

Minutes of the 9th Meeting of the 104th Executive Committee of the of the Socialist Party

4 August 2007

Note: These minutes are not official until amendment and adoption by the EC.

Present: Browne, Chesham, White, Miller, Helps, Deutz, Carter, Bissett, Easton, Stair

Visitors: A Buick, M Chesham, N Deutz, P Hart, M Martin, G M Freddi, F Allen, M Tenner, G Thomas, P Lancaster, S Parker, B Johnson, K Martin* (non-member), C Buick (non-member)

The meeting was called to order around 13:00.

1. Election of Chair

Motion 1 (*Carter & Easton*) BIRT Deutz be chair.

Agreed

Motion 2 (*Chesham & Stair*) BIRT Miller take the minutes.

Carried 8–0–2

2. Minutes of the previous meeting, business arising therefrom and the General Secretary's rising of Notices of Motion and Business from previous meetings

(a) Amendment of the 7 July 2007 meeting minutes

Motion 3 (*Miller & Easton*) BIRT in §2.f.iii, "Miller stated that Martin had uttered threats of physical violence against another comrade." be inserted at the beginning of the second paragraph.

Carried 5–2–3

Motion 4 (*White & Miller*) BIRT in §2.f.iii, "(apart from White)" be inserted before "for referring the matter to the Branch".

Agreed

Motion 5 (*Bisset & Deutz*) BIRT in §2.f.iii, "and cited one such telephone call made to Cde Bissett" be inserted after "made abusive telephone calls to Head Office", and that "Bissett explained that he did not feel it was an abusive call." replace the following sentence.

Carried 6–0–3

(b) Adoption of the 7 July 2007 meeting minutes

Motion 6 (*Deutz & Easton*) BIRT the 7 July minutes be adopted as amended.

Agreed

(c) Matters arising from the 5 May 2007 meeting minutes

*Unless otherwise noted, any reference to "Martin" in these minutes refers to M Martin.

i. §2.g.i (Head Office security)

Miller reported that a member's relative had posted details of the security breach to a third-party website. He also reported on another incident in the Head Office vestibule where the police were involved, but that the police assured us that we had no liability for it. Stair and Chesham said we could incur liability for people smoking in the vestibule. Browne disagreed.

(d) Matters arising from the 2 June 2007 meeting

- i. Motion 8 (GPC): Letter received from HOO and Treasurer (27 July) indicating that the GPC was not necessary, but that an assistant would be helpful.

Motion 7 (*Miller & Easton*) BIRT the EC issue a call for a volunteer in line with the Head Office Organiser and Treasurer's requirements.

Carried 10-0

It was agreed to reconsider the matter of the GPC at Conference.

- ii. Motion 18 (speakers' classes): No report received from Central Organiser
iii. Motion 16 (Conference resolution implementation)

A. Report from Treasurer (27 July) regarding implementation of resolution on Branch dues. The Treasurer chose HSBC for the bank account and requested that £20 000 be transferred into the new account.

Motion 8 (*Browne & White*) BIRT both requests of Treasurer be granted.

Carried 10-0

B. No written report received from Ballot Committee regarding secret ballot implementation. Browne said that they hoped to produce a written report for ADM.

(e) Matters arising from the 7 July 2007 meeting

- i. Regarding §2.f.iii, Miller said we wanted to correct a statement he had made about the abusive telephone calls. He said that only one call was abusive; the other, a voicemail message, was a merely inappropriate as it disclosed private personal information about a member.

ii. Motion 24 (charge against Martin)

A. The charge proper

Bissett said that at the 7 July meeting, the chair said he would not accept any motion but a charge under Rule 31. Chesham said he had asked every EC member if Martin was engaged in action detrimental, and finding no objection, ruled that a Rule 31 charge was the only permitted course of action. Browne said he did not understand that ruling and that the EC had the option of referring the matter to the Branch. Easton explained that Rule 29 applies if the complaint is made to the Branch, and Rule 31 if the complaint is made to the EC. He said that once the EC deems a member to be acting detrimental, the EC has no choice but to charge.

