

The Socialist Party 2007 Autumn Delegate Meeting



Volume III Full Proceedings

52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN

20–21 October 2007

Foreword

These proceedings reproduce as faithfully as possible the oral contributions made to the 2007 Autumn Delegate Meeting. Where a contributor has spoken too quickly or indistinctly for a verbatim record, I have attempted to preserve at least the substance of their arguments. Because these proceedings cannot be formally amended and adopted by all the meeting participants, this record should not be viewed as definitive but rather as the best effort of a single fallible comrade.

A brief summary of the discussions is available as a separate document. No claim regarding which version of the proceedings is more “correct” or “official” is expressed or implied; the two versions have been produced to satisfy the different needs of different Party members. It is expected that for most readers the summary will be more than sufficient; on the other hand, members holding Party offices or on Departments/Committees may find it useful to review this version’s more detailed record of discussion on their reports. Also, as this version gives speakers’ names, it provides some measure of accountability for Branches; they can use it to confirm that their delegates have spoken as instructed.

Note that speakers’ names are followed by a Branch affiliation only when speaking as elected delegates. When it is stated or presumed that a member is speaking in an official capacity or on behalf of a Department or Committee, that affiliation is listed instead of or in addition to the Branch affiliation.

Tristan Miller
Assistant Secretary
London, 23 November 2007

Proceedings

The Assistant Secretary called the meeting to order on Saturday, 20 October at 10:30.

A. Election of Chair, Deputy Chair, and Tellers by Delegates

Upon a nomination from **Vanni (Glasgow)**, it was agreed that **Johnstone (Edinburgh)** would be Chair.

B. Fraternal greetings from Companion Parties, Branches and members

The Chair read fraternal greetings from the overseas group in Uganda and from M Martin.

C. Arrangements by Delegates of the order of taking the Items of Business

The Chair read an e-mail from McEwan (Manchester) asking if all Items for Discussion could be held over until the second day of the meeting.

Johnson, Swansea We tried this in the past and it was better to deal with the Items for Discussion and Reports together.

Buick, West London Why does the agenda place the Item for Discussion on 9/11 conspiracy theories next to the Report from the Central Organiser? How are the two related?

It was agreed to adopt the proposed agenda as-is.

D & E. The Executive Committee and the Party Officers’ Reports and Branch Items for Discussion

1. ~~Report of the General Secretary~~ (vacant)

2. Report of the Assistant Secretary

Vanni, Glasgow The commissioned logo looks dreadful. It conveys nothing. Three hundred pounds has been thrown away.

McLellan, Lancaster Windle made some logos a few years ago and was happy to do more.

Bennett, Manchester Are these SPGB logos or WSM logos? We shouldn’t include words if it’s a WSM logo.

Moss, Swansea The best ones for both the SPGB and WSM are the ones done by Terry King; they are most effective and attractive in this day and age.

D Chesham, Central London/EC I note the electronic display has been fixed. We should express appreciation for what Assistant Secretary has been doing since the General Secretary has resigned. I wish to clear up the impression from recent EC minutes that EC members were not happy with his continued presence at Head Office, which doesn't reflect the expressions of gratitude he received from the EC.

3. Report of the General Purposes Committee (vacant)

P Deutz, EC The EC cannot decide to abolish the GPC; this is something the Party membership must do.

4. Item for discussion: The nature of EC minutes

Buick, West London The EC minutes are too long and too detailed, especially the first two or three pages, which seem to have become devoted to amendments to previous meetings. Making the minutes too detailed and recording what individual members of the EC say leaves you open to too many amendments. This is not just the fault of minute taker, but also the chairs, who are not effective or forceful enough. Trivial matters such as behavioural misdemeanours in and around Head Office have been taking up too much EC time.

Miller, Assistant Secretary Buick is mistaken; the EC has never amended (and could never amend) any minutes other than those of the previous meeting.

D Chesham, Central London/EC West London Branch complain that the minutes are too detailed; others complain that they're not detailed enough. Regarding the complaints of trivial matters, the EC is bound to discuss items brought to it.

Vanni, Glasgow We are getting buried under a mountain of paper. It would help if whoever received the minutes picked out items of interest to Branch members.

Moss, Swansea I support Vanni. Minutes are meant to be a summary, not a verbatim report. There is overkill at the moment; a balance must be struck.

Carter, EC I agree with Moss. It is also unnecessary to record the contributions of non-EC members.

Johnson, Swansea Speaking from experience, minutes should contain brief, short summaries of what occurred, and certainly no comments from non-EC members. And they shouldn't record any comments made after a vote.

5. Report of the Central Organiser

Buick, Central Organiser We have a new South West Regional Branch.

Johnson, Swansea Where will they be meeting?

Buick, Central Organiser Half their membership is in Bristol, and half in Poole, so Salisbury looks to be the most convenient, but I have no idea at this point where they will continue to meet.

Lawrie, Central London I am glad to see that the Central Organiser is getting out in the country. North East Branch really needs to be pulled together, and maybe work is needed in other areas as well. I urge the Central Organiser in the forthcoming year to start pulling members together.

Gluck, West Midlands The report has no mention of Birmingham Branch being reformed into the West Midland Regional Branch.

Bennett, Manchester Is it just a renaming? Tell us more.

Gluck, West Midlands The reason for the renaming is that only a minority of members come from Birmingham. They come from all over the West Midlands.

Easton, non-delegate I am delighted that the South West Regional Branch has started and that Birmingham Branch has been reinvigorated. But can the South West and North East Branches be called South West/North East *of England*? They're not in the southwest or northeast of of Britain.

Stair, non-delegate Is there or is there not a Birmingham Branch now?

Foster, West Midlands No, it's now the West Midland Regional Branch, but the only difference is the name.

D Chesham, Central London/EC I am gratified that the Branch has been revitalised, and look forward to many months and years of success in that area. However, this is the first I've known about the renaming. This has not come in front of the EC, and as the Branch has not been in compliance with Rule 9 for three years, this is something the delegates should consider.

Johnstone, Chair Are we agreed that the delegates can sit?

It was agreed that the West Midland Regional Branch delegates could continue sit.

6. Item for discussion: The spread of 9/11 conspiracy theories

Buick, West London It is not incompatible with Party membership to hold such views, but it is odd, and we should explicitly repudiate such views.

Foster, West Midlands I am quite interested in conspiracy theories, though sceptical, and as Party members we should be sceptical of the mainstream media. We should approach these things sceptically, as with any other news media.

Easton, non-delegate I accept much of what Foster said, but we should go a bit further than "sceptical but open-minded". For example, it's highly unlikely that the American state engineered 9/11, and even more unlikely that it was a collaborative effort with Israel. However, we can ask what they knew beforehand, how much they knew, whether they thought the attack was likely, and whether they could have done more to prevent it. On conspiracy theories in general, capitalism is not a conspiracy, but there are conspiracies within it, which are probably less effective than many think they are. We need to take a sophisticated view: conspiracies do happen, and there may be elements of the 9/11 which are conspiracy-like (similar to Pearl Harbor).

D Chesham, Central London West London Branch says that they are concerned that some members are prepared to abandon a rational approach. Really? I don't see this at all. West London Branch is abandoning the rational approach because they are saying that we must either accept the official version as it appears in the mass media; anyone else receives the ignominious label of "conspiracy theorist". Many claims appearing in the *Socialist Standard* are bland, empty statements without any in-depth analysis. There are several well-known proven examples of true conspiracies—for example, Pearl Harbor, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, and Jessica Lynch. Some conspiracies are hysterical and undeserving of serious investigation, but some are not. It is ironic that author of this Item for Discussion is one of the most enthusiastic proponents of conspiracy theories in our Party, having claimed at the last Conference that smoking is not known to damage one's health, and having written on the mailing lists that the Party has been infiltrated by a hostile group.

Johnstone, Edinburgh There is no denying that there are cover-ups to take away responsibility for official mistakes, though this isn't exactly the same as most conspiracy theories.

Whitfield, Lancaster I agree with Foster; we don't need to go out of our way to repudiate these things, but we should refute them as they arise.

Stair, non-delegate There is the danger of using the *Standard* to address the members instead of going into greater depths in the facts of the matter and of others' arguments.

Vanni, Glasgow There seems to be some confusion with members mixing up conspiracy with propaganda. The Gulf of Tonkin Incident wasn't a conspiracy; it was just the American government telling a pack of lies. Same with Jessica Lynch.

