THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Report of the Proceedings of the 87th Autumn Delegate Meeting held at
Chiswick Town Hall, London, on 5 and 6 October 1991

Saturday 5 October

Comrade H. Vallar was elected to chair the meeting.
Letter from Lancaster Branch saying they were unable to be represented
and wishing the meeting every success.

1. Should there be a maximum period of continuous service on the EC?
2(a) The Need for the EC to meet monthly at weekends.
(b) Should the EC; (a) meet on Sundays; (b) be restructured?
Those in favour of a maximum period felt that this would both be more
democratic in giving more members a chance to be on the EC and allow EC
members a period of rest without feeling they were letting the Party
down. Others argued that, in restricting the choice of those standing
for the EC, the measure would not be democratic.
Once again, there was general agreement about monthly EC Meetings on a
weekend: restructuring could involve devolving a number of routine
decisions (such as paying bills) on to a subcommittee that could meet
more frequently.

3. Applications for membership of the Party: How to improve the
procedure
J. Dunn (West Yorks). opening, said his branch was concerned that only a
small percentage of those who enquired about membership followed this
up: they felt that most were put off by the questionnaire. This was
intimidating, especially for those who were not used to expressing
themselves in writing. A possible alternative procedure would be a “tick
box” system under which applicants would be asked to indicate whether or
not they agreed with particular statements.
D. Donnelly (Glasgow): this would seem to be a watering-down of the
admissions procedure.
S. Coleman (Central London): could applicants not be sent cassettes on
the Party’s case, and even reply to the questions by cassette?
H. McCloughlin (Bolton): could sample answers not be supplied to some of
the questions to indicate the type of reply required?
A. Buick (West London): the ideal procedure was a face-to-face meeting
with members. Could not it be arranged for applicants to be met by
members from branches in their region?

The utility and practicality of Party-run weekend residential education
conferences
S. Coleman (Central London), opening, said his branch was very much in
favour of this; it would provide an opportunity for Party members from
all over the country to meet and discuss in an informal atmosphere. At
the moment the only occasions for this were at Conference and ADM but
much time had inevitably to be devoted to procedural and house-keeping
matters and speaking priority given to delegates.

5. Branch Funds/Party Funds: Do Rules 6 and 7 need to be amended?
W. Brown (EC Member), opening with ADM permission on behalf of
Islington branch, said that recent experience had shown the need to
spell out in the Rulebook that monies in branch funds belong to the
Party as a whole.
In the discussion, most delegates said they had always understood this
to be the position; others questioned whether the Rules mentioned were
the ones that would need to be amended.
6. Should the Party buy a van?
C. Begley (Islington). opening. argued that it should. A van would be useful for publicity, storing literature and fly-posting equipment, touring the country, etc. One could be obtained for as little as £1000. In the discussion, delegates questioned what sort of van could be had for £1000 as well as suggesting that running costs would be higher than suggested. The alternative of hiring a van was mentioned.

8. Ways and Means of increasing Socialist Standard sales
9. Party policy on advertising the Socialist Standard
D. Donnelly (Glasgow). opening on 8. said we should consider reducing the price of the Standard, perhaps halving it, or at least having a dual price system (cheaper for outdoor sales). As well as posters advertising each issue.
C. Begley (Islington). opening on 9. also spoke in favour of posters, but felt that the price should be held at 50p, the real value of which would diminish anyway with inflation.
R. Cook (Birmingham). street sales were virtually finished: we should be looking elsewhere to shop sales and subscriptions. Sales could also be increased by each member taking 2 copies to sell or give away.
J. Bradley (Enfield & Harrow): detected that the climate of opinion was changing from the rabid individualism of the 1980s to more concern for a "community". We should take this into account in our advertising as well as the fact that Green Party members were now demoralised.
D. Donnelly (Glasgow) and C. McEwan (Glasgow) moved:
"That this ADM recommends that the EC produce a 4-colour poster advertising the Socialist Standard with a space for the current issue's cover". Carried 18-0.

