

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN
33, Gloucester Place, London, W.1.

REPORT OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1942.

FIRST DAY.

The Acting General Secretary called the meeting to order at 11.25 a.m.
Chairman - C. Groves.
Vice Chairman - E. Lake.
Tellers - Kersley, Turner and Anbridge.

The Standing Orders Committee reported that of 16 Branches with 455 members, 12 Branches had representation with 25 Delegates. Two branches - Marylebone (newly formed) and Leyton (re-formed), were asking permission to sit delegates. Tottenham had not complied with the rule governing Forms 'C' and needed the permission of Conference to sit. Some delegates had no credentials (Glasgow). The report was adopted.

RESOLUTION - Butler and McLaughlin Jn. "That Glasgow delegates be allowed to sit." Carried 16 - 0.

RESOLUTION - Lawrence and Hampson. "Permission be granted to delegates of Marylebone and Leyton to sit." Carried 16 - 0.

RESOLUTION - Howard and Gratton. "Tottenham delegates be allowed to sit." Carried 16 - 0.

REPORT OF 38TH E.C.

The question was raised as to why the principle of the second ballot had not been applied in the election for the vacancy on the E.C.

RESOLUTION - McLaughlin and Hayden. "That this Conference deprecate the action of the E.C. in allowing Comrade George to sit, and of Comrade George in taking his seat contrary to rule 12." Lost 7-16.

E.C. RULING (Sending of Matter to Press).

It was agreed to defer this item until later and to consider it in connection with Comrade Hutchins' Item for Discussion.

END OF SUSPENSION OF COMRADE JACOMB.

The Central Organiser reported that arrangements had been made for a London Party Meeting to discuss the issues in controversy and that Comrade Jacomb had been invited to attend.

RESOLUTION - McLaughlin and Hayden. "That a committee of three of the delegates at this Conference be appointed to inquire into and report on the issues at stake between Comrade Jacomb, the E.C. and the Editorial Committee, and to report their findings to the next Annual Conference."

Moved by McDowell and Butler. "The vote be taken." Cd. 14 - 13.
Resolution Lost 6 - 28.

The Standing Orders Committee reported that Comrade Hayden was not entitled to sit, as he had been a member of the E.C. whose work was under review.

RESOLUTION - Price and Howard. "That the business conducted be ratified." AGREED.

D.M. RESOLUTION ON PROPAGANDA AND PROPAGANDA COMMITTEE'S REPORT.

RESOLUTION - Price and Howard (Bloomsbury). "This Conference urges the E.C. to consider the advisability of holding more mass meetings at large halls such as Conway Hall with several speakers." Cd. 13 - 5.

The Standing Orders Committee reported that 15 Branches were now represented by 33 delegates. Only one branch was not represented. S.W. London asked that permission be granted to Comrade Elliott to sit in place of Hayden.

RESOLUTION - Gilman and Howard. "Permission be granted." Carried 27 - 0.

RESOLUTIONS ON AGENDA.

MANCHESTER (I) - "That this Conference, whilst having due regard for existing difficulties, censures the late E.C. for its failure to utilise what opportunities do exist for presenting within the pages of the 'S.S.' the Socialist case on the present war, and the issues arising therefrom, and requests the present E.C. to make good this omission."

AMENDMENT (Bloomsbury).

"That this Conference approves the action of the late E.C. To deal with the war adequately from our point of view would almost certainly result in difficulty in getting our literature printed, and thus preclude us from getting our Socialist message to the working class. As we are a Socialist Party, and not merely an anti-war party, we would be failing in our duty to the working class if we endangered our literature in order to explain our attitude upon only one of the facets of Capitalism." Carried 23 - 15.

As sub-Res. Carried 23 - 15.

MANCHESTER (II) - "That because of circumstances arising out of the war, this Conference is of the opinion that the existence of a Paid Party Organiser cannot be justified from either a financial or, more particularly, a propaganda viewpoint, and, therefore, requests the E.C. to act in line with this opinion."

Lost 10 - 26.

Comrade Gilman asked why no discussion was being permitted on these resolutions. The Chairman replied that it was the usual practice, and that presumably delegates had instructions from their branches.

RESOLUTION - Walker and Cash. "That discussion be allowed on the Resolutions and Amendments to Rules on the Agenda and that this be retrospective."

AMENDMENT - Inertens and Price. "Discussion on S.W. London Resolution on Trade Unions be allowed." Lost 13 - 16. Resolution 0316-12.

