

SUPPORTING STATEMENTS:for the 104th

Annual Conference of The Socialist Party
at 52 Clapham High St. London SW4 7UN on
Friday 21st March 2008 times: 10.30 to 17.30
Saturday 22nd March 2008 times: 11.00 to 16.30.

Item 5 Item for Discussion: Should dues be collected centrally?

I feel this would save work for each branch secretary as some branch members never attend branch meetings. This central method of collection will make it easier to have up to date information on the numbers of people who pay dues and the number who have dues waived etc. I (Fred Allen) have been collecting the dues for central branch since 2004 and I would be prepared to take on the extra work. East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 7 Motion: 'This conference instructs that we set up a committee to investigate the possibility of advertising the Party on a vehicle.'

Over the past few years the public face of the party has improved no end. We have a journal that could sit easily on the shelves of newsagents amongst other current affairs magazines, we successfully published a well designed, properly bound centenary book on time and for sale in many bookshops and housed in many public libraries, we utilised 'new' technology to publicise ourselves over the internet with a film/DVD. Head Office is now a pleasant and well organised place to work and hold functions. These functions, whether they are film showings or day schools for discussion have been a success with much more envisaged for the future along with the soon to be revamped front to the Head Office building.

2007 saw the installing of a computerised account system for receipts and invoices which further sets us apart from the 'unprofessional' cottage industry approach that has existed in the past. We think that a well designed motif on a vehicle would further increase our existence to a wider public and would be an experiment worth trying beyond the advertising and limited audience we usually reach. The 'professional' looking approach would also convey our seriousness about reaching more people and show we have the confidence in our convictions. East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 13 Motion: "This Conference rules that no member shall be permanently or

semi-permanently resident at Head Office. Members may only sleep overnight at Head Office on an occasional basis for particular occasions such as Conference, ADM and EC meetings."

The experiment in allowing members to live at Head Office on a permanent or semi-permanent basis has failed and could in fact be said to have been a major contributory factor towards making 2007 an annus horribilis for the Party. The branch is divided on how far the Party should go in restricting members staying at Head Office, but we know from those who have contacted us that many members, especially in the Provinces, have strong views on the matter and would like it put to the vote. WEST LONDON BRANCH

Item 14 Motion: 'This conference believes that there is no objection to people

staying at head office if it helps the work of the party and is authorised by the executive committee'

Head Office is one of the party's main contact points with the outside world, and it would be good if it could be manned twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Since the party is not in a position where that is financially feasible, anything which helps us to have as regular a presence at Head Office as possible seems to be desirable. This would

help in the following ways. 1. Someone being available to answer the phone. 2. Any personal callers being attended to. 3. Any accidents, which are always possible in any building, such as a pipe burst or an electrical fault, could be dealt with. 4.

Any physical hostility

could also be dealt with: there are unfortunately not a few people around who would consider breaking a window to be an important political statement. 5. There is always work to be done at Head Office, and extra hands are always helpful. No one is suggesting that the party should run a hotel, so the two qualifications should always be kept in mind - first,

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that any stay at head office can be justified only if it helps the work of the party, and second, that any such stay is only acceptable if it is authorised or sanctioned by the executive committee. East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 17 Motion: 'This conference considers that in the heading on the front cover of the Socialist Standard the word 'Socialist' should be at least as prominent as the word 'Standard'.'

This resolution is largely self explanatory. Over recent months the word Standard has been given prominence both in size and colour on the front cover. We are not the 'Standard' Party; it is the Socialist part of the title that matters. The resolution does not mean that the size of 'Socialist' should be equal to the current size of 'Standard'!

East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 18 Motion: 'That this conference is in favour of having a Socialist Standard

that is printed with ease of reading in mind, for example with articles being printed in two columns and the print justified.'