Buick, West London This isn't just an abstract issue, because at anti-war demos there are people handing out conspiracy-theory leaflets. This is something we need to respond to.

7. Report of the Assistant Treasurer (none received)

8. Report of the Auditors (none received)

9. Report of the Trustees (none received)

10. Report of the Advertising Department and Report of the Enquiries Department

McLellan, Lancaster We've had adverts in *Nexus*, which is big on conspiracy theories. I'm horrified that we're advertising there.

Lee, Advertising Department We had an experimental series which was ended in May, and we got a number of replies.

Foster, West Midlands What about *Private Eye*?

Lee, Advertising Department Yes, we have advertised there in the past, and got a reasonable response, but that diminished.

Miller, non-delegate I have mentioned this at previous Conferences and ADMs, but it seems no notice is ever taken of it: we should be advertising in student newspapers, since it's often in university that young people begin to become interested in politics and political theory. Look at all the student political groups and clubs at every university.

Lee, Advertising Department One of the student newspapers, the *London Student*, doesn't have classified ads.

Stair, non-delegate The insertion in the *New Internationalist* has been very successful. This has been followed up with the *Big Issue*, whose rates are far better. Ten thousand leaflets are due for October, and 10 000 in Brighton in October, and 10 000 in East Anglia in February. Leaflets will be printed free of charge by a sympathiser. Another thing not mentioned in the reports is INK which has garnered a number of replies.

Lawrie, Central London I am concerned about the *Big Issue* inserts, speaking as a former *Big Issue* vendor. Ten thousand leaflets is a lot, particularly in London, and many of the vendors discard them to lessen their load.

Johnston, Edinburgh I would like to see an expense report/budget. Please do so for Conference.

11. Report of the Audio Department

D Chesham, Central London It is interesting that master tapes can be digitised. I would be willing to help.

Whitfield, Lancaster What is the Department's progress?

Stair, Audio Department Slow.

Johnstone, Edinburgh How many titles are currently available for sale?

Stair, Audio Department At the moment it is very difficult for us to produce tapes/CDs.

12. Report of the Ballot Committee

13. Report of the Campaigns Department

Vanni, Glasgow The Department has asked for £3000. The Committee itself should determine its budget. The EC must continue to screen all requests for funds.

Johnson, Campaigns Department The Campaigns Department has recently seen the suspension of Martin, the resignation of Bissett, and recently the resignation of Lancaster. With respect to the budget, the EC failed to understand the way the Campaigns Department is on possibilities. We cannot turn around and say, "Yes, we're going to do that." I would have liked the budget so that we could have bought some material rather than using the budget for planning for events. The days of the old paste-board tables are gone. We're looking at presentation on demos. The Department has purchased a suitable table and what needs to go with it is a banner and set of posters. In addition to that, we must buy some promotional material to make the stall or table more attractive. These would include pens with our name and address, mugs with a logo, and sweatshirts. We can't provide budgets for such things in advance. So far this year we managed to get one debate in Dublin. There are three further university debates in the works in Stirling, Manchester, and Keele. Finally, we had the idea of a Party calendar with business meeting dates. We need further members on the Department.

Johnstone, Edinburgh The Branch has always pressed for more presentations, badges, T-shirts, etc.

14. Report of the Treasurer and Financial Statement

Moss, Swansea Regarding the recent Northern Rock bank failure, at one point the Party had all its money in a fairly obscure private bank, and out of fear that it would collapse, most

of the money was transferred into an Alliance & Leicester account. Now there are reports that Alliance & Leicester is in trouble. If it were to collapse, we would get only £30 000. Should we consider transferring our money to an even bigger bank, and would that secure it?

Thomas, Treasurer I am not a financial adviser; I know next to nothing about which banks are in or out of danger. I remember big debates the Party had in the 1970s about opening a deposit account. Delegates should take this back to their Branches. Do we rely on the advice of members in this respect? Should we hire a financial adviser? Or should we cross our fingers?

Lawler, Central If it happened to Northern Rock, why not other banks? We must be careful dealing with financial advisers, and ask what their fees are, and whether they work on behalf of a particular company.

D Chesham, Central London What proportion of the Party's funds are in which accounts?

Thomas, Treasurer We are thinking of opening an HSBC account but it has not yet come before the EC. There is £30 000 in a private bank account and £300 000 in Alliance & Leicester.

Moss, Swansea When we transferred most of our money into Alliance & Leicester, it was because they had the highest rate of interest on deposit accounts. Who knows if this is still the case? If their rate of interest is no higher than other banks, they may be in trouble, and they give bad service. Perhaps we should consider transferring our money to another bank which at least seems on the surface to be more secure.

D Chesham, Central London Would it be appropriate for the ADM to ask the Treasurer to investigate this matter?

Wilcox, West London Alliance & Leicester is mentioned in the media as being at risk, so we shouldn't put all our money in one bank. We could hedge our bets by splitting our money evenly across three banks.

Stair, non-delegate We need convenience to be able to pop in and have a dialogue with the bank. There are three banks and building societies on this road so we should consider all of them.

15. Report of the Ad-hoc Committee Investigating the Circumstances Surrounding the Estate of the Late George Pooley

Allen, East Anglia I am delighted to see the small cost of the solicitor in recovering the money. But why is there this unexplained discrepancy?

Thomas, Ad-hoc Committee The solicitor advised us that the terms of the will weren't strictly complied with. The solicitors that were dealing with Pooley's estate didn't take into account the Party's interest in the estate and as a result he invested the money which put us in an uneven position with the other beneficiaries of the estate. They invested the money and it remained invested for a period during which, had the will been complied with, would have come straight to us. As there were fluctuations in the stock market, we may have lost out to the tune of £5000 to £8000. The Party needs to consider whether it's worth spending another £500 or whatever to chase this remaining money. We already have the bulk of the estate. If it requires a lot more toing and froing to tie up loose ends then it may not be worth it.

Allen, East Anglia So it's not really the solicitor's negligence; it's just how he handled it.

Johnson, Swansea My understanding from the beginning that the total amount left by Pooley was £148 000. The total amount provided by the solicitor is far less than that: £132 000. My reading of the will was that his sister and two nephews were the only named beneficiaries, and they received the interest from the sum that was invested. The surviving nephew phoned me up in the late 1990s and he was really concerned about the way it had been invested and how much payment they were receiving from the investment. At that time, the sum had shrunk to £142 000. Solicitors can claim expenses, but it seemed to me that this claim of £6000 was a bit on the large side. If we wish to contest this, the solicitor is obliged to provide all relevant documentation regarding the fund and

his administrative expenses. If there is any discrepancy, then he has committed fraud. When we add things up, we are missing £24 000.

Lawler, Central The quickest way is to request a certificate of remuneration which details his expenses.

16. Item for discussion: The pros and cons of setting up a small socialist community when the time is ripe.

Parker, Central London I invite members to join Allen and I on the Board of Directors for such a community, which will be funded by my estate. The time is not yet ripe; it's a long way off, but we must start somewhere.

Foster, West Midlands I'm in favour of such proposals to put into practice what has formerly been theoretical. Certainly the term "socialist community" will need to be clarified, as this obviously doesn't refer to an island of socialism within capitalism. The tricky bit is "when the time is ripe"—the time is always right; it's not necessarily in the future.

Allen, East Anglia I want to make it clear that Parker is only calling for people to sit on a committee; it's not to actually join such a group.

Trinder, South London This has been put up before and was turned down. It might start, but when it gets to a certain point, you start producing stuff not just for the small group but for outside people as well. You can only go by the kibbutzim in Israel, which started as small communities but ended up as large-scale productions.

Easton, non-delegate This shouldn't be confused with what Guildford Branch proposed in the 1980s. Stan isn't talking about the same sort of thing. What exactly would be involved now in sitting on such a committee, and how well-defined would its aims be?

Parker, Central London Initially, all I'm asking is if anyone is interested in the *idea* of setting up a small board who would then decide on how to go forward, and the number-one thing which I mention in my opening, and which I want to stress, is that a certain amount of money has to be there before a place can be purchased. I don't like the idea of renting, though that shouldn't be ruled out. Coming back to the question of the time, the time will be right to consider setting this up once a small number of members are prepared to take steps. And unless the Party generally on balance is ready to say to this organisational committee, go ahead. I published a booklet recently called *Commonweal* which sets out some provisional questions and answers on this subject; it is available from Head Office.