1 p.m. Meeting adjourned for lunch. Resumed 2 p.m.

RESOLUTION - Walker and Overs. "That votes on the Resolutions taken be cancelled." Lost 9 - 16.

Discussion then ensued on the Manchester Resolution (I) and the Bloomsbury Amendment. It was agreed to take the BLOOMSBURY ITEM FOR DISCUSSION also in this connection.

"Is the policy pursued in the 'S.S.' in line with the Party's attitude to war, and is it expressed as adequately as possible under existing circumstances."

In Support of Manchester Resolution the following points were made:-

A more vigorous attitude in the 'S.S.' was possible in spite of the Defence Regulations. Better to preserve silence than to water down our opposition to all conditions of Capitalism besetting the working class, including the calamity of War. It was incumbent on the Party to make a statement and no attempt had been made to produce any adequate statement on the Socialist opposition to war.

The reason of expediency offered by the Editorial Committee appeared untrue. The alleged differences within the Party were not of such a character that no common agreement could be reached. Judgement regarding the outcome of the war and of the nature of Fascism, as well as the issue of Spain, had been put forward as insurmountable obstacles. Our approach to the question of war had not changed from the traditional attitude. Preferences shown in the manner expressed by some members regarding victory for the Allied Powers should be condemned, and the resignation of those members called for. Vagueness of the S.P. attitude to war in the S.S. was inimical to the Party's revolutionary character. Propaganda could not be conducted without reference to the war. If we had nothing effective to say, it would be better to shut up shop. A delegate wished to be able to return to his branch and say that the Party was still one hundred per cent Anti-War, despite the wayside incidentals involved, such as Fascism.

Another Delegate stated that there appeared to be no intention of the Government to suppress small papers, and instanced "War Commentary." Even so, we could carry on without the S.S. in its present form.

There was some evidence of disquiet amongst the membership regarding the revised attitude to war. The statement of the Editorial Committee that some improvement had been made in the S.S. was an admission of error.

Against the Manchester Resolution the following points were made:-

The statement regarding improvement was not an admission of error. The situation had been and is always considered in relation to the Defence Regulations, which could at any time be employed against those papers which could be interpreted as having a depressing effect on the war effort. Quotations from statements made by Herbert Morrison in the Commons with regard to 'Peace News' indicated the danger of defying the Regulations. To even say that the war was waged for unworthy ends would be construed as an offence. We do not water down our position or intend to preserve silence, but to use necessary caution. The Home Secretary had warned that even the absence of motive would not absolve those who produced such effects in the minds of others as to depress. Regarding vagueness in the 'S.S.', our attitude to war was understood by those who observed the implications of our object and Principles.

Would those who call for expulsion in the case of members showing preferences also want the expulsion of those who supported the Republicans in Spain? We had not a fixed attitude to all and every war which arose, as instance the issues of the Russo-Jap War and Spain. The Editorial Committee Statement on Attitude to War showed clearly that we consider the circumstances in relation to its effects on the Socialist Objective, and to the consequences of such a war. In the last war, a blank column represented an article written by a member (censored). A quotation made from the S.S. of 1916 showed that the attitude to this question of expediency was the same then as now.

Other Points in Discussion were:-

Can we at least defend the Democratic privileges being whittled away and filched from the working class. Britain now under a virtual dictatorship. A delegate opposed both the Resolution and the Amendment, considering neither to fairly represent the view of the Party.

The E.C.'s circular to branches of March 3rd, containing the letter of Manchester Branch to the E.C. and the E.C.'s reply, was extensively quoted.

GREETINGS FROM THE U.S.A.

During the proceedings the Chairman interrupted to announce the arrival of a cablegram from the Workers' Socialist Party of the United States:-
"TO THE 38TH ANNUAL SOCIALIST CONFERENCE
"GREETINGS FROM YOUR AMERICAN COMRADES" - W.S.P. OF U.S.

The Chairman refused permission for S.W. London Delegates to raise the question of the re-instatement of Comrade Hayden as delegate.
Discussion then took place on Manchester Resolution (II).

HACKNEY RESOLUTION (I)

"That the ban by the E.C. on the pamphlet "War and the Working Class" be lifted." Lost 12 - 21.

HACKNEY RESOLUTION (II)

"That the pamphlet 'Socialism and Religion' be reprinted." Lost 8 - 25.