9. As all copies have been sold, the need to re-issue the pamphlet SOCIALISM AS A PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE
P. Lawrence (SW London). opening, said this was a unique pamphlet which covered ground none of our other pamphlets did: its only flaw was the inappropriate illustrations.
P. Lawrence and B. Simpson (SW London) moved:
"This ADM recommends the re-printing of the pamphlet 'Socialism As a Practical Alternative' in a revised form". Carried 17-0.

10. Attending opponents meetings
P. Bennett (Manchester). opening. said his branch's experience was that this was not very useful: our opponents' meetings were not generally run on democratic lines and were boring.
B. Simpson (SW London): most of the opponents' meetings he had attended to discuss had ended up as verbal punch-ups.
O. Bond (West London): attendance was to contact any visitors not the militants of the group organising it.

11(a) The sharing of platforms with our political opponents
(b) Is there any conflict between our Declaration of Principles and representatives of the Party participating in forums with other organisations?
(c) The utility of forums in presenting socialist ideas
(d) Can we reconcile our hostility clause with the practice of holding "shared forum" meetings with other organisations?
J. Dunn (West Yorks). opening on (a). said his branch felt that this practice of the London branches should be explained to Provincial branches who hadn't gone in for it.
A. Buick (West London). opening on (b). said his branch felt there was
no incompatibility between forums and the Declaration of Principles. What had come to be called "forums" were a cross between a debate and a guest speaker. Some non-party political organisations would not engage in a formal debate while a guest speaker without a Party member on the platform to reply was felt to be unsatisfactory. He could assure Comrade Dunn that at forums the Party speakers always put the Party case, especially against reformism.

S. Coleman (Central London), opening on (c), said his branch felt tricked by Comrade Skelton: they had put this item on the agenda at her request as a member of Central Branch but now found that this had been a pretext for her to circulate the Party urging members to leave. This was outrageous behaviour.

P. Deutz (East London), opening on (d), said her branch was not convinced that the forum formula had always been successful in practice but had no strong feelings on the issue as long as such meetings attracted visitors and the advertising for them made it clear that they were debates not joint campaigning meetings.

C. McEwan (Glasgow): nothing detrimental in forums: if something sinister had ever happened as Comrade Skelton seemed to be suggesting, then the evidence should be produced.

R. Cook (Birmingham): during and after the war workers had been more interested in overall political solutions but as those they had supported had failed they had turned against "politics". This had now been replaced by non-party single-issue campaigns. He couldn't imagine a forum being held with a political party, but why not with conservation, animal aid, etc groups?

K. Smith (Bristol): we are hostile to all other political parties, but not necessarily to all other organisations. He was a member of Amnesty, Friends of the Earth, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and would be joining the RSPCA next week. What was wrong with that? These were not political parties and he did so as an individual not as a Party member.

C. Skelton (non-delegate) said she had asked branches to put this matter on the agenda because the General Secretary had written to her saying that the EC was fed up with her letters to them. If forums were debates, then the EC should approve the speaker, which didn't happen so they were a way round the rules. They also suggested that she had something in common with the reformist organisations we did them with: this was the slippery slope towards expediency, compromise and opportunism. Asked by C. McEwan (Glasgow) if she could produce any evidence of compromise and opportunism, C. Skelton replied that she had a bad memory but recalled some meeting in Ealing at which a member had expressed a personal rather than the Party view.

M. Judd (non-delegate): one forum he had attended had not been a success since our speaker had been only one of four.

P. Lawrence (non-delegate): in politics "shared platform" meant that two organisations got together to pursue some common aim. This had never happened in the Party and Comrade Skelton's use of the term "shared forum" was tendentious and dishonest. Forums were low-level debates, though he personally preferred the old-style, full dress debate.

C. Slapper (non-delegate): on one occasion Islington branch had wanted to organise a meeting on mental health and had invited a representative from "Mind" to provide some facts. Why not? How could we debate against an organisation like "Mind"? What happened at this forum was that the "Mind" representative provided information, while the Party speaker drew the political conclusion. Forums with more political organisations like Friends of the Earth were also useful and positive as they provided two different angles on the same problem, with the Party speaker again drawing the socialist conclusion.
J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): we should recognise that we don’t know everything and could learn from some other organisations.