The following correspondence concerning the charge was read out:

- Circular from General Secretary (11 July) explaining that he did not mail out the charge because the resolution did not specify the particulars
- Letter from Central London Branch (28 July) containing the following resolution:

BIRT with respect to Motion 24 of the 7 July EC meeting minutes, Central London Branch calls upon the EC to issue a more specific charge in accordance with Rule 31. (5-0)

- Letter from Chesham, Easton, Helps, Miller, and White (21 July) arguing that the original resolution was sufficient, and drawing comparison with past charges, which also did not specify the particulars
- E-mails from S Colborn (13 July) deploring the treatment of Martin and calling it a witch hunt and a personal feud
- E-mail from West London Branch (27 July) containing the following resolution:

West London Branch is dismayed that the matter of Comrade Martin's transgressions has not been referred to us and requests that it be done so now, in the best interests of the Party and of the member. Such action would be in line with longstanding practice and consistent with the EC's stated policy; namely, "... in general, any complaint or disciplinary matter which can be handled at the Branch level should be handled at the Branch level" (Special EC Meeting minutes, 24 June). The branch has asked Comrade Tenner to attend your August meeting. (8-0)

- E-mail from East Anglia Regional Branch (29 July) containing the following resolution:

This Branch gives full support to the EC motion to charge Michelle Martin under Rule 31 at the 7 July 2007 meeting. (4-2-2)[†]

- An e-mail from K Martin on behalf of M Martin (22 July) and two e-mails from M Martin (29 July and 4 August) offering a partial apology and giving a response to the charges
- E-mails from Lancaster Branch (31 July) containing the following resolution:

Lancaster Branch notes and endorses the E.C. resolution of June 24th, 2007, that "This E.C. believes that the effect of Party discipline should be corrective and preventative rather than punitive."

The Branch was surprised to see an item at the last E.C. meeting of July 7th, 2007 dealing with complaints from 3 members of Central London Branch against a member of West London Branch – dealt with using a rule 31 charge when the first rule on discipline in the Party rule book is rule 29. The first line of this rule states that "Charges against any member shall be submitted in writing to the Branch and a copy supplied to the member accused who shall be allowed 14 days to enter the defence." We do not understand why rule 29 was not used in the case.

Also, the Branch was disturbed to see that a comrade a) made a personal complaint against a member, b) sat as chair of the EC whilst dealing with this complaint, c) ruled that the matter be dealt with under rule 31 rather than rule 29, and d) voted on the validity of the complaint. These actions filled the Branch with disquiet.

We expect justice in the Socialist Party to be at least as fair as the capitalist legal system where a plaintiff would under no circumstances find themselves in the jury in the same case. (6-0)

Miller addressed four objections which various members had been raising to the charge: namely, that the charge was personally motivated or a witch hunt, that it was out of process, that it was unsympathetic, and that the rules were archaic. He said a witch hunt occurs only when the accusations are baseless, whereas the EC had considerable first-hand evidence. He said that any personal motivations of those making the charge are irrelevant, as the charge was debated and accepted on its merits.

[†]Deutz said that the voting figures were erroneous, and that the correct figures were 4-2-1.

Easton said that the matter is now in the hands of the membership, and stressed that a charge did not automatically result in expulsion, contrary to what some members have stated. He said that he believed the General Secretary was acting in good faith but in error.

Deutz noted differences with past charges, such as the fact that the EC met weekly and that the charge was not the first resort. She thought the application of the rule was wrong but that it was not a witch hunt.

Chesham said that charges were so rare that there is little tradition or precedent for handling them; we are bound only to follow the rule, not past examples. He said that contrary to past charges, this charge stems not from a single issue or incident but from overwhelming evidence, and that Martin's defence e-mails do not ameliorate things.

Bissett said that three previous general secretaries agreed with his circular. He said that there was no need for the charge because corrective and preventative discipline is working.

White said that we don't ask people to apologise for their political views.

Stair said that the situation is being exacerbated by people on Internet who are commenting on the case before it has even been properly formulated. He said he does not believe charge is being laid punitively.

Martin said she had been long thinking about changing her mind and has been talking with Cde Montague about the Irish question.

K Martin said that this is very clearly a personal vendetta and that Miller was taking her words out of context.

Browne said there is no need to proceed with this charge as Martin's ideas have already been questioned. He argued for referring the matter to the Branch, and asked why the complaint wasn't made to them in the first place.

White said the first incident was around June 2006, and that there was uproar at the time but it came to nothing.

Bissett said that Lawrie wrote the first letter of complaint about Martin's MySpace pages despite not having good computer skills.

Helps said that members of West London Branch have known about this problem for over a year and have done absolutely nothing. Deutz asked the West London Branch Secretary when he learned about Martin's views. Tenner replied that Branch members did not know about the charges until they were made. He said that it would be an insult not to refer the matter to the Branch, as EC members imply that the Branch is incapable of dealing with it.

Martin said that she doesn't think she should get special treatment.

Allen read out examples of Martin using abusive language against members.

Motion 9 (*Chesham & Easton*) BIRT the Executive Committee, having been presented with considerable evidence that Comrade Michelle Martin has been expressing support for nationalist, reformist, and theist views and organisations over the last year, deems her behaviour to be an infringement of the Principles and Rules and detrimental to the interests of the Party, and for this reason reasserts that she has been charged under Rule 31 and is suspended from all Party activity except the matter in dispute.