Stair, non-delegate This idea is a complete disaster and would be a disaster. You can't have a socialist community within capitalism. You can have a socialist community only in socialism. If you have a few people in a house with all the pressures of the outside world, you're going to have problems with money and with relationships, both within the group and from outside. This would be a very insular project by its very nature. It would give our opponents ammunition because of those inevitable comments.

Vanni, Glasgow If members want to do this, then fair enough, there's no harm in it. Parker has shown that he's well aware of the difficulties raised by Stair. These communities will happen irrespective of what we do.

Johnson, Swansea What concerns me is whether the time is right, and who is to decide when it is right. I propose it is for the working class, not the Party, to determine when the time is right. Also, I propose that it is going to be the working class who is going to set up any small socialist communities, and it won't be so contrived as what is proposed under this Item for Discussion.

17. Report of the Central Branch Secretary

Johnson, Central Branch Secretary I am expecting further activity in Africa. I want to get a set of standing orders for Central Branch to get them more involved politically. Hopefully the Branch will soon be voting for their own secretary, organiser, and treasurer.

18. Report of the Central Branch Organiser (none received)

19. Report of the Overseas Contacts Committee (vacant)

20. Report of the Overseas Group Secretary (vacant)

21. ~~World Socialist Correspondence Secretary~~ (vacant)
22. Item for discussion: Would it not be more efficient and safer for overseas members to be organised and administered directly under the banner of the WSM rather than the SPGB?
- Johnson, Central Branch Secretary** It's important to understand the difficulties of overseas members, particularly in Africa. The government's attitudes change from day to day. People can be locked up for political reasons at any time. We really need to consider that the administration of the overseas members comes under the umbrella of a world organisation rather than a foreign national organisation. They have far more leeway under the former.
- Donnelly, Glasgow** I've been to fifty-odd conferences, and there are always people saying we should have a WSM, but it never happens. And how would such an organisation operate? It's daft to say that a totalitarian regime would tolerate WSM affiliation but not SPGB.
- Easton, non-delegate** What reason do we have to think this is possible?
- Miller, non-delegate** The overseas members can reorganise themselves into a companion party on their own initiative and without our permission; there is no need to discuss this matter here.
23. Item for discussion: Would it not be more appropriate and flexible if all financial requests from overseas were judged on their merits after they have been confirmed and verified?
- Johnson, Central Branch Secretary** There is the possibility of three parties being formed in Africa. This is going to put us in a predicament: how do we set up these World Socialist Parties within Africa without providing them with financial support? In order to register as political parties, they have to deal with appropriate government offices, and that isn't cheap. Are we going to let them die on the vine from lack of financial support?
- Allen, East Anglia** To confirm or verify money transfers is practically impossible, as is confirming whether these comrades are genuine.
- Buick, West London** I am concerned that Johnson is encouraging members to form parties in Africa. I wouldn't send any money to Nigeria. We have been trying to get rid of them, to tell the truth. We can't verify these things, and we've been had before in Uganda.
- Miller, non-delegate** Registration as an official political party is not required to have an active and functioning socialist group. The Socialist Party of Canada isn't formally registered either, and yet it is active in spreading socialist propaganda. Once a group is large and active enough to start contesting elections, it will probably have the necessary funds to register.
- Donnelly, Glasgow** How were the Central London standing orders drafted? How were the items for discussion drafted and submitted?
- Johnson, Central Branch Secretary** The procedure is as follows: The Central Branch Organiser, not the Central Branch Secretary, is the person who organises the ballot on any item put to the Branch. When this item came from the comrades in Zambia, I sent it back to them for revision and suggested an alternative wording. This revised motion then went to the Branch for a vote. With regard to encouraging the comrades overseas to set up political parties, I plead guilty; that's my job!
- P Deutz, non-delegate** I have had correspondence with Justus Weijagye in Uganda in which he referred to European comrades and various organisations he was working with. I asked about their relationship with the Kabale Socialist Club.
- Stair, non-delegate** Perhaps we need to have a better way of administering Central Branch.
- Foster, West Midlands** If we are hesitant to send money overseas, why not send literature and help set up websites?
24. Item for discussion: What significance, if any, can be drawn from the populist movements rising up against Western intervention in Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia?
- Lawrie, Central London** In December, Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela, will put 120 amendments to its constitution to a referendum. Meetings have taken place all over

Venezuela and local branches of the recently established United Party of Venezuela, whose formation was announced only six months ago, and whose first congress is likely to take place in December. The PSUV has become more or less a part of the state. The PSUV membership is enormous—around six million people. The original conception seems to have been to create a political apparatus like the PRI to cement a relationship between the people holding offices in the state and create a mechanism for advancement and promotion. A tension between the expectation of the people of a developing power at the grassroots and the reality of the greater concentration of control seems to be greatly defining the political life in this country. The employers of the biggest trade union, with over 1.5 million members, went to the Ministry of Labour this year to renegotiate the collective contract. The Minister, a Trotskyite, refused to negotiate and locked them inside a room for six days. They were then driven out of the building by hired thugs. This gives an indication of what sort of country we're talking about.

Chavez surrounded himself with a legion of opportunistic supporters, many of whom had switched alliances from the previous régime. Some went on to support the attempted coup against him, others did not, but all maintain the habits of previous time: corruption. Chavez's supporters view him as an anti-imperialist liberator, reducing poverty and unemployment. He has often suggested an extension to his presidential term limit. Amnesty has catalogued a number of human rights violations under his administration.

I would like to see more analysis of such countries in the *Standard*, since there are so many people hailing his sort of "socialism" as a great achievement.

Buick, West London No one here thinks Venezuela is socialist, but people out there do, so this is something we have to deal with.

Easton, non-delegate I am fascinated by what Lawrie has said to us. It's like having a huge Communist Party from Eastern Europe. It's clear that the PSUV is an arm of the state.

Johnstone, Edinburgh A lot of people are jumping on his bandwagon as the great saviour of Central and South America, along with Castro and the Bolivian leader. Hopefully our comrade Marcos Colome is defending our position on the Spanish-speaking parts of the Web.

25. Report of the Election Department

McLellan, Lancaster We're in danger of getting voted on the council in some of these places. What would councillors do if elected? I've always said we shouldn't be standing in council elections.

Donnelly, Glasgow We contest these elections to get our case across—it's for propaganda purposes.

Buick, Election Department If someone is elected, they will take their seat, though this is an academic question because we're too far away from getting elected now.

Stair, non-delegate What's been happening is that in the North East we have been standing candidates who haven't been backed by the Branch, because the Branch is moribund, so shouldn't we at least have a Branch with regular meetings and have the candidate come from that Branch?

P Deutz, non-delegate At one time it did say in the rulebook that in a ward with three seats, if the Party won only one or two seats, they would not take the seats.

Johnstone, Edinburgh All elected representatives take instruction from their Branch, so without a Branch, how can they take instruction?

26. Report of the Internet Department

D Chesham, Central London I'm concerned about the uneven policy that the moderators tend to be applying towards various postings on the Party's e-mail lists, spintcom and spopen, and wonder whether we can get some more consistent application of the policy to address this problem. There are some severe abuses getting through without any moderation or warning, and yet for some relatively minor offences posters are being warned or moderated for a period of time. If a policy is being applied, it must be applied equally across the board to all posters. This is something that ADM or the EC needs to address.

McLellan, Lancaster The Department should not mislead us with statistics. If there are so many hits to our website, why are there so few requests for information? What is the Department doing about Wikipedia?

McEwan, Manchester Maybe it's because the website is so good that they don't need to e-mail us; they can find answers on the website itself.

Lawrie, Central London I'm concerned about the quality of the Party website. I preferred the previous one. We need to do a better job on it, even if that means spending a bit of money. The other matter is the business of moderation. I'm a person who has been moderated, in my opinion, too much. I don't feel I've made any attacks of a personal nature on other comrades. The shame of it all is that these lists should be used for educational and informational purposes, and if I don't see a change in the months ahead, I don't see the point of me being on it.

Miller, Internet Department In response to McLellan, our report gives only raw statistics, but we don't offer any interpretation of them, so it's not fair to say that we're misleading the membership. With respect to Wikipedia, it's generally frowned upon to edit an article for an organisation in which one has personal involvement, as this often leads to a conflict of interest between promoting one's organisation and helping to write a neutral encyclopedia article. Members should read Wikipedia's policies carefully before editing articles about the Party.