IT WAS [redacted] stated that the pamphlet had 'dated', was Spencerian, and among other reasons its nebulous attitude made it unsuitable for re-publication. What was needed was a statement against organised religion. It was pointed out that a short chapter on the subject would appear in the pamphlet "Questions of the Day". A Delegate considered that articles in the 'S.S.' could deal adequately with the question of religion.
S.W. LONDON RESOLUTION (T.U.)

"That Party members be required to be members of their appropriate Trade Unions, and that only members whose occupation is outside of Trade Union limits, or members who have a valid reason for non-membership of their Union, be excepted. The validity of the reason given to be decided by the Branch, or in the case of disagreement, by the E.C."

RESOLUTION - Walker and McLaughlin. "That the item be deferred until Saturday after lunch." Lost 7 - 14.

After considerable discussion, Adler and Overs moved:-

"That the vote be taken." Carried 15 - 12. The Resolution was put to the vote. Lost 17 - 24.

REPORT DAY.

The Meeting was called to order at 11.30 a.m.
Chairman - C. Groves.
Vice Chairman - Lew Davis.
Tellers - Hallard and Lester.

The Standing Orders Committee reported 24 Delegates representing 14 Branches.
Report adopted.

FINANCE REPORT. - McLaughlin asked whether the report was covered by the Finance Committee, and observed that it was not signed by the Auditors.

RESOLUTION - McLaughlin and Howard. "That consideration of the report be deferred until attendance of the Treasurer." Carried Unan.
It was pointed out that Comrades Nichols and Catt had audited the books.

PREMISES COMMITTEE REPORT and the PREMISES COMMITTEE'S REPORT TO THE E.C. OF 25.11.41.

RESOLUTION - Howard and Gilman. "That the Premises Committee Report of the 25.11.41. to the E.C. be referred back to the present E.C. as we do not consider it a matter for the consideration of Conference." Lost 6 - 13.

RESOLUTION - Beck and Mills (Hadkney). "That this Conference recommends to the E.C. that a Full Time Paid Head Office Assistant be appointed as soon as funds permit."
Cash and Clark moved "The vote be taken." Lost 7 - 14.

AMENDMENT - Overs and Canello. "To delete all after appointed."
Overs and Adler moved "The vote be taken." Carried 14 - 3.
The Amendment was then put to the vote and Carried 21 - 5.
Moved • Lawrence and Howard. "That the question be referred to a committee to be set up as per the suggestion of S.W. London Branch, under Items for Discussion, was refused by the Chairman for the reason that as the Item had not yet been discussed, it could not be assumed that Conference would adopt the recommendation to set up the suggested committee.

SECOND AMENDMENT - Lawrence and Howard. "That the E.C. be recommended to set up a committee to deal with this recommendation. Lost 8 - 18.

THE SUBSTANTIVE RESOLUTION

"That this Conference recommends to the E.C. that a Full Time Paid Head Office Assistant be appointed", was then put to the vote and carried, 24 - 4.

At this juncture the Central Organiser asked for his Report to be dealt with at four o'clock in the afternoon. This was agreed.

PARTY FUNDS ORGANISER'S REPORT.

RESOLUTION - Cash and May. "This Conference places on record its appreciation of the work done by the Ex Party Funds Organiser" Carried Unanimously.

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE'S REPORT. - NO ACTION.

CENTRAL BRANCH REPORT.

A suggestion was made that Central Branch members should be urged to make and maintain contact with contiguous members.

DEFERRED PARTY POLL.

RESOLUTION - Beck and Mills (Hadkney). "That the E.C.'s action be endorsed and that the Poll be not proceeded with". Carried 25 - 7.

Some criticism was made of the E.C. for breaking Rule 26. On the other hand it was argued that a call for such a Poll in the war situation placed the Party and Party members in jeopardy. That consideration should be shown for the spirit and not the letter of the rules. Not the E.C. but the branch which forced the E.C. calls for castigation. Rule 25 backs the E.C.'s action in calling a Party Meeting on what was a Politically Important Issue.

Considerable time was needed to alter rules, and the E.C. had to act in the Party interest. The E.C.'s action should not create a precedent.

AMENDMENTS TO RULES.

AMENDMENT TO RULE 18 (S.W. LONDON). - Clark and Hyams moved "The vote be taken". Lost 8 - 15.

1 p.m. Meeting Adjourned for Lunch. Resumed 2.5 p.m.