BIFRT the Executive Committee shall forthwith submit to all Branches and to Cde Martin the particulars of this charge; namely, this Resolution, Resolution 24 of the 7 July EC meeting minutes, a copy of Rule 31, the three letters submitted to the 7 July EC meeting and upon whose basis the charge was laid, a list of addresses for

web pages referenced or quoted in said letters, an offer to send electronic or printed copies of the web pages on request, a copy of Rule 6, and a copy of Principle 7.

Amendment (*Miller & Easton*) Add to the end “and the three letters from Martin”.
For: Helps, Miller. Against: Carter, Deutz, Chesham, Stair, White, Easton, Bissett. Abstaining: Browne. Failed 2–7–1

Vote on substantive motion:

For: Chesham, Miller, Stair, Helps, White, Easton. Against: none. Abstaining: Deutz, Carter, Bissett, Browne.

Carried 6–0–4

Easton left at this point.

Motion 10 (*Stair & White*) BIRT the Assistant Secretary send out the charge.

Amendment (*Browne & Carter*) Insert at the beginning “the General Secretary and”.
For: Carter, Deutz, Browne, Helps. Against: White, Miller, Chesham, Stair. Abstaining: Bissett. Failed 4–4–1

Vote on substantive motion:

For: Chesham, Stair, Helps, White, Carter. Against: Browne, Deutz. Abstaining: Miller, Bissett.

Carried 5–2–2

B. Conduct of General Secretary, Chesham, and Central London Branch

The following correspondence was considered:

- Circular from General Secretary (21 July) complaining about alleged activities and statements of Chesham at Summer School and of Central London Branch’s involvement in disciplinary matters
- Circular from Central London Branch (21 July) denying the General Secretary’s claim that it was responsible for the 24 June special EC meeting
- Circular from Chesham (26 July) denying the General Secretary’s claims

Bissett deplored the recent personal attacks against him and other comrades and said that members’ hasty use of e-mail was partly to blame.

Stair took issue with Bissett’s denial of having a conflict of interest in matters involving Martin and gave particulars of the alleged conflict of interest. Miller concurred that Bissett had a conflict of interest in matters involving Martin, claimed he and others present had personal knowledge of it, and gave nine examples of what he claimed was Bissett’s active obstruction or diversion of charge procedures. Chesham agreed.

Deutz said that Bissett’s refusal to send the charge was for procedural rather than personal reasons. Bissett agreed. Buick said that up to five former General Secretaries concurred that the charge was too vague to send out. Johnson argued for letting Bissett handle the matter, and that his past behaviour was irrelevant.

Motion 11 (*Stair & White*) BIRT the EC notes that the General Secretary has not conducted himself appropriately in that he has spent a lot of energy into trying to malagin Cde Chesham; that he contradicts himself with his personal statement (circular) in relation to alleged slanders against Cde Smith and his own comments, warnings, and observations about Cde Smith’s behaviour to Cde Martin and potential behaviour to Cde Clanchy; and that he has spread malicious rumours about the running of Head Office and members who frequently attend and work at Head Office.

Thomas deplored the informal meeting at Summer School to discuss the charge as the Branch is the unit of organisation. Chesham and Miller said the meeting was a called at the request of the General Secretary, that it simply dispelled false

rumours of an expulsion, and that it made no decisions. Others gave differing accounts of how meeting was called. Bissett said his request for dialogue at Summer School was in the hope members could sort out problems amicably. At Bissett's request, Miller read out the e-mail to spint.com suggesting the dialogue.

Miller and Browne said they would not support this motion as it assumed facts not in evidence.

For: Stair, White. Against: Miller, Bissett, Deutz, Browne, Carter. Abstaining: Chesham, Helps.

Failed 2-5-2

Motion 12 (*Miller & White*) BIRT Lancaster and West London Branches be advised that Rule 31 applies because the complaints were made to the EC and not to the Branch, and that Lancaster Branch be advised that as the complaint was of a political rather than personal nature, Cde Chesham had no conflict of interest in voting for it.

For: Miller, White, Helps, Stair. Against: Carter, Deutz, Bissett, Browne. Abstaining: Chesham.

Failed 4-4-1

Motion 13 (*Chesham & Deutz*) BIRT the resolutions from Lancaster and West London Branches be noted.

Carried 9-0

Buick and Browne urged the EC and Assistant Secretary to exercise caution and discretion when recording the minutes for this item.

iii. Motion 9 (Central Branch Forms F): E-mail received from Central Branch Secretary (26 July). Agreed to defer.

iv. Motion 21 (nominations to Internet Department)

A. Letter from Central London Branch (28 July) nominating A Johnstone to the Internet Department

B. E-mail from A Johnstone (24 July) accepting the nomination

Motion 14 (*Browne & Helps*) BIRT the EC accept the nomination of Johnstone to the Internet Department.