Thomas, South London I think that next to the post of Treasurer, the moderator must be the most thankless task in the Party. I am fairly happy with the moderation, and in the absence of any examples from Chesham I can't think of anything egregious which has happened. The moderator isn't like the *Socialist Standard* editorial committee, who are under instruction to present only the Party case. There is on the forum a certain amount of give-and-play due to differences within the Party about aspects of the case. Having said that, if you have too tight a control of it, the whole thing is going to freeze up, and while occasionally that may be to the good, on the whole I am satisfied with the moderation.

Stair, East Anglia Isn't calling six members of the EC "nincompoops" offensive? Why didn't that get moderated or result in a warning? Another member recently called us all a "shower of tossers". Isn't that offensive?

Johnstone, Internet Department For several years, the requirements of the moderator was simply to approve subscription requests. It's only in the past six months that his role was expanded. This is why the Internet Department sought out further volunteers. Yes, we are probably inconsistent, because the character of a member of the party is not naturally a policeman, authoritarian, or censor. It goes completely against our nature to police a forum members should police themselves. Yes, I am probably being inconsistent, but we have *attempted* to be even-handed. We have banned people, placed them on moderation, given them formal warnings, informal warnings, *etc.* What we do find is that people are inflaming the situation by repeating these allegations rather than dropping them. It's not a situation that will be resolved through complaints. It's not easy to deal with because a lot of the problem is reading between the lines and into peoples' motives.

Perrin, non-delegate Are there posting guidelines? If it's the case of when people join the forum, every single member should get it as an e-mail.

Miller, Internet Department Yes, the mailing lists have a charter which lay out the rules, and the charter has been posted to the list and is e-mailed to every new subscriber. Perhaps we should post it to the lists periodically as a reminder.

McEwan, Manchester Your recent posting on spopen was interesting to note that participants do not tend to go over the same ground over and over again, and it is true that in our internal forums, people are not prepared to let things drop. Perhaps the charter should be amended to ask people to let sleeping dogs lie.

D Chesham, Central London I think this rule about no personal attacks is too broad. What constitutes a personal attack? Is it outright abuse? A smear? Innuendo?

Stair, non-delegate It would cut down on abuse if those who made the attacks would to apologise to those they insulted.

Miller, Internet Department In response to Chesham, we can't get too specific in defining personal attacks. If the Department were to make a list of specific types of personal attacks, then someone would probably think up some other way of attacking someone and then defend himself on the basis that his behaviour wasn't on the proscribed list. The best policy of identifying abuse is usually "I know it when I see it."

ADJOURNMENT: 13:15 Saturday

RECONVENTION: 11:00 Sunday

27. ~~Report of the Blog Department~~ (none received)

Buick, West London Members are welcome to contribute blog postings. We haven't had many comments to the blog postings.

28. Item for discussion: The downside of the party's Internet message boards

Buick, West London Nasty things have been said about individual members such as allegations of unwelcome advances to females. This doesn't strike us as being good for the Party. Other bloggers are picking up on this and posting them to their blogs.

Stair, non-delegate Do we want an open organisation, or do we want an organisation where we can have access to what people are saying? That is the fact of the matter if we were to close down our message boards: we would have an organisation that would shield the truth and what Party members want to say. It's all very well to talk about something like "unwelcome advances" being hearsay, but there is definite abuse going on, some directed at the EC.

McEwan, Manchester I would be opposed to closing the lists because it would be a breach of our principle of openness. In this supporting statement, West London Branch have exaggerated and overstated the situation and the harm that's allegedly been done to the Party. I know people who aren't actually members who have been viewing what's going on on spopen and saying how interesting and fascinating it is. The Branch does not believe that "immense harm" has been done to the Party.

Whitfield, Lancaster The forums are usually fine, and the current troubles should blow over. The moderators have attempted to lay down some firm guidelines, and if they're reiterated and the forums are moderated vigorously, then that should be alright. Before I joined the Party I spent a year reading the *Standard* and the forums and found them an interesting insight, and they didn't put me off in any way.

D Chesham, Central London The Branch discussed this at great length and we take the view that we are not in favour of the lists being closed, but we are in favour of members exercising self-restraint, which in many cases they haven't done up until now. The alternative is for the moderation to be applied even-handedly, and quite obviously this hasn't been the case. It is not popular to relate things which have been stated on the lists as instanced by the reaction to Stair's remarks just now about the "nincompoops" remark. But this won't go away as it hasn't been resolved. It will go on until those who take part in the lists moderate themselves or are moderated. I have no way of knowing if these examples are doing any harm to the Party:

... the members of Central London Branch who have decided to form some kind of star chamber within the Party and expel members through their membership of the EC disgust me, and I would second Ron's recent call for their expulsion. I saw that there was no chance of getting any kind of business done at that Branch and so resigned from it.

Hopefully ADM will sort this business out and remove the stench of corruption from Head Office, because that's what it is—a few people who've got it into their heads that they can warp the Party any way they please because they know what is going on and can control the flow of information. At the minimum what is required is a complete EC turnover—not because I think even a majority of the EC are so minded, I don't, but because a minority is acting there and the alternative is a bloodbath. The small bloodbath advocated above would be much better targeted.

What a (small) shower of tossers.

And this, directed at our mild-mannered Assistant Secretary:

... you saw it as a wonderful occasion to blacken her character so as to get support for her expulsion, just as you did at the August EC Meeting with repeated references (via so-called amendments to the Minutes) to highlight her so-called so-called abusive phone calls and then the sneaky way you brought up again the “security breach” incident by tying it to a completely separate incident. You know as well as I do that this is completely irrelevant (even if she can’t see this, because it’s something she can’t help thinking about once it has been brought back as an issue). It just confirms what many in the party already suspect that you and Chesham are on a crusade to drive her out of the party at all costs. . .

I am thoroughly disgusted, especially because those two items came from members of West London Branch.

Buick, West London Which members wrote those?

D Chesham, Central London Wigley and Buick.

Bennett, Manchester I am a member of a message board relating to Manchester, where I live. Occasionally it goes over the top with people insulting each other. It may help to delay responses so that the response didn’t turn up for three or four hours. The two items read by Chesham are completely unacceptable; people should not be making that kind of remark on boards or on any other forum, but to include with them the “nincompoops” remark shows a lack of understanding.

Allen, non-delegate I am completely opposed to the proposal to shut down the mailing lists; this would be like a cover-up. You have my full permission to publish anything I say.

McLellan, Lancaster I’ve been horrified and dismayed by the arguments I’ve seen on spintcom and spopen. The moderators should step in quicker and start banning people if they’re saying such things.

Lawrie, Central London I am disappointed with this Item for Discussion. I’ve been in this Party not even a year, and the backbiting and abuse has made me wonder a few times whether I should stay in this Party. I’m asking now for people to stop this. This isn’t what we joined the Party for.

Miller, non-delegate The supporting statement for this Item for Discussion references a discussion on a third-party website, Urban 75, of an ongoing Party disciplinary procedure. Now, in any sufficiently large group of people personal disputes and conflicts will inevitably arise, and in order to maintain its integrity the group must have some sort of disciplinary procedure for dealing with these disputes. The SPGB operates openly and democratically, and doesn’t conduct its disciplinary matters behind closed doors. Given that most other organisations don’t operate this way, I can understand how some people may find this shocking or titillating. Because we aren’t normally privy to the details of interpersonal conflicts and discipline in businesses, corporations, government agencies, and political parties, we may wrongly assume that these organisations rarely or never encounter such problems in the first place. Thus when we do find evidence of such an organisation handling a personal dispute, some of us treat the matter as an aberration, and sensationalise it.

The facts of the particular incident being discussed on Urban 75 were that one Party member became angry at the conduct of another and threatened him. The member’s Branch and the Party’s Executive Committee examined the incident, solicited evidence and opinions from other members, and applied discipline in accordance with the Party’s rules and procedures. Is this the model of a socialist society? I think so. The SPGB has never claimed that socialism would be a utopia free of problems and personal conflicts, and neither does it claim that its members are perfect. It does, however, advocate that when conflicts arise, they be settled fairly and democratically.

Johnstone, Edinburgh I am willing to live with the downside; the boards should remain open. Bennett’s suggestion of delaying messages may be an alternative. The moderators will review the ADM debates to help re-examine the guidelines, though it won’t be a

quick, overnight solution. Simply shutting it down is not a good idea. It would be treated as sinister by members of the public to make the boards private.

P Deutz, East Anglia I don't think our mild-mannered Assistant Secretary needs anyone to defend him; he's perfectly capable of giving his own answer to criticism. Members have to be self-disciplined about comments they make. I am concerned about Branch minutes which can make accusations and accusations which were made at the special EC meeting which, while defeated, are still going to be circulated as part of the minutes.

