

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Report of the Proceedings of the 89th Autumn Delegate Meeting held at Head Office, London, on Saturday 16 October and Sunday 17 October 1993

1. Comrade H. Vallar (Glasgow) was elected to chair the meeting.
2. Com D. Perrin (Central) was elected a teller.
3. Permission was given for delegates to sit from Birmingham (no special meeting) and Islington (no Form C).

4. Should members unable to attend the Special Branch meeting to vote on Conference Agenda be able to send in a postal vote to the Branch to be included in the count? (West London).

J. North (West London) drew attention to the anomaly whereby all Central Branch got a postal vote on Conference resolutions while members of full branches who were unable to attend the special Conference voting meeting of their branches, for instance through shift-working, were disfranchised.

Opinion was divided. Most delegates were opposed on the grounds that hearing the discussion before voting was important. Those in favour replied that already 44% of the membership (those in Central Branch) voted without the benefit of this, so this was no a matter of principle.

5. The use and abuse of Amendments and Addendums to Conference Resolutions (West London).

This item arose out of an addendum to a rescinding resolution that was on the 1993 Conference agenda and which some members had felt was out of order. In the discussion it emerged that the Standing Orders Committee did have the power to rule certain amendments out of order but that the present committee was reluctant to use this being composed only of one person.

6. If Conference remains at three days, what can we do to make the third day more interesting for members and non-members? (West London).

A. Buick (General Secretary) explained that, mainly for financial reasons, Conway Hall had only been booked for 2 days for 1994 Conference; the intention was that the third day should be devoted to some activity in connexion with the June Euro-elections.

Other suggestions that emerged were: a Conference lecture, workshops, a day-school. Also that, for the other days, branches should put down interesting, political matters for discussion instead of boring, administrative ones (as they had for this ADM).

7. How can we reverse the average monthly deficit of £2000 of expenditure over income? (West London).

This item was based on the figures for the first few months of 1993, which were exceptional. The shortfall had since been halved, partly due to the expenditure of £3000 in this period on a computer and DTP programme to typeset the Standard. All the same, monthly expenditure was still exceeding average monthly income.

8. Print Department Report

C. Begley (Print Dept) explained that, as soon as they had mastered how to use the camera to make plates, the Dept would be in a position to resume printing leaflets, pamphlets and documents. Printing the Standard again, however, was unlikely for at least six months since this depended on finding more volunteers. He added that the Standard was still being collated each month on our own equipment.

9. Publications Department Report

P. Lawrence (SW London) proposed a pamphlet on the current economic crisis, but insisted that it should not be based on the Report of the

Crises Committee which advanced a view that the Party had never accepted, viz that capitalism could lapse into a state of permanent stagnation.

J. North (Advertising): his Dept felt strongly that priority should be given to reprinting the "Socialism As A Practical Alternative" pamphlet over any pamphlet discussing abstruse points of economic theory.

S. Coleman (EC) hoped any pamphlet on the crisis would not discuss the matter in historical terms but the effect of the current crisis on the working class; it should not be a work of economic theory.

D. Perrin (Crises Committee): the Report had not said that the current crisis was the beginning of a period of permanent stagnation; it had merely held this out as a long-term prospect as opposed to the idea that capitalism could continue for ever. He didn't envisage this debate being included in any pamphlet.

T. Lawler (SW London) and P. Lawrence (SW London) moved:

"That this Delegate Meeting recommends to the EC that they give approval for publication of a propaganda pamphlet on the subject of the present economic slump". Carried 8-4.

#### 10. Socialist Standard Department Report

D. Trainer (Glasgow): his branch were not satisfied with the short replies to letters in the Standard.

G. Thomas (Editorial Committee) replied that the idea was not to give authoritative replies handed down by the editorial committee, but to allow members and others to write in with appropriate replies.

#### 11. The significance of the D of P to our written propaganda (SE London).

E. Coffey (SE London): his branch disagreed with the EC's decision not to put our Declaration of Principles on the Euro-election manifesto; this was a fine statement of our case which had yet to be improved on and so should be put before the maximum possible number of workers.

R. Donnelly (EC Member) replied that our primary aim was to communicate our case to workers in as simple a manner as possible; the EC wanted the manifesto to be a short, simple statement of our case to attract the maximum number of replies; respondents would of course be sent literature which would contain the D of P.

#### 12. The relevance of photo's accompanying articles in the Socialist Standard (SE London).

W. Buchanan (SE London): his branch felt that not all photos and illustrations had always been entirely relevant to the articles they accompanied.

C. Slapper (Standard Design Member) replied, appealing to writers and members to send in photos.

#### 13. Should there be a regular humorous column in the Socialist Standard? (Manchester).

Most delegates felt this was easier said than done. Those currently writing what they thought were humorous columns were not amused.

#### 14. Campaigns Department Report -- Summer School

R. Headicar (Central Organiser) said that this year the Belfast comrades were planning a school in Ireland; another school would be organised on the mainland, possibly at Ruskin College, Oxford.

#### 15. Media Department Report

Delegates felt that this 2-page report - which set out concrete plans to get us on every TV screen by the end of the decade - was an excellent one and indicated the direction in which we should be moving. Some delegates wondered whether we had anyone suitable to appear on TV and

urged that training begin now.

#### 16. Campaigns Department Report - Euroelections

D. Trainer (Campaigns): the Dept's plans for the Euro-election involved posters, perhaps a campaign van, some meetings and approaches to schools for their mock elections; generally this would take the form of aiding local initiatives by the contesting branches.