Agreed

v. Motion 26 (image credits in the *Standard*): Oral report from Assistant Secretary. Agreed to defer.

vi. Motions 33 and 35 (Campaigns Department report): No report received from Campaigns Department. Agreed to defer.

The meeting was presented with a separate letter from the Campaigns Department indicating that a speaker was needed for an event in Ireland.

Motion 15 (*Browne & Miller*) BIRT Cde Cronin be appointed speaker and that the necessary arrangements be made.

Agreed

vii. Motion 34 (Campaigns Department nominations): The meeting received a letter from Swansea Branch nominating B Johnson to the Campaigns Department, to the Overseas Contacts Committee, and to Overseas Contacts Secretary. It was agreed to defer consideration of the latter two nominations.

Motion 16 (*Browne & Miller*) BIRT the nomination of Johnson to the Campaigns Department be accepted.

Agreed

viii. Motion 46 (World Socialist Party (India)): The Central Organiser orally reported that we were awaiting minutes of our group in West Bengal. Agreed to defer.

(f) Notices of Motion and Business

i. Notice of Business 2 (Stair) from 2 June: The EC shall discuss the purchase of a hearing induction loop. Agreed to defer.

ii. Notice of Motion 1 (White & Chesham) from 7 July: BIRT in view of the fact that the Head Office computer has been used to access and view websites of a pornographic nature, this EC affirms that the Party's infrastructure is for the propagation of socialism and the administration of the party. Agreed to defer.

iii. Notice of Motion 2 (Chesham & Carter) from 7 July: BIRT the practice of self-nomination to subcommittees be discontinued. Agreed to defer.

3. Forms A and F

(a) Form A for Charlie Wolf: No report from Membership Department. Agreed to defer.

(b) Forms F for Anne Hopkin (Swansea Branch, lapsed) and Gavin Sinclair (Manchester Branch, deceased)

Motion 17 (*Deutz & Helps*) BIRT the Forms F for Hopkin and Sinclair be accepted.

Agreed

4. Written report of the General Purposes Committee

- None received.

5. Accounts

- None received.

6. Reports of Party Officers, Party Appointees, Subcommittees, and Departments; discussion of campaigns and *The Socialist Standard*

(a) Report from the Video Production Department. The report gave further details of the £9000 of equipment requested and mentioned an upcoming film.

Miller wanted to know what the equipment would be used for, as the EC already asked for more details on the project but received none. White, Stair, Deutz, Chesham, and Browne voiced concerns about the Party's potential use for the equipment and where it would be stored.

Motion 18 (*White & Miller*) BIRT the EC thanks the Video Production Department for their report but doesn't feel that the expense can be justified. BIFRT the EC looks forward to more detailed plans of the forthcoming film.

Carried 8-0-1

Deutz left at this point.

(b) Report from the Library Department. The report gave an update on the effort to recover overdue books and indicated that a Library Department was necessary given the amount of work.

Motion 19 (*Browne & Carter*) BIRT the EC issue a call for additional members to Library Department in accordance with requirements from the report.

Agreed

(c) Report from the Internet Department. Agreed to defer.

(d) Report from the Enquiries Department. Agreed to defer.

- (e) Report on Actions Taken Pursuant to the 1995 Conference Resolution Concerning the Protection of the Party's Identity and Funds. Agreed to defer.
- (f) Discussion of campaigns. Agreed to defer.
- (g) Discussion of *The Socialist Standard*. Agreed to defer.

7. Correspondence

- (a) Matters of urgency
 - None received.
- (b) Correspondence from or concerning Branches, the Party in general, and members
 - i. Letter from Central Branch Secretary (2 July) and letter from P Newell regarding the Zambia group (23 July). Agreed to defer.
- (c) Correspondence from Companion Parties and Groups
 - i. WSPNZ minutes for June 2007. Agreed to defer.
 - ii. SPC newsletter for July 2007. Agreed to defer.
- (d) All other correspondence
 - None received.

8. Any other business

- (a) Browne issued a call for reports to and items for discussion for the Annual Delegate Meeting ADM, the deadline for receipt of which is 31 August.
- (b) Stair and Browne urged the EC to renew our agreement with INK as we had received several subscriptions through them. The cost was £250.

Motion 20 (*Miller & Carter*) BIRT the EC authorises renewal of our agreement with INK.

Carried 8-0

9. Nomination of Chair for the next meeting

Motion 21 (*Browne & Chesham*) BIRT Browne be chair for the August 2007 meeting.

Agreed

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 19:39.