J. Dunn (West Yorks). winding up. said he was pleased with the debate. He could see a case for forums as long as it was made perfectly clear that we had nothing in common with the other organisation. This could be done, and no doubt was, at the actual meeting but he was sceptical about whether this could always be done in the publicity for it.

S. Coleman (Central London). winding up. said that we generally did have something in common with those to whom we were hostile; a shared concern for a particular problem; where we differed was over the solution. We should not confuse content and form by making a dogma of particular forms of meeting and ruling out those which did not conform to this. The forum had proved to be a useful meeting form for getting our case across and should be continued.

12. To what extent must socialist principles be manifested in personal behaviour?

S. Coleman (Central London) withdrew this item, saying his branch would put it on the Conference agenda with an explanatory circular.

13. The current suitability of contesting elections

C. Begley (Islington). opening. said the branch circular, as explained in a footnote, did not necessarily represent the views of even a majority of members of the branch. It had been put forward to get a discussion about whether, in contesting elections, we were not encouraging illusions about Parliament and elections to it being democratic when in fact they were largely a sham, and to ask whether we didn’t stand for the “democratic” rather than the “parliamentary” road to socialism and, if so, should we not be encouraging the working class to organise democratically rather than contesting parliamentary elections?

S. Coleman (Central London): elections today certainly were far from being completely democratic but it was quite wrong to refer to them as a “sham”. In however distorted a way they did allow for minority views to be expressed and for majority views to prevail. The vote had been an important gain for the working class.

C. Elworthy (Birmingham): whether in contesting elections, we were not associating ourselves with something that was not democratic was a good question to consider. Despite their limitations we should stand in elections to put our case across, but we should not become addicted to them.

C. McEwan (Glasgow): had long been against contesting elections at the present time, but this was because he felt that we could use our limited resources in better ways not because he was an anti-parliamentarian. At a later stage the socialist movement would have to contest elections to win control of political power.

J. Dunn (West Yorks): we should consider contesting selected by-elections in order to get publicity in the media.

F. Simpkins (SW London): since we were a political party we had to think in terms of contesting elections, but for political reasons not just to get media publicity which didn’t amount to much anyway.

C. Begley (Islington). winding up. said he accepted that elections were not really a sham, but were they a fair fight?

14. How can we counter the SWP?

15. The Socialist Party’s attitude to the growth of the political organisation “Class War”.

Q. Bond (West London). opening on 14. said that with the collapse of Russian state capitalism and with Labour keen to be a party that only
wanted to manage capitalism. A political vacuum existed: where were people attracted by the concept of socialism to go? The SWP were clearly seeking to fill this gap and to present themselves as "the real socialist party". What should be our reaction to this, since, because it was a Leninist organisation, the workers it attracted could be expected to eventually become disillusioned with its authoritarian and leadership nature?

S. Coleman (Central London), opening on 15, said that unlike the SWP Class War was not a Leninist organisation. It was against the money system and was selling lots of its paper, and was clearly attracting people who could be joining us. Over the last ten years or so there had been a growth of a large section of the working class who had never had jobs and had no prospects. This had led to a sort of punk nihilism in which the energy of youth and unthinking anger were combined. Class War was in part an expression of this, and it was something that we too would have to come to terms with.

R. Cook (Birmingham): we still tended to define the working class as those forced to work for a wage or salary, but this gave the wrong impression that the working class did not embrace those who had never been employed, housewives, and single parents on state hand-outs. Because we were a democratic organisation, we were unable to react as quickly and decisively as dictatorial organisations like the SWP or anarchist organisations like Class War which went in for individual actions.

J. Dunn (West Yorks): we faced the dilemma of how to approach the "underclass" without alienating the majority of the working class who had seen an absolute increase in their standard of living. The gap within the working class between the rich and the poor had widened, which made it virtually impossible to have a common message that would appeal to both groups. People who wanted action not theory were not a good group for us. We should concentrate on putting our case rationally to the majority of workers rather than to the "underclass".