#### 17. Elections Department Report

B. Montague gave a talk, with projections, explaining the aims and methods to be employed in next year's Euro-election campaign. Basically, the aim was to use it as a mass leafleting campaign in which one million leaflets would be distributed by the Post Office. The target would be to obtain up to 7500 replies (an 0.75% response rate), each of whom would be sent a personalised letter and a literature pack. The success of the campaign would be able to be judged by whether or not we established a mailing list of thousands, increased the circulation of the Standard by 200 and obtained 25 new members by December 1994. This would be a quite different campaign from those the Party had engaged in in the past; no doubt postering, canvassing, etc would go on locally but the main work would be at Head Office where 20 or so members would be needed to open the post, key in the information to computers, and envelope the replies. He appealed for volunteers and also for the loan of computers.

18. The need to maximise support for the European election campaign (Camden).

19. What more can be done in this election campaign rather than in previous campaigns - what new ideas can be used? (Camden)

20. The need for a positive, analytical and constructive Euro-election manifesto in place of the draft proposed (Enfield & Haringey).

21. What new literature is needed for the European election campaign, what existing literature needs revision? (Camden).

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey) outlined the reasons why his branch felt that the present draft for the manifesto was inadequate: it didn't comply with a 1992 Conference resolution which had called for our literature to adopt a positive approach emphasizing that we stood for a democratic world using ecologically-appropriate production methods. The present draft adopted a negative approach, criticising the rich and outlining the defects of the profit system.

S. Coleman (EC Member) defended the existing text. He favoured a class approach and not Comrade Bradley's "One Green World".

Most delegates felt lost in the discussion as they had not seen the draft (which, due to some administrative error, had not been sent out with the agenda).

P. Lawrence (SW London) and F. Simpkins (SW London) moved:

"This ADM recommends that the EC appoint an ad hoc committee to discuss and consult with members for the purpose of producing the best possible manifesto for the European elections".

EC members explained that they were working to a time-table and had called for draft manifestos in January to be submitted for discussion at the July EC meeting. Only two had been received by the deadline and one of these had been adopted after paragraph by paragraph discussion and amendment. Although it was theoretically possible to change the wording at what was now the last minute this was not a serious way of going about Party business; the EC had been delegated by the membership to do a job and had done it.

The floor resolution was lost 4-9.

22. "The Report of the Executive Committee and Party Departments on their Planned Activity in 1994" was adopted on a motion of E. Coffey and W. Buchanan.

### 23. Fraternal Greetings from America

Comrade L. Fenton, of the WSP of the US, who was attending ADM with Comrade R. Elbert, conveyed fraternal greetings. He also suggested that we consider changing our name to World Socialist Party.

A discussion on this ensued during which delegates were reminded that a Party Poll to do this had been defeated in 1986 by 229 votes to 72. Some delegates were still in favour of such a change. Others were not.

24. Does the Party give the impression that we are utopian? (SW London)  
F. Simpkins (SW London) again replied that we did, as by talking about "the future society" and by giving the impression that we stood for the immediate abolition of all prisons, armies and police forces.

P. Lawrence (SW London) concurred. By appearing to offer an ideal vision of a future society we were being what Marx had meant by "utopian".

R. Headicar (Islington): the SW London comrades lacked imagination. Things that appeared unchangeable could change, as socialists ought to be the first to recognise.

S. Coleman (EC Member): the word "utopian" had two senses: impossible in the technical sense and impossible in the ideological sense. In saying that certain features of existing capitalist society could not be abolished Comrade Simpkins was succumbing to the ideological pressures of capitalist apologists who naturally saw a socialist society without prisons and police as utopian (in their sense). Since SW London branch were turning this discussion into a six-monthly event members should read "Marx and Utopia" by Vincent Geoghegan as the textbook.

M. Judd (SE London) also objected to using "utopian" in a perjorative sense. Marx had not criticised the utopian socialists for their aims - he had in fact got many of his ideas from them and freely acknowledged this - but their methods (appealing to rulers and governments, etc).

### 25. The Nature of Common Ownership - its practical implications (Islington).

R. Cox (Islington) expanded on his branch's circular on the subject. Our Object could be interpreted as meaning that we thought that every single human on the planet would in practice have an equal say in the way in which every single productive resource or instrument of production should be used. This of course was absurd, but we could avoid giving this impression if we emphasised that local communities would in a sense have greater "ownership rights" over some resources than the generality of humanity. At the same time we should speak of "reciprocity" rather than "free access" as this brought out that socialism involved people adopting a responsible, caring attitude as well as taking what they needed to satisfy their material requirements.

R. Cook (Birmingham) felt that Comrade Cox's proposed new formulations were too tainted with sociological jargon.

P. Lawrence (SW London): these points had already been covered in the Production for Use Committee reports and in the "Socialism As A Practical Alternative" pamphlet. He added that not only would local communities exercise a greater degree of control over certain resources than the generality of humanity, but so would those operating particular productive units. This is what was involved by the different levels of democratic decision-making - local, regional and world - that we recognised would exist in socialist society.

A. Buick (EC Member): as socialism would be a "non-property" society we could envisage the concept of property and ownership disappearing and being replaced by that of use and control. So, instead of talking of local communities having greater "ownership rights" we could talk of them exercising greater rights of democratic control.

Branches not represented: Belfast, Bolton, Edinburgh, Lancaster, SE Manchester, Swansea, West Yorkshire.