Bennett, Manchester When I said a delay of three or four hours, I didn't have in mind everyone moderated, but rather an automatic delay.

Miller, Internet Department Enforcing a delay on messages on the mailing lists is not possible with our current setup, but we could transition to another if necessary.

Buick, West London We are not actually proposing shutting down the mailing lists; we are putting it up for discussion. Moderators can't moderate Branches, which can't be moderated. One Branch in particular has all sort of peculiar things, such as "Shannon is a good bloke, Balmer is not". We have a few EC members using the minutes to issue abusive statements. A bit of self-restraint needs to be exercised by Branches, EC members, and minute takers.

29. Item for discussion: The Party's attitude towards pornography

Lawrie, Central London Pornography is as old as civilisation and can be found printed and engraved on various ancient buildings throughout the world. The concept of pornography as understood today did not exist until the Victorian era. Previous to that, some sex acts were regulated in laws. Looking at objects or images depicting them was not. In some cases, specific books, engravings, or image collections were censored or outlawed, but the trend to compose laws which restricted viewing of sexually explicit things in general was a Victorian conception. When large-scale excavations took place in Pompeii in 1860s, much of the erotic art of the Roman Empire came to light, shocking the Victorians, who saw themselves as the Empire's intellectual heirs. They did not know what to do with these depictions of sexuality, and hid them away from the public. These objects were locked away in museums, and those which could not be removed were covered up to protect the public's sensibilities. Soon after, the world's first act criminalising pornography was enacted by the British Parliament. Today, the legal status of pornography varies from country to country. Some people, including Flynt and Rushdie, have argued that porn is vital to civilisation. Opposition comes generally from several sources: law, religion, and feminism. Some from the latter two have expressed belief in the existence of porn addiction. When we look at sex and crime in many developed European countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden, a growing majority of people contend that an increased availability of porn in a society equates to a decrease in crime. In the 1970s and 80s, feminists criticised porn as essentially dehumanising women and as likely to encourage violence against them. This led to an alliance between anti-porn feminists and fundamentalist Christians to help censor the use or production of pornography. And when we talk about production and distribution and economic activities, this is of some importance to capitalism. In 2003, America spent as much as £15 000 000 000 on porn. A significant amount is produced in the US. The US represents two thirds of all world production. The industry now includes not just magazines, but videos, DVDs, TV channels, sex shops, lap dancing, clubs, Internet sites. 10% of all Internet activity and funds raised on the web is porn-related. The porn industry has been considered as deciding format wars (e. g., VHS vs. Betamax). Mainstream companies all profit considerably from the adult channels carried on their systems. Even international hotel groups make attractive profit margins from porn paid TV in their guest rooms. For the investor, there are a handful of public companies, the best known of which is Playboy International. Capitalism and sexuality under capitalism are exaggerated; it's for sale; its importance is manipulated in the interests of state profit and capital. Pornography is going to exist only as long as capitalism exists.

Johnstone, Edinburgh One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter; likewise

one person's pornography is another person's erotica. It will exist under socialism and carry on. As long as it's not exploitative, it's going to be tolerated.

Moss, Swansea Almost all pornography is exploitative under capitalism, just as prostitution is. The more blatant forms of exploitation we should try to avoid as socialists and as a Party. This got on the agenda because the Party computers were being used to view pornography. It's obvious that this shouldn't happen.

Buick, West London Presumably it's the Party's position that we're against censorship, including pornography.

Lawrie, Central London I agree with Moss. There will always be the pornography that exploits people in the interests of profit. I'm not against pornography; I'm against exploitation. Workers in the porn industry are no different than any other workers. This Item for Discussion isn't just because of the Party's computers, though it may have triggered it. I think we need to look at and discuss all aspects of capitalism.

30. Report of the Head Office Organiser

Moss, Swansea The Branch would like to congratulate everyone who made Head Office the efficient and comfortable place it is now.

Miller, non-delegate Thanks are due to Stair, John Helps, and Jim Lawrie, who attend Head Office several times a week to help with cleaning, renovations, and repairs.

31. Report of the Membership Applications Department

Donnelly, Glasgow This arises in a sense out of some of the mailing list postings. We had a member who attempted to join, got his membership card, the Membership Department forwarded it to Head Office, and in the interval he wrote a letter to the EC which indicated he knew very little about the Party case. That doesn't completely startle me, because there is a member who variously says he has been 9, 12, or 14 years in the Party, and that he was delighted to hear that the Party allowed members to belong to trade unions. How can someone like that pass the membership test? He said, "Why don't we publish a list of socialist states?" I engaged him in discussion and in my anger probably broke some rules, though this person is unstable and has mental problems. Then the Central Branch Secretary said that this man, like many other people, joined through the mail and didn't have the advantage of attending meetings, so there were a lot of people like this. If this is the case, we must look at ourselves very closely. If there are 176 people who joined just by filling in a form but don't know our attitudes to trade unionism, state capitalism, etc., then we need to look at *ourselves* much more than at the applicants! I would hope that we have a membership test that quizzes applicants on these simple, fundamental concepts. Members should not be in a political party whose ideas they don't agree with or understand. This problem stems either from the fact that the membership questionnaire isn't stringent enough, or that it isn't getting applied.

Vanni, Glasgow This applicant, C. W., is somewhat of a mystery. Can the Membership Department or EC tell us why they turned him down? Did he display such ignorance of the Party case as to deny him membership? Donnelly also mentioned a current member who didn't know that we could join trade unions, but also thought that we could join other political organisations! This is an appalling lowering of standards. At a previous Conference at Conway Hall, delegates admitted that they didn't apply the knowledge test. Members should realise that one of the chief reasons the Party has lasted so long for 104 is that it has nearly always tried to ensure that the applicants agree with the Party's principles and policies through thorough application of the knowledge test. This doesn't guarantee that members are completely politically sound—they could be dishonest—but it does give some protection by excluding some of the more obvious inappropriate applicants. If you don't apply the knowledge test, you do so at your peril.

Chesham, Central London/EC To answer the Glasgow delegates about C. W., whose recommendation for membership was received a few months ago, it was quite obvious that a questionnaire had been completed, but answers to two questions were obviously not what were expected, so the EC could not ratify the application. The matter was referred to the Department for further examination. This took some time, and in the meantime

the applicant got irate about the delay and wrote a letter to the EC complaining about it. It was evident from this letter that there were all sorts of other issues which showed that he was completely unsuitable as an applicant. We had another incident which has not yet come back to the EC. An applicant went to the Department, and his replies were so incoherent that the Department asked for further clarification of most or all of his replies. They didn't receive any satisfactory explanations, so they instead corrected his answers, asked if he agreed with them, and recommended his application on that basis. This illustrates the sort of thing that's going on at the moment. I've heard only a couple of months ago that we shouldn't be too stringent when applicants come to the Party as they can be educated once they're in. Sorry, but this isn't the way, and we're seeing now the fruits of this attitude. One of the members Glasgow delegates were talking about was a member of one of the most important organisations in the Party, the Campaigns Department. We need to propose some changes at Conference in order to get over this problem.

P Deutz, East Anglia/EC Chesham has said what I was going to say about C. W. There were certainly several things he said wrong. Perhaps it was a question that he could be again written to, because of the difficulty of carrying things on with correspondence. When you're in a Branch, you are more able to learn. I read from Porter's letter to the EC regarding C. W.:

... this was dealt with by Andy Pitts and myself—we do not have copies of his response to the questionnaire and neither of us can recall his answers to question 5 and 10 and so cannot comment on the criticism *viz.* "... why they recommended so strongly his acceptance into the Party...". With regard to his letter of 13 August 2007, although the comments in his first paragraph suggest a lack of understanding with regards to administration in socialist society his comment in paragraph two where he states "... where everyone is a member not just the selected few..." suggests to me that he does understand the democratic nature of the society we propose. Also, in paragraph three he states his objection to the term "executive committees" that he (apparently) sees as governing bodies and consequently he mistakenly assumes that the Socialist Party is seeking such control. I think most people understand the word "executive" in the same way as [C. W.] does—*i. e.*, leadership and control—not the image we wish to project and one that [C. W.] finds unacceptable. And so I read into his letter that he does not see socialist society as a society of governance and that he was disappointed to discover, through his misinterpretation of the word "executive", that the Socialist Party is a party of leaders that wish to "govern". Okay, so he has a misconception of the Socialist Party's credentials and quite rightly raises an objection—good for him.