The branch very much appreciates the work that is being done by the layout members; they are making the most of technical innovations to produce an attractive journal. We also recognise that fashions in presentation and design change, and that opinion about aspects of the appearance can be subjective. We have therefore worded the resolution to take account of some of the concerns that have been raised about our journal but without being too restrictive. The resolution does not mean that 3 columns cannot be used for example for letters and some book reviews. The main purpose of the Socialist Standard is to attract new readers. However if some members have found difficulty with three columns, with

unjustified print and with the print size, it may be that new readers could have similar difficulties. East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 26 Motion: 'This conference reaffirms that branches will only be recognised as having the rights of functioning branches if they return their Form C yearly, and that this be followed up by the EC.'

It doesn't seem to make sense to recognise branches if they do not perform the above criteria as stated in the rule book. All this resolution does is reaffirm what the requirements of a branch are in the sense that important inconsistencies and anomalies should be ironed out and set on a footing understandable to all. East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 27 Motion: 'This conference instructs that branches who haven't held quorate

meetings at least four times in a calendar year be wound up.'

An integral part of our task as a party is to try to foster an atmosphere based on the understanding of our principles that would encourage others of a like mind to join us. People who have joined up as

members have, in our opinion, taken a responsible step in wanting to participate to achieve a future participatory socialist society.

It should be hoped that the more members we have the more branches we will have as a result, and that all is done that is possible to encourage functioning branches. It doesn't seem to make sense to keep branches in existence for appearances sake only and we suggest the above criteria to focus members attention and remedy any possible malaise.

East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 29 Motion: That the 1992 Conference resolution establishing the General Purposes Committee be rescinded.

The General Purposes Committee has been vacant for several years, and its work has been assumed by the Executive Committee. Since the GPC was established by Conference, it requires another Conference motion to abolish it. Central London Branch.

Item 31 Item for Discussion: "The usefulness of an analysis of the political and cultural climate of the times. 7

One can assume that most people who may start to develop a politics that might one day turn out to be Socialist are sparked by an interest in current world events and a reflection upon the quality of their everyday lives. As an organisation could it be that we could engage a bit more effectively? Would it be more fruitful to comment and shed more light and historical understanding of recent world events? Examples that come to mind recently would be the latest developments in Venezuela, the turmoil in Pakistan, the state oppression in Burma, and the recent killings in Kenya. The media encourage workers to accept a subtext of competition, escape and the cult of personality whether celebrities or politicians. For the most part our lives are lived out in an atmosphere of lack of control, conformity and acquiescence. It is not all bad though. How good are we at connecting with some indicators in the media and what has been described as a "counter culture" that there could be a better way? Could we help move that partial critique into an empowering one? East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 33 Motion: 'This conference believes that Spintcom and Spopen should not be moderated.'

Since we are a party that advocates open political debate amongst ourselves and with our opponents and since we claim to be open about the internal workings of the party, it seems a contradiction to moderate our message boards. It has been argued that the moderators may be seen to act like a chair at a meeting principally by ensuring that a meeting doesn't degenerate into unfounded personal attacks.

In a normal meeting, however, all those present have the opportunity to evaluate what is being said, and to take responsible action, indeed they can move to over rule the chair. Because the message boards are moderated however, we are not always aware of what is being said and not always full enough in the picture to respond appropriately. Furthermore, because their position on an issue may be seen to affect how and who they moderate, despite their best efforts and whether founded or not, moderators will come under attack for behaving in a biased manner.

If some members persist in personal abuse then let the membership decide how to deal with them because they have witnessed the goings on.

Needless to say these incidents we should anticipate would be few and far between. Let us show our opponents that we operate an openly democratic organisation of which we are not ashamed. East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 35 Motion: "This conference rules that members borrowing books from the

library must renew their loan at three monthly intervals so that library records can be kept up to date. Further, no more than six books may be borrowed at one time.'

It seems that some members have had a strange attitude to the party library, having a number of books on extended or indefinite loan. In one case a book turned up for sale with second hand books and was purchased and returned to the library. Whilst appreciating that the library is there for the use of members, it is important that members act responsibly. Books should either be returned within a reasonable period or the library committee be contacted via HO (e mail or phone) and the loan renewed. East Anglian Regional Branch.