C. Elworthy (Birmingham): he had been reading Class War for three years and it was not true to say that they were hopeless from our point of view. In meeting them he had found that they were spontaneously against the system and that it was easier to talk to them about capitalism and socialism than it was to the satisfied worker. We should not knock the "underclass" and should recognise that we had something in common with them: we shared their anger against the system, even if unlike them most of us had jobs. The SWP attracted a quite different type, but even many of them were soon put off by its authoritarian nature. He had witnessed this happen when an SWP leader from London came to Coventry to impose a new branch organiser.

C. Begley (Islington): last week on his way to a Class War meeting he had been attacked by fascists who were looking for a fight with another group that preached violence and had mistaken him for a Class War supporter: he wouldn't be going to any more Class War meetings.

S. Easton (non-delegate): the last two years he had attended the week-long series of meetings and debates organised by the SWP in the summer under the title of "Marxism". He had made some useful contacts and suggested more members should go next year. He had also learned how undemocratic the SWP was: during the Gulf War, for instance, the SWP Central Committee had abolished all Branch Committees so as to have a tighter control of the membership.

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey): the best antidote to the SWP was the article "Leninist State versus World Socialism" that had appeared in the October 1987 Socialist Standard. When he was on the Publicity Committee it was sent to all enquirers. Since the SWP was present in towns all over the country where we were not even known and where they would be
attracting people who rejected Russian state capitalism and the Labour Party.

T. Kelleher (non-delegate): he had been a member of the SWP and had joined it because he was angry against the system, but had not found what he wanted there. Last week he too had attended the Class War conference, but hadn’t been impressed by their cult of violence. He had told them that they needed theory to understand capitalism and how to get rid of it, but they had replied “no. what we want is action”: they seemed to him to be “leftwing fascists”.

O. Bond (West London) winding up said his branch was not suggesting that we should direct all our efforts towards countering the SWP, but they could not be dismissed as “ageing Leninists” since they continued to attract young people. The real point was who was going to fill the political vacuum left by the collapse of Russian state capitalism and Labour embracing of the market. As long as capitalism exists there will be working class discontent and workers will seek solutions. We should be there with our solution. As to Class War, it was wrong to say that the growing “underclass” and the rest of the working class had separate interests. They were not two watertight groups and there was movement between them. What they had in common was lack of control over their lives and such problems as pollution and the threat of war.

H. Vallar (chair) said item 16 about changing the Party’s name to “World Socialist Party of Britain” would have to be taken the next morning.

Sunday 6 October (morning)

17. The role of the Executive Committee in the recent dispute with Camden and NW London branches

D. Donnelly (Glasgow) opening said that through an error in not strictly following the Rules the EC had put the Party in a silly position of still regarding as members, even if as suspended ones, people who regarded themselves as having been expelled and who had set up an organisation that was dedicated to wrecking our party. The EC should have accepted that the Rule 26 Poll was a poll to expel the two branches and not interpreted it as an instruction to the EC to charge them again.

G. Woods (non-delegate): Rule 33 was the rule that should have been used for a disciplinary measure. When they had received the requisition from the 6 branches under Rule 26, the EC should have told the branches they were using the wrong rule and asked them to re-phrase their question. In any event a total only of 32 members in the 6 branches had voted for the call for a Poll under Rule 26.

G. Skelton (non-delegate): some people had warned of the consequences of using Rule 26 to expel branches and now these had materialised. The outcome was ambiguous but after the vote went the way it did it was only to be expected that the ex-members would regard themselves as expelled and form their own party.

P. Lawrence (SW London): Glasgow was right: the EC had been inept and incompetent and had acted in direct opposition to the Rules. They had let personal considerations sway them and had landed landed the Party in a mess: all we could do now was to discuss how to limit the damage.