Turning to the question of [A. S.]'s application, I enclose for your information copies of correspondence (e-mails) that issued from the point where the EC rejected [A. S.]'s application and I also enclose copies of the letters that I sent [A. S.] I re-affirm that the Membership Department has received no further contact regarding the outcome of the application from [A. S.] and as you will gather from the correspondence, I no longer have any information other than that I am providing with this letter. You will see from the copy of John Bissett's e-mail of 16 January 2007 that a stamped addressed envelope (SAE) was sent out with a letter John wrote to [A. S.]—the SAE was to be returned to John at Head Office—either it is there or [A. S.] lost interest and never completed another Form A and questionnaire as invited. I was unable to forward the enclosed e-mails by e-mail as I can only receive e-mails at present.

Buick, West London The Membership Department is a subcommittee of the EC and the practice seems to have developed that when a Form A comes to an EC, the questionnaire is attached to it. We now have the EC second-guessing the subcommittee. If the Membership Department were functioning properly, it would not be necessary for the EC to read the questionnaire.

Stair, East Anglia How would we know otherwise? If the EC isn't looking at things, how are we going to know that Departments are errant? The EC isn't a central committee; it's

voted for by the whole membership to oversee the work of its committees.

Bennett, Manchester I assume that when someone applies to join through a Branch, they are already known to Branch members, so that members already have some ideas of their knowledge, so when it comes to questioning them, they could perhaps be briefer in terms of questioning. But clearly when someone applies through the membership questionnaire in writing, this situation does not apply. We ought to bear in mind with respect to the questionnaire that not everyone is fluent in expressing themselves in writing, and it may be harder for some than others, and that isn't necessarily a reflection of their knowledge of the Party case. There was a case in North West a few years ago where someone read *Standards* and immediately applied to join, and was sent a questionnaire, and it was way beyond anything she could have possibly answered at that point.

32. Report of the Premises Committee

Vanni, Glasgow There have been many terrific improvements over the past three years, but nothing like what there's been in the past six months. I think they've done a fantastic job. Head Office is practically unrecognisable from what it was when I first joined the Party. All credit to the Premises Committee, and I hope they will continue.

D Chesham, Central London/EC I endorse Vanni's comments. When it came to the EC that some additional windows needed replacing, and a proposal to finish the flooring, some of us had some misgivings about the cost that was involved, but nevertheless thought that this was a one-off expenditure which would last the Party for years to come. But I was more than a little concerned to find that the work was going to start in October as I didn't think it would be done in time for ADM, but I am amazed that it was completed. There has been a colossal effort on the part of the Premises Committee, Helps, Beat, and Shodeke. The Party should appreciate their work and recognise the improvements to the building.

33. Item for discussion: Is Head Office becoming too much like the *Big Brother* house?

Buick, West London The Branch was asked by the Standing Orders Committee to rewrite their supporting statement, and the author did so but the Branch dropped the matter. But the first two versions were intercepted and circulated. What we wanted to do was raise the question of what is going on at Head Office without making specific accusations. A lot of the trouble has been problems not in theory but in behaviour because there are too many members living in close proximity in Head Office. At the June Special EC meeting, Carter made the point that three members were staying at Head Office, and if the people don't get on with each other, as one is obsessively clean and the other has an animal which craps everywhere, so I am giving advance notice that at Conference we are proposing a resolution that either nobody should stay at Head Office, or only one person at a time should stay at head office for a period of up to one year. The problem is that the people staying here on a permanent basis are paid officials of the Party, and such paid officials should not be on the EC or take sides in disputes. This is the practice of many trade unions. All these problems arose because of a cliquey atmosphere.

Donnelly, Glasgow This item has nothing to do with the things Buick just said. I'm not going to discuss the rights or wrongs of his comments, which are perfectly valid items for discussion, but have no bearing on the Item for Discussion. Is this Item for Discussion a joke? If so, it's awful and pathetic. I'm amazed it ever appeared. I'd be embarrassed if any opponent ever got a hold of it. More important that putting a silly statement out is using an item in the ADM to introduce something that's got nothing to do with the item.

Helps, South London I think this item should be treated with the contempt it deserves.

Stair, East Anglia This, in my mind, is another attempt to scapegoat Central London Branch, scapegoat Head Office, scapegoat the Head Office Organiser, scapegoat the EC, and scapegoat the Party. How far does West London Branch and Buick's humour stretch? After something I said yesterday, Buick said, "He's out (of the Party); he's a cunt."

Buick, West London You *are* a cunt.

Allen, non-delegate I was absolutely disgusted and ashamed with this. If West London Branch has opinions or complaints, they should bring it and state exactly what it is. All

these schoolboy things just amaze me. If I'd've been a member of West London Branch, I'd've resigned from the Branch immediately. It doesn't stick to the point. If you're going to attack the Head Office Organiser, say what he's doing and bring a charge against him.

D Chesham, Central London This is another example of the smear and innuendo which has been going on on the Party's lists and it's being introduced as an Item for Discussion. It's a complete and utter smokescreen. This is an attack on the Head Office Organiser and the Assistant Secretary who have been staying here. There is no rational argument, no logical discussion, and least of all no recognition of the work these comrades have been doing for this Party. What was witnessed after the Party meeting yesterday was nothing short of diabolical, and Buick has admitted what he has said. This ADM's standing orders read,

Except as provided for in Rules 29 and 31, no member shall question the socialist integrity, honesty or motives of any other member. In the event of infringement, the Chair shall require the offending member to withdraw the remarks in question. If there is failure to do so the delegates may move a Vote of Censure against the member concerned.

Now Comrade Chair, is he going to be asked to withdraw this?

Buick, West London I apologise.

Perrin, non-delegate Doesn't this debate demonstrate that Head Office *has* turned into the *Big Brother* house?

34. Report of the Publications Department

P Deutz, East Anglia I am concerned that the Department purchased an expensive book on interior page design, but after reading it decided to get a professional designer.

Miller, Publications Department I had originally argued for hiring a professional book designer to retypeset our pamphlets, but the other Department members thought we could read up on it and then do it ourselves. After purchasing the book we found that the art is considerably more complicated than he had time to learn, so we stuck with the original plan of hiring a designer. As it turned out, the designer we chose read our pamphlets and became a sympathiser, and is now offering to do some work for free.

Johnstone, Edinburgh Has there been any progress lately?

Miller, Publications Department There has been no progress lately, largely because Bissett's sudden resignation has overloaded us.

35. Report of the Public Access Committee

Johnstone, Edinburgh Edinburgh Branch is surprised that the front window responsibility has been transferred from the Premises Committee to this new Public Access Committee.

Stair, Public Access Committee/Premises Committee In a way it has to do with the premises, but it was actually under the remit of an ad-hoc committee, the work of which was subsumed into the Public Access Committee. It's likely the work will happen early in the new year. We are in contact with a builder. The glaziers did an excellent job with the windows upstairs, so we will coordinate them with the builders.

36. Report of the Library Department (vacant)

37. Report of *Socialist Banner* Committee (vacant)

Johnstone, non-delegate I'm involved in the Committee's blog where there is some activity.

Johnson, Central Branch Secretary The comrades in Africa are eager for another *Socialist Banner* issue. But there is no one on the Overseas Contacts Committee, so there is a problem getting it together. I have put my name forward, but I will be pushed into doing the editing and typesetting, so any help would be welcome.

Buick, West London I had an e-mail from the editor of the *Socialist Banner*, who said he had been ill, which is why there has been no new issue.

38. Report of the Archives Department (not adopted)

Buick, West London Why was this report not adopted?

Miller, Assistant Secretary/EC This report was considered at the 6 October EC meeting. Several members—including Helps and Stair, I believe—raised some major objections to it. I don't remember what all of them were. There was no time to send the report back for a rewrite, and the objections were such that it would not have been feasible for the EC itself to amend the report, so we instead opted not to adopt it.

P Deutz, EC A Department member wrote in the report that he had been unable to work due to renovation work. Stair disputed what was said in the report. We didn't have time to refer the report back to the Department for corrections, so we did not adopt it.

Stair, Head Office Organiser/EC Head Office disruption was being used as an excuse for why the Department couldn't do any work, and the EC did not accept this as a valid reason. Scholey had been here only about twice. One time some DIY material was stored in the corner of the archive room, and in the night he kicked the paint and shouted about it. The presence of the material wasn't preventing him from doing work. The next day he was throwing library books at Beat. The only recent disruption has been two and half weeks of work on the flooring, and there was no intention of Scholey coming down during this period.