Item 37 Motion: "That this Conference re-affirms the 1996 Conference resolution

on questioning potential members, viz. "That this Conference re-affirms the need for potential members to be examined by the Branch they wish to join as instructed in Rule 1, and instructs Branches to ensure that applicants are in agreement with the Party's Object and Principles before recommending acceptance of their application."

In 2007 and 2008, the EC was presented with two members who had made numerous statements outrageously conflicting with the Party's case, a further member who employed

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religious language in correspondence, six members of Central Branch who the Central Branch Secretary claimed needed "clarification" of the Party's case, a recommendation by the Membership Department to enrol a member who apparently did not understand the Party case, and a recommendation by the Membership Department to enrol a member based largely on his affirmation that he agreed with the text sent to him by the Department. We consider this appalling and wish this Conference to recognise the absolute importance of building a movement of socialists with a proper understanding and acceptance of the fundamentals of socialism. Central London Branch.

Item 38 Motion: "This Conference reaffirms the Socialist Party of Great Britain

position that all applicants for membership shall be examined in order to ensure that they fully agree with and understand the principles and policies of the party."

In the past some branches have stated that they never apply the knowledge test to applicants for membership, preferring instead to "assess" them and argued that some applicants felt intimidated by being questioned and so were unable to do themselves justice. Leaving aside the obvious fact that most people have to face being questioned for jobs, qualifications etc., Glasgow branch is well aware that some applicants may not be able to express themselves by the spoken or written word, but if, for whatever reason, they are unable to tell us what their ideas are then, unfortunately, they cannot be admitted to membership. The main reason why the party has survived for so long is that it has tried to ensure that every applicant understands and agrees with its principles and policies and this is what has kept fundamental disagreements to a minimum. The knowledge test has served the party well and should always be applied. Glasgow Branch.

Item 39 Item for Discussion: The need for party discipline to be observed

It's obvious that party discipline has all but collapsed in recent years and that some members appear to welcome this. The fact is that nearly all members dislike having to apply discipline (no one has been charged since 1991) but this reluctance has seen the D of P and party democracy

openly defied by some members. For example, the Web has been used to trash the party and its policies, members who not only marched in a leftist demo but even flaunted the party banner, while other members have publicly described themselves as anarchists. It's been a case of giving some members an inch and them taking a mile. The truth is that we've been far too lax for too long,. We stood by and watched all of this happen and did nothing about it. The inevitable result of all this indiscipline has been more and more time and energy spent on in-fighting and vendettas. We need party discipline to be re-asserted, not ignored.

Glasgow Branch.

Item 40 Item for discussion: The need to improve the Membership Questionnaire and the "About Joining" letter.

We feel that some recent events concerning the examination of applicants for membership have highlighted the need to improve the questionnaire and the accompanying "About Joining" letter. For example, there is no mention on the questionnaire about the party's attitude to Trades Unions and the letter assumes that applicants already know the party's case on two fundamental issues - reformism and leadership. Glasgow Branch.

Item 41: Item for Discussion:How to get more Forms A and reduce Forms F

Supporting Statement

This is not a new problem - it has faced the Party since its inception. From a peak membership of around 1,100 in the 1950's it is now a little over 300. There is no single explanation for this decline. Some of the main factors are:

- (1) The idea of socialism, from being a distant goal for some Labour supporters, is now completely off their agenda.
- (2) Consumer culture has provided more and more non-political ways for workers to spend their time and money.
- (3) Outdoor meeting places, which were recruiting grounds for many earlier socialists, have now virtually disappeared.

The task of reversing the trend of membership also depends on several courses of action rather than just one.

Making more socialists.

Although our printed and electronic literature makes a strong case for a revolutionary world system, we have perhaps underestimated how difficult it is for many people to think and act in the long term. Until we put our resources into building socialist media, the capitalist media will be able to successfully claim that 'capitalism is the only game in town'.

Retaining more members.

