

Eustace, Tim P., Williams (Northampton)

Jim T. (Leicester)

Oliver, Thomas, Parsons, Quelch
(Coventry)

Gaines (Rochdale)

Christel (E.London)

Cunliffe, Levy, Bryan M, Kath M.
(Oxford)

(Previously resigned: McInnes (Edinburgh) and Phil H. (Leicester)).

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