RESOLUTION - Lawrence and Price. "That delegates be limited to speeches of five minutes in discussion on Amendments and Addendums to Rules." Carried 16 - 8.
The Amendment to Rule 18 was put to the Vote and Lost 12 - 25

AMENDMENT TO RULE 9 (HACKNEY) - Clark and Hyams moved "The vote be taken". Carried 22 - 6.
The Amendment was put to the vote and lost 4 - 31.

AMENDMENT TO RULE 20 (Palmer's Green.)...Lost 13 - 24.

ADDENDUM TO RULE 26 (Palmer's Green.)...Lost 4 - 34.
and SOUTHEAST AMENDMENT.....Lost 10 - 29.

AMENDMENT AND ADDENDUM TO RULE 12 (Palmer's Green.).....Lost 8 - 21.

AMENDMENT TO RULE 19 (Palmer's Green.).....Lost 12 - 17.

E.C. AMENDMENT TO RULE 12

"To delete the fourth sentence, and insert the following:-
'Members of less than six months' standing, full-time Paid Party Officials, and those holding full-time paid Party positions, shall not be eligible for candidature." Cd. 23 - 11.

MANCHESTER ITEM FOR DISCUSSION.

"The method of appointment of the present paid Party Propagandist, and the procedure to be adopted in the future".

RESOLUTION - Overs and Nichols. "That in view of the circumstances, and in view of the endorsement received at the Delegate Meeting, the method of the appointment of the present propagandist be endorsed."

"That any future Full Time Paid Propagandist should be nominated by branches and subject to a Party Poll. The principle of the second ballot to apply."

AMENDMENT: - Maertens and Beck. "To delete the first part, and the word 'future' be deleted and insert 'Party Officials or'." Lost 10-21.

AMENDMENT - Hyams and Clark. "To delete the second part of the resolution".
Carried 22 - 8.
As Sub.Res. Carried 20 - 6.

RESOLUTION - Overs and Nichols. "That the second part stand as a resolution"

The Chairman accepted this procedure on the grounds that the original resolution had been awkward and complicated.

AMENDMENT - Leck and Mills. "That full time paid speakers employed by branches be elected by those branches, and full time paid speakers of the Party be elected by a Party Poll". Lost 6 - 16.
Second Part Resolution Carried.....25 - 7.

The Standing Orders Committee reported that 35 delegates represented 15 branches.
Report adopted.

OVERSEAS SECRETARY REPORT.

On the motion of Lawrence and Sykes, it was agreed to send the following message of greeting to Companion Parties abroad:-

"On the occasion of this third Annual Conference since the outbreak of war, the delegates present today forward to their comrades in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the U.S.A. their most cordial and fraternal greetings, determined to carry on the hard, laborious but essential spadework for Socialism, and resolved to propagate and keep alive the principle of

International Working Class Fraternity. In the midst of our common hardships and difficulties, we send a message of encouragement to our comrades overseas."

CENTRAL ORGANISER'S REPORT.

RESOLUTION - Price and Hoffman. (Bloomsbury). "This Conference instructs the E.C. to appoint a committee to examine the practicable possibilities of the scheme proposed in the Central Organiser's Report to the Conference."

The Chairman suggested that the S.W. London Item for Discussion be dealt with in connection with this report. S.W. London Delegates agreed.

THE - 'The advisability of setting up a committee of five to examine the internal working of the Party machine, with a view to making such recommendations as they may deem necessary. The committee to have power to co-opt other comrades in an advisory capacity, and branches be asked to submit recommendations: the Party records to be placed at the disposal of the committee, and a report to be submitted to the Party Conference 1943.'

DEFERRING - Cash and Jefferies. "That consideration of the resolution be MOTION deferred until the Report in general be considered." Cd. 13 - 11.

Questions and discussion ensued on the arrangements at Head Office, the Central Organiser's activities in connection therewith, and the reasons for the partial breakdown in the running of classes.

The Central Organiser stated that most of the work in initiating the classes had been his. That Comrade Lester's class on History and Economics had been very successfully continued for several months until Lester's unavoidable absence through illness. The difficulties had mostly arisen at the Friday discussions, where insufficient support had been extended by speakers. With more willing co-operation from speakers, Friday discussions would be a continued success. Further criticism was made of neglect to maintain the continuation of what had been for several months a very satisfactory beginning. A Glasgow Delegate asked why the Report stated that no Forms 'C' had been received from Glasgow and Southend. It was replied that the Report had been made up for 1941 and before the receipt of any Forms 'C' from those branches. Considerable discussion followed on the question of Party Organisation, the Plan proposed by the Central Organiser for London 'Regional' activities, and the Party's capacity for meeting its tasks in difficult war conditions.