We know sometimes about why members leave from their Forms F. Perhaps a questionnaire addressed to ex-members in the last 3 years would yield more information to guide future action. Central London Branch

Item 42 Item for Discussion: When it comes to spreading Socialist ideas in Africa would it be more practical and feasible to focus our attention on making socialists than recruiting members? However, if they apply to join, their application would be dealt with in the normal way.

In terms of practicality and feasibility we are better equipped with plentiful resources and geared towards making socialists in Africa than gaining party members. Not only have we absolutely mountains of literature we can easily distribute throughout the African continent but also have the valuable experience of making new contracts. We also know from past

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experience which countries to target and what response we can expect. On the other hand by encouraging them to become members of the party they form a false impression they can only become socialists by joining

the WSM through the SPGB. when we know full well that what determines class consciousness is their understanding and accepting the case for socialism. And they can obtain this without going through the formal procedure of becoming a party member. If they do become members there are also the issues and problems of democratic participation in formulating party policy. We may go through the motions of sending them the documentation for the ECEc, ADM and Conference, but know full well our African comrades are firstly denied access through financial constraints, and secondly because of the long drawn out process of Central Branch procedure. Swansea Branch.

Item 43 Item for Discussion: Should SPGB members overseas be re-formed as a World Socialist Group?

We raise this issue because there have been problems in our dealings with some overseas members and groups regarding their functioning and even their true socialist identity. We have also experienced problems regarding the sending of money abroad. In addition there are the practical difficulty of applying day-to-day democracy over great distances e.g. operating the ballot procedures. We hope this discussion contributes to our intention to move an Amendment to Rule at the 2009 Conference along the following lines:

Rule 1 to be amended to read: "Any person resident in the UK desiring membership..."

Insert new Rule 2:

"A. A member going to live abroad may remain a member of the SPGB unless there is a companion party or group in their new geographic area.

B. Members who previously joined the SPGB although permanently resident outside the UK shall no longer be members of the SPGB but will be deemed to be members of the wider World Socialist movement.

C. Applicants from geographic areas outside the UK will not be eligible for membership of the SPGB but will be advised to join or help to organise a group which is or may become a companion party of the World Socialist Movement."

Amend Rule 3: Delete all after "...by their last Branch." South London Branch.

Item 44 Item for Discussion: Is "anarcho socialist" a suitable way for party members to describe themselves?

Some members on occasion describe themselves as "anarcho-socialist" - is this acceptable? Some anarchists hold views close to our own but does the use of this term imply an abandonment of the crucial use of Parliament as a mechanism for establishing socialism? South London Branch

Item 45 Motion: This Conference resolves that the Party's full name, 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain', be used in the following cases:

- A. legal documents;
- B. Party forms;
- C. Party membership cards;
- D. publication credits, including the masthead of the Socialist Standard;
- E. listings of World Socialist Movement parties and publications; and
- F. the title of the Party's website. 10

It is encouraged to use the abbreviated form 'The Socialist Party' in any other context where confusion with other similarly named

organisations is unlikely. This resolution supersedes the 1986 and 1988 Conference resolutions respecting the use of the Party's names.

There are two main reasons for adopting this motion.

First, the current Conference rulings, which mandate the use of the short-form name "The Socialist Party" in most contexts, were adopted before the widespread adoption of the Internet. Nowadays many people's first encounter with the Party (or indeed with any organisation) will be online. However, given that there are dozens of parties worldwide which refer to themselves as "the" Socialist Party in their electoral district (including three in the UK), using the short form of our name makes it difficult to find our website and information about our party online.

Just as we need to use the full form of our name when listing ourselves alongside our similarly named Companion Parties, so too do we need to use the full form of our name when search engines and other online resources list our Party and its websites alongside similarly named parties in other countries. As our publications can now be distributed online with great ease, we need to make sure that there is no ambiguity when crediting our organisation as the publisher.