Johnson, Swansea The hullabaloo occurred in February when the windows were replaced. Work was going on and Scholey was upset because of the mess. He has since visited at the last EC meeting, and work was still going on, but Scholey did do some work in the archives. Yes, he does regard the archives as his personal fiefdom as he knows where everything is, and when that is disrupted he loses his cool.

Helps, EC The windows had already been finished at the time of Scholey's visit. There were only a few items from the utility room in the archive room and did not affect the archives in any way whatsoever.

Stair, Head Office Organiser/EC Helps recently installed adjustable shelving in the Archives Room to make more space. We discovered hundredweights of unfiled archive material which needs looking at. If someone is going to come twice a year, it would take them 10 000 years to sort it out.

39. Report of the *Socialist Standard* Department

Vanni, Glasgow In the September issue, there is a cartoon and the text is written in such small, faint type that a member phoned me up to ask what it was. The cover is dreadful and is of the kind I complained about at Conference. There must be a better way of "illuminating the hidden hand" than this complete darkness. For goodness' sake, get better covers. I see that the price will be going up to £1.50 in January. I hope that the Department will publicise this in the November and December issues.

Johnson, Swansea Thankfully the *Socialist Standard* has made a further improvement since Conference and they have taken up my suggestion regarding empty spaces. I also hope that when they do bring it up to 24 pages, they don't have any further problems with empty spaces. I'm sure that short articles will be more than welcome.

Donnelly, Glasgow Regarding the phony photo of Gordon Brown reading the *Socialist Standard*, this may be a good in-joke for members, but first-time readers may take this literally. The *Standard* has definitely improved. But I hate it when articles are broken up with a notice saying "continued on page *x*".

D Chesham, Central London I thought the September cover was quite good. I also don't see a problem with phony pictures, generally speaking, as they're amusing and no one takes it literally. What I don't like are other phony pictures, like the one in "Who controls the world?"—it's not entirely phony, but not what it says it is. The photo caption says "Seen on a recent anti-war demonstration", but this wasn't the case. I don't like incorrect captions. Also, the absence of credits for photographs: simply saying that a photo has been taken from Wikipedia or NASA is not sufficient. We must give the source of the picture, because that's really what the copyright law requires us to do.

P Deutz, East Anglia East Anglia had voted to put on an item on this and I was deputed to do the supporting statement, but when I looked at their terms of reference, I found that it wasn't correct; the layout members are part of the Department but we wondered

how much liaison there was between them. We think photographs are unnecessary large and not necessarily relevant. We also think that broken-up articles should be avoided wherever possible. We also take issue with “Socialist” being smaller than “Standard” on the cover. I’m not imputing any particular motive for this, but I like to see if something is prominent, then it should be “Socialist”, or it should be the same size. I also don’t like these very busy covers. Sometimes words can make a better point than the pictures. Another point is that some columns are not justified, and it’s difficult to read tinted backgrounds.

Moss, Swansea Over the last two or three years, the *Standard* has improved dramatically. Regarding the increased price, locally it’s much easier to sell for a pound. I wonder whether it’s possible if it’s possible to continue to sell to Branches for a pound. It means that Branches can then sell them on the street for a pound.

Whitfield, Lancaster Relating to the photographs, is it still an ongoing issue?

Miller, Assistant Secretary I have been in contact with the Department and we have agreed to set an in-person meeting to discuss things.

Perrin, Socialist Standard Department These are all issues for the layout members, not the editorial team, but layout team should take note of what delegates have to say.

LUNCH RECESS

40. Report of the Standing Orders Committee

Thomas, South London The comrades do an excellent job. It’s a difficult position to fill, and we hope that Lawrie gets trained up as soon as possible.

Stair, East Anglia Earlier this year we had an occasion on the EC where someone on the Standing Orders Committee attempted to revoke a Form A. I think this sets a dangerous precedent. If someone joins the Party without any question that they know and agree with the Party case, surely whether they’re in for a week or for 20 years, it’s wrong to revoke a Form A. If someone determines that someone shouldn’t be in the Party for whatever reason, then they should use the normal disciplinary procedures.

Johnstone, Chair This was already raised at Conference.

Browne, Standing Orders Committee I shall be retiring from the Standing Orders Committee.

Johnstone, Chair I give the ADM’s gratitude for Browne’s past work and hope Lawrie will continue it.

41. Item for discussion: Rule 26 should be amended so that four branches rather than six can call a Party Poll

McLellan, Lancaster Years ago there were 36 Branches, and any six can call a Party poll. Now that we are down to about twelve Branches, we think it’s realistic to have a corresponding reduction in the number of Branches which can call a Party poll.

Stair, East Anglia I can see the wisdom of this, but if that was the procedure over the recent poll requisition, then there could be a ping-pong effect with sets of four Branches issuing mutually exclusive poll requisitions.

D Chesham, Central London Central London’s fear is that this proposal would allow two subsets of Branches can call for contradictory polls. Also, with the absolute number, this could become out of date if the number of Branches increases or decreases. It would be better if the number of Branches were specified as a proportion rather than a number—say, 50%.

Johnson, Swansea With regards to ping-ponging, I call this democracy, and it is the essential nature of democracy that discussion goes on, whatever the results of that discussion. Regardless of the number, you’re still going to have this democratic discussion, and I welcome it. It serves a couple of functions, the most important of which is that it allows members to get things off their chest. A lot of the discussion here went on beforehand, and when it came to the ADM we ended up talking about the essential matters. Should

we reduce the number of Branches that can call a Party poll from six to four? Let's be pragmatic: Branch numbers increased recently from twelve to thirteen, but I can't see them expanding by another two at the most. Let's make democracy more simplified and diplomatic and allow members to vent off the steam if they so choose.

Thomas, non-delegate A proportion of Branches rather than an absolute number would have more flexibility. If Branches increase sufficiently then the number will automatically go up, rather than the Party having to discuss the matter at Conference. Vis-à-vis the ping-pong polls, I'm with Johnson on this. "You always obey the last order you were given", so the Party will abide by the most recent poll. The additional advantage is the relatively easy calling of Party polls will give the Party rather more control over the doings of its EC than it does at the moment, when the EC acts not in accordance with the wishes of the Party. The ability to call a poll to rectify a situation that a substantial number in the Party thinks needs changing would make this easier.

P Deutz, East Anglia When it was discussed at East Anglia, we were generally favourable to the idea of reducing the number of branches required. If the Party expands, we can always change the number again.

Vanni, Glasgow On the one hand, I can see the sense of this proposal. But I don't understand Thomas's view about the need for more Party polls. There's been no mention from myself or Johnson about the expense involved. If we keep it at six, Party polls will be harder to get, but what happens if it's a very serious matter? Then there will be no difficulty in getting six branches. If you could have less than six, you will have a very flippant attitude to party polls. It's best to keep it at six.

42. Item for discussion: In future all members who are subject to disciplinary procedures should not be dealt with by their own branch but by the EC or a branch determined by the EC

Stair, East Anglia A lot of Branches have only up to five regular attendees. The EC is a far better representative body, elected by the members.

Vanni, Glasgow This would produce another example of the reluctance of the Party's reluctance to give more power to the EC. The Party has insisted that the EC be no more than an administrative rather than a policy body. This has been the case for a long time. There have been occasions when the EC was comprised of enough members to try to turn it into a policy-making body, and it always got reigned in. The best example was the row over the Rent Act in the 1950s, when the EC laid down a viewpoint in total contradiction to the Party's.

McLellan, Lancaster We find this smacks of a central committee, and the EC could always refer the matter to their own Branch. It smacks of there being "suspect branches" and "good branches". The first port of call should be the person's own Branch, despite the fact that the accused may have friends therein.

Johnson, Swansea If this sort of procedure were adopted, there raises the possibility that the EC's time would be taken up with disciplinary matters. The EC is there to administer the Party. It has got powers of discipline which I think are quite sufficient. The supporting statement raises some problems which would occur regardless of whether discipline was handled by the branch or by the EC.

Thomas, non-delegate This Item for Discussion implies distrust. What happened to comradeship trust between members? I think the EC is not a disciplinary body and should never be. It should be a representative and administrative body. There may be occasions where the EC has to charge a member, but that's the end of their role. The disciplinary procedures in the Party are carried out by the membership, not the EC. What's the concern about personal friendships within Branches? Are we not allowed to be friends? And who says friendships are limited to within the Branch? Are we now in danger of prohibiting friendship between Branches?