AMENDMENT - McLaughlin and Walker. "That the S.W. London Branch Item for Discussion be taken as an amendment."

The acceptance of this amendment by the Chair was challenged. The Chairman averred that as it enlarged the scope of the scheme it was in order.

The Amendment was carried 16 - 12 and as Sub.Res. Cd. 17 - 7.

The Conference reverted to the REPORT OF THE 38TH E.C.

BRANCHES AND MEMBERSHIP. It was agreed to take also Item for Discussion (Palmer's Green).

"That from the time that a Form 'A' is presented to a branch in respect of a prospective member, a period of three months elapse, during which period the prospective member be required to attend at least eight branch meetings, prior to the Form being voted upon in the branch."

It was further agreed to take the Glasgow Item for Discussion re Rule I.

"After the word 'consideration' (Line 5), insert:- 'The branch shall satisfy itself that the applicant understands the Object and Principles of the Party'."

Questions were put to the Central Organiser regarding the lapsing and resignation of members. It was pointed out that most had lapsed, and that only one had resigned because of differences with the Party. Many members had been unable to keep contact with the Party for reasons of the war, and had perforce to be lapsed after a considerable time. Some members had lapsed through branches winding up. No action could be taken on these 'Items' affecting Rules.

MEETING ADJOURNED 5.55 P.M.

2 P.M.

Meeting was called to order at 11.20 a.m.
- C. Groves.
- E. Lake.
- Butler and Criffman.

Standing Orders Committee reported that 17 delegates represented 10 branches. Delegates' credentials had arrived in order. Report adopted.

FINANCE AND MEMBERSHIP (Contd.)

RESOLUTION - McLaughlin Jr. and Lee. "That this Conference refers the suggested alteration to the method of enrolment of new members contained in the Palmers Green Itas for Discussion to the committee that this Conference has already recommended that the E.C. set up for examination of Party machinery and organisation".
Carried 10 - 9.
The vote was challenged and again recorded 10 - 9.

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION (GLASGOW) RE. RULE 1. NO ACTION.

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION (GLASGOW) RE. RULE 2 (Line 1) & RULE 9 (Line 2). NO ACTION.

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION (GLASGOW) RE. RULE 2 (Line 5) & RULE 2 (Line 7). NO ACTION.

E.C. RULING 2.2.41. re SENDING OF MATTER TO PRESS and COMRADE HUTCHINS' ITEM FOR DISCUSSION.

"That any member sending written matter to the Press, shall supply the E.C. with a copy of the publication containing the contribution. If such a contribution misrepresents the Party position, the General Secretary shall send a correction to the publication concerned."

RESOLUTION - Lawrence and Price (Bloomsbury). "That this Conference re-affirms the existing restrictions on sending of matter to the Press."
Carried 22 - 6.

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION (COMRADE HUTCHINS).

"The advisability of deleting the Card Vote at Delegate Meetings, and substituting the right of any two delegates to demand a Party Poll on the subject voted upon."

RESOLUTION - McLaughlin and Bowie. "That the E.C. Item for Discussion for Comrade Hutchins re Card Vote and Party Poll at Delegate Meetings be referred to the committee to be set up to examine Party machinery." Carried 28 - 0.

FINANCE STATEMENT.

The Treasurer was questioned re Audit and replied that the Books had been audited by Comrades Catt and Nichols, but that they had not signed the Report. Bloomsbury Delegates asked why the statement had been signed 'Finance Committee' when in fact no Finance Committee had functioned during the period. The Treasurer stated that the Ex. General Secretary (Comrade Boucher) had acted as the Finance Committee and that the analytical comments were his. Delegates insisted that in future the rules be adhered to. The Chairman on request read out the Terms of Reference of the Finance Committee.

1 P.M. Meeting adjourned for lunch. Resumed 2 P.M.

RESOLUTION - Price and Adler. "The E.C.'s action in paying £9 to Comrade Turner for sickness be endorsed."
Carried 14 - 5.

PUBLICATIONS. NO ACTION.

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION (HACKNEY).

'Are the statements contained in the letter of the E.C. to Hackney Branch dated 7.8.41 contrary to the Party position on war'.

MANCHESTER LETTER TO THE E.C. AND THE E.C.'S REPLY.

A criticism from Manchester Branch of the statements in question and the E.C.'s reply were read to the Conference. The Acting Secretary regretted that copies were not available for delegates, but would be circulated to branches immediately after Conference.