Second, the current Conference rulings are rather rigid concerning the use of the full form of our name. This motion softens the wording somewhat by indicating that, while it is generally preferable to use the abbreviated form, members may use the full form, particularly in contexts where confusion with other groups is likely to arise. Central London Branch.

Amendment to the Motion: After 'C' insert new paragraph: 'D' All Party bank accounts." and re-letter subsequent paragraphs. South London Branch.

Item 46: Item for Discussion: What is our attitude to nuclear power?

At one time the Party used to say that nuclear power would be one of the factors that would enable a socialist world to produce enough, indeed abundance, for all. We used to favour in particular nuclear fusion rather than the currently-employed nuclear fission. Then, with the rise of the ecology movements, we became a little more cautious about saying this, though we have never taken up an anti-nuclear position.

The matter has come up again since, if global warming really is caused by burning fossil fuels, then even if we get rid of capitalism socialist society will still have to find an alternative source of energy to power industry and supply homes. Obviously, recourse would be made to renewable energies but one problem here is that these don't always supply consistently (e.g. the wind doesn't always blow) so can only play a complementary role to some constant source. Nuclear power could be such a source. In fact, it's the obvious one.

Although we are not obliged to give a blueprint for how socialism might deal with the problem of global warming, we have to face the issue, especially when so many young people influenced by the Greens are anti-nuclear on principle and even feel morally obliged to halt the construction of more nuclear power stations.

In our view we should not rule out nuclear power in socialism and not support opposition to it under capitalism on irrational grounds. West London Branch.

Item 46: Item for Discussion: Should we turn our lights off when we leave a room?

In other words, should we as individuals seek to cut our consumption of fossil-fuel generated energy, as a way of lessening the threat of global warming. This is what we are urged to do by the government, the media, the Greens and the churches. But what do we say to workers: should they or should they not follow this advice? The knee-jerk socialist reaction

is to be cynical and say that the government always wants us to tighten our belts and that they have just found a new, plausible reason as to why we should do this.

Would it make any difference anyway, especially since the main source of greenhouse gas

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emissions is capitalist industry and agriculture? In fact, blaming us as individuals can be seen as a way of diverting attention from this. In any event, individual reductions in energy consumption are not going to solve the problem. Only socialism can provide the framework within which a solution can be found. But would a reduction in individual consumption of fossil fuel generated energy be part of the solution.

So, what do we say to other workers when they are urged to reduce their so-called "carbon footprint"? Ignore it and carry on as before? Do it if you want to, without illusions? What do we do ourselves? West London Branch.

Item 49: Item for Discussion: "The need for the Party to engage in educational and theoretical activities."

Much discussion has taken place recently on the forums about the need to put those members straight who do not understand certain aspects of the Party case. This Branch is very much concerned that our limited resources are better used for genuine members who fully understand the Party's object and principles but would greatly benefit from 'further education'.

A member of the Campaigns Department was approached recently by a member of this Branch with the suggestion that the Department might like to consider organising educational forums, initially held at Head Office.

The member was less than enthusiastic about the idea.

The Branch considers that it is vital to improve the knowledge of members on a wide range of subjects, particularly on economics, reformism and scientific materialism. For no other reason, we would suggest, than to guarantee a continued supply of writers and speakers. Central London Branch.

Item 56 Motion; This conference instructs the 'ad hoc committee investigating

alternative models of party decision making' to investigate how best Central Branch should be run in accordance as close as possible with the running of other branches, and a set of standing orders be drawn up as a result.

At the moment Central Branch does not operate like any other branch, it does not for example, hold meetings, or elect its own party delegates or officers; consequently the participation of its members democratically in party affairs may be seen to be at question. Since an ad hoc committee has already been set up to investigate alternative models of party decision making it may well be best placed to examine how best central branch can

operate on a democratic par with other branches, if at all. Central London Branch.