D Chesham, Central London No one is suggesting there shouldn't be friendships within or without the Branch. What East Anglia is saying is that friendship sometimes makes it difficult to be objective about certain situations and actions of members. I don't suppose for one moment that should this proposal be adopted, the friendship problem wouldn't

carry over to the EC, but I think it's less likely. We have seen this very recently, where a conflict of interest within a Branch has resulted in the normal disciplinary procedure to go forward unfettered. This proposal from East Anglia doesn't have all the answers, but is something the Party should consider.

Stair, East Anglia If a disciplinary matter comes before the EC, then the EC has to deal with it. The idea of this wasn't to suggest that the EC should have a final say on whether someone should be in the Party, but only to judge whether their transgressions should be judged by the membership.

At this point the Chair thanked the members involved in preparing the food for ADM, on behalf of all delegates and attendees.

43. Item for discussion: The proper venue for raising concerns about impropriety or corruption

D Chesham, Central London We've had many examples over the past few months of accusations and allegations being made against various individuals and Party Officers, and there have been many comments made in response that the occasion on which these matters were raised was not the appropriate time. We've had some of that this weekend. Items have been raised of controversial and contentious matters, and delegates and others have said that this is out of order and inappropriate, or hearsay, or unallowable. We are simply asking, then, where do delegates think that these sort of issues should be aired? Because we are in no doubt about it that these are important issues—they're not something that we can just ignore because if they're not dealt with, then they fester and carry on without resolution. We've had a lot of comments and accusations made on the Party's e-mail lists. We've had items directed at for example the Assistant Secretary—for example, that his tenure at Head Office isn't being examined frequently enough. The EC has been negligent in reviewing his stay, so one poster suspected that something underhanded was going on. There was also a suggestion that the Assistant Secretary has cost the Party £4500. Now, that last assertion was completely inaccurate. Where does anybody have redress, and where is someone able to answer that sort of incorrect statement? There are many other examples of suggestions or innuendo or outright accusations and abusive remarks, but when there is attempt to raise things, there is someone who says it's not appropriate. This process has been used in the case of our own Branch. We have been accused of using our minutes to spread accusations, and I would flatly reject this. What we have done is to answer accusations made against our Branch and its individual members. We have never instigated any accusation, but we are told here and again that this was not an appropriate place to deal with the matter.

Johnson, Swansea The supporting statement lists a number of possibilities. I would personally typically first raise my concerns with the member concerned. But I might bring it straight to the Branch, or to spintcom, which is there for internal Party business. But it depends on the subject matter. Some things are more important than others, so you must widen your circle of concern. The proper venue applies to the circumstances. We have the flexibility to address the issue when and how we feel appropriate. I can't see any way that we can improve upon our structure for raising concerns about the running of the Party.

Vanni, Glasgow Your Branch is the obvious first port of call, which should then go to the EC. That 1980 resolution doesn't put any hindrance on a member bringing a complaint; all you have to do is refrain from calling the complaineé a liar or rogue.

P Deutz, East Anglia The heading is "concerns about impropriety or corruption", but the questions he gave us as examples is quite clear: questions asked about Miller should be answered where they were raised. They were raised at the EC and answered at the EC. Questions were raised at the EC about the integrity of some Branches, and the Branch wasn't asked for any clarification, but unpleasant innuendos and resolutions were passed. I agree with Vanni.

Johnstone, Edinburgh I want to direct us to the part of the supporting statement which says, "More to the point, is there any of the above where the matter definitely should *not* be discussed?" For items which contain confidential information or could involve legal matters, these should not be posted on public mailing lists and have been deleted.

Stair, East Anglia To expose and find out the truth about any matter, you have to get the people involved together. If I were to consult a couple of plumbers, I need to weigh out the difference between what they both say to me and come to my own conclusions. But to get to the bottom of anything, and I'm sure any mainstream political party or business organisation would do this, they would call a meeting of all interested parties and witnesses that would help us discover the truth about those facts. However uncomfortable they are. This pre-empts accusations of hearsay.

Shodeke, non-member Getting people together sometimes makes it worse, because not everyone tells the truth.

Martin, non-delegate Say it's not a member of the Party, who do you complain to?

D Chesham, Central London I think spintcom and spopen are not the places to conduct this, for the simple reason that not every member has access to the lists, so things can be said and the individual in question may not be aware of it or have the opportunity to respond. Stair talked about a meeting of members, and that seems an eminently sensible suggestion. We attempted to do something like that at the special EC meeting of 24 June, where a number of concerns were raised about members' behaviours, and the EC dealt with them as well as they could under the circumstances. But what happened? The EC was itself placed under scrutiny for its decisions—quite rightly so—but fun was poked at some issues, particularly the unwelcome advances to females. This was treated quite light-heartedly by members then and since, and in fact got its way into a Branch's supporting statement, as if it were a humorous and illegitimate item to consider. Most of the items raised at that particular meeting were legitimate.

Back to questions on spintcom regarding the Assistant Secretary's tenure and alleged expenses, there was also another post criticising members who had received some payment for their work at Head Office and suggesting that as socialists they shouldn't be doing this. We live in a capitalist society and members who give their time because they have jobs anyway and they need to be remunerated for the time they spend working for the party, and in most if not all cases, those members accept far less than if they were working outside the Party. Those members weren't able to respond to the accusations. I was interested to hear Johnson's remark about not every concern having to be raised in the same place; there should be flexibility. That's right, and that goes for what the EC did in relation to the charge against Martin. Not every concern about a member's socialist credentials or actions needs to be brought up in the same place. In this place, the complaints came to the EC, and the EC dealt with them. In another case, they might go to the Branch in the first instance. But what it should have above all else is the means for them to address these problems, and not swept under the carpet and regarded as unimportant or hearsay.

44. Item for discussion: Rule 31 should be amended in the last line to read: "No parties to the charge or dispute. . . shall be allowed to sit as Delegates or Chair at Conference, ADM or any EC meeting where the case is being reviewed."

McLellan, Lancaster This is to do with what recently happened with the EC bringing the charge against Martin. People shouldn't be both plaintiffs and judges. Miller thinks he's just witnessing things, but you shouldn't be making the decision that something is action detrimental. If a problem is brought by someone on the EC and is a Party to the charge, then they shouldn't be sitting in judgment as to whether Rule 31 is applicable.

Miller, non-delegate If you're going to use a capitalist legal analogy, a better one would be that the Party members who raised the issue, and the EC, are acting as policemen witnessing a crime, who then apprehend the suspect and bring the matter to the attention of a jury—*i. e.*, the whole Party—to decide what to do. In this particular case the people who found the evidence weren't even the aggrieved parties.

McLellan, Lancaster There's a difference between witnessing a crime and voting on whether the suspect should be charged.

45. ~~Report of the Ad-hoc Committee to Construct Alternative Models of Party Decision-Making (none received)~~

Miller, Ad-hoc Committee Regrettably the Committee has not produced a report. One thing we probably ought to look into is the issue of online Branches.

46. Report of the Video Production Department

D Chesham, Central London At the recent summer school a number of digital video tapes were made. Can these be put online? Does this fall within the purview of the Video Production Department?

Miller, Internet Department As a member of the Internet Department, I was going to post them online, but the Party's video recorder was stolen. The Video Production Department has been informed of this and asked to recommend a new purchase.

Johnstone, Edinburgh Edinburgh Branch had suggested that the EC buy video equipment.

47. Adoption of the Executive Committee's and Party Officers' Reports to the 2007 Autumn Delegate Meeting

Buick, West London What does "adoption" mean in this context? Is it absolute approval? I don't want to approve anything done after 13 June as that's when the EC went off the rails.

Johnstone, Chair I am informed that the adoption covers activity carried out in the first half of the year 2007.

On a motion of **Vanni (Glasgow)** and **Buick (West London)**, the delegates agreed to adopt the Executive Committee's and Party Officers' Reports to the 2007 Autumn Delegate Meeting.

F. Any Other Business

Miller, Assistant Secretary I would like the delegate's opinions on how the proceedings should be presented.

Bennett, Manchester I favour a summary of arguments, not necessarily attributed to individuals.

Moss, Swansea The best thing is a summary of what's said, not necessarily brief, but of reasonable length, as long as the major points, but without naming individuals.

P Deutz, East Anglia A summary of arguments.

Stair, East Anglia I am in favour of a verbatim report.

ADJOURNMENT: 15:47 Sunday

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