Item 57 Amendment to Rule: The EC shall appoint a Secretary to the Central Branch annually," and replace with: "The Central Branch membership shall elect their Branch Officers. Where no Branch Officers are elected the EC shall appoint annually,

This slight change in Rule 4 will allow the Central Branch membership to elect all their Branch Officers rather than have the EC automatically appoint them. However, where no Branch Officers are elected, the EC will still be able to call for nominations from the general membership to

ensure the administration of Central Branch committees. Swansea Branch.
Amendment to Conference Amendment to Rule 4: Reword the entire amendment as follows: Replace 'The EC shall appoint a Secretary to the Central Branch annually, who shall...' with 'The Central Branch membership shall elect their Branch Officers. Where no Branch Officers are elected, the EC shall appoint them annually. These Officers shall...'

This amendment fixes a grammatical error in the original amendment to rule, plus another grammatical error which would occur in the rule were the amendment to be adopted.

Central London Branch. 12

Item 58 Amendment to Rule: That Rule 26 should be amended so that 4 branches rather than 6 can call a Party Poll.

This amendment ought to be self-explanatory and the need for it self-evident. With the severe reduction in the number of branches over recent years, the correcting mechanism of Rule 26 - a unique rule for which the Party is justifiably proud - is now harder to achieve than at any time in 100 years, as the ratio of branches required for it has risen from 20 percent to nearly 50 percent. A reduction of the requirement to 4 branches returns the ratio to approximately 30 percent, a more practical level. An alternative suggestion, raised at 2007 ADM, to agree a percentage figure instead of an integer, is not in keeping with Party practice relating to quoracy figures and makes things unnecessarily complicated. 4 is a lot easier to comprehend than, say, 25 percent of 13. There was also some surprising opposition based on two related arguments, that lowering the requirement might lead to frivolous polls, or that there could be a ping-pong effect of polls and counter polls. It should scarcely be necessary to point out that both of these possibilities have always been with us and are if anything becoming less likely rather than more likely with today's fewer branches. Nor does the Party's long history show much evidence of such rampant capriciousness. What this opposition seems to be saying is that it is actually a good idea to make Rule 26 as difficult as possible just in case members feel tempted to use it too often. This is a truly bizarre notion, that too much democracy is bad for your organisational health. Members who have argued this have perhaps not followed their own logic to its conclusion, which is that, to be on the safe side, the best thing to do is not to return Rule 26 to the ease of use intended by the Party's founders, but to abolish it altogether, along with any other democratic mechanisms the irresponsible membership may be inclined to 'overuse'. Lancaster Branch.
Amendment to the Conference Amendment to Rule 26: Replace '4 branches' with 'at least half of all branches'.

This amendment specifies a proportion rather than an absolute number of Branches, which means the rule will not have to be amended if the number of Branches increases or decreases. Central London Branch.

Item 59 Amendment to Rule: That Rule 31 be amended in the last line to read: "No parties to the charge shall be allowed to sit as Delegates or Chair at Conference, ADM or any EC meeting where the case is being reviewed.

To clarify, Lancaster Branch identifies 'parties to the charge' as: the person being charged, and the person or persons instrumental in bringing the charge in the first place. This follows a recent situation in which it appears that a member was instrumental in bringing a charge to the EC table, then sat as an EC member and in fact presided as Chair while the charge was debated, used his position as Chair to rule on the use of

Rule 31 rather than Rule 29, and then proceeded to vote on the charge just like any other impartial EC member. One other EC member was also instrumental in collecting evidence in order to bring the charge, and then similarly voted at the EC meeting. There is a degree of dispute over the details of this, however the point is that there is nothing in our rules preventing such an amalgamation of plaintiff and juror, and that this needs to be addressed. Rule 31 recognises such a conflict of interests in the case of ADM or Conference, but overlooks the possibility of a similar conflict at the EC table. This amendment seeks to rectify a small loophole. There is no difficulty here. If a branch member wishes to bring a charge to the EC while also an EC member, they cannot wear two hats simultaneously. Having brought the charge, they should 'sit out' of the subsequent EC discussion, as any other branch member would have to do. To do otherwise is to take advantage of an ability to influence decision-making which is not open to other members. Lancaster Branch.