H. McLaughlin (Bolton): Rule 26, including its use for disciplinary matters, was an essential safeguard against an EC that might refuse to abide by the rules or be corrupt or even, as had happened, where London members from whom the EC was elected had a different view on some question to members in the Provinces.

P. Deutz (East London): was against the use of Rule 26 for discipline:
the EC should have told the 6 branches that only Rule 33 could be used for this. Since the wrong Rule had been used, the EC had no choice but to begin again using the correct Rule.

E. Goodman (EC Member): resented what Comrade Lawrence had said. EC members had not acted to please themselves but in what they judged to be the best interests of the Party.

J. Usher (EC Member): the EC had applied the Rulebook. Rule 26 might in theory have been used to expel a branch but to do this it would have had to have been carefully worded: unfortunately it wasn’t and the EC had taken it to have been an expression of opinion that the two branches should be expelled, leaving the EC to set in motion the procedure for this by applying the appropriate rule, i.e. Rule 33.

C. Trainer (Glasgow): reference had been made to the fact only only 30 or so members in the 6 branches had voted for the Poll, but this was still more than the 4 EC members who in October had prevented Rule 33 being applied at that time. The job of the EC was to apply decisions, not interpret them: otherwise it would be in a leadership position.

C. Slapper (Central London): drew attention to an advertisement in the Guardian the day before ADM in which the expelled members had publicly stated their opposition to us. The EC had bent over backwards not to charge them.

R. Headicar (Islington): as a member of last year’s EC, he resented the allegations that were being made against the EC. The EC had called a Poll on the 1988 Conference resolution precisely to get the backing of the Party for a charge under Rule 33 on the next occasion of a breach. But the six branches had pre-empted this resulting in the present mess.

R. Cook (Birmingham): the two offending branches had been defying the Party for at least five years. The EC had been faced with the difficult problem of how to handle a totally undemocratic minority existing within our essentially democratic party.

G. Woods (non-delegate): wanted to make it clear that she had not supported the two branches in ignoring the Conference decision and that she didn’t support what they were doing now.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): winding up, said he accepted that the EC had acted in good faith, but they had made a mistake.

18. Could the defence of socialist principles and Party democracy have been carried out more forcefully and with less time-wasting in recent years? What lessons can we learn from the recent events of an undemocratic minority refusing to adhere to the majority will?

S. Coleman (Central London): opening, said we should discuss how to prevent what had happened, where an undemocratic minority had operated within the Party, from ever happening again. We should be a tolerant party which respected members as people. We should not dogmatically insist that there was only one correct position on issues; and we should remain a fiercely democratic party.

H. Vallar (Chair) said that in view of the hour she now take the EC charge, leaving items 19 and 20 to be taken later.

EC CHARGE. UNDER RULE 33. AGAINST CAMDEN BRANCH AND NORTH WEST LONDON BRANCHES OF ACTION DETRIMENTAL TO THE INTERESTS OF THE PARTY

The text of the charge adopted by the EC at its Meeting of 21 May 1991 was as follows:

"The EC hereby charges Camden and NW London Branches, under Rule 33, with action detrimental to the interests of the Party in that they have persistently chosen to act undemocratically.

"The facts are well-known. In 1988 Annual Conference passed a resolution
regulating the use of the full and shortened versions of the Party's name, with the aim of trying to get us accepted as "The Socialist Party" by ourselves promoting this particular version of our name in our own publicity and propaganda.

"Camden and NW London Branches have never applied this democratically-agreed Party policy and have persistently and deliberately infringed it in leaflets advertising their meetings and in the titles of some of them, so acting undemocratically.

"They persisted in this practice even after the Party Poll in March this year which confirmed the 1988 resolution.

"These facts are not at issue in this case. The two branches have never denied that they have not complied with the Conference resolution: their claim has been the legalistic one that the resolution was in some way flawed and so not binding on them. The Party has taken the view that, as the resolution was passed in the same way as all other resolutions it is perfectly valid and so binding on all branches. So in flouting the resolution the two branches have acted undemocratically by disregarding the majority view both as to what Party policy should be on the subject of the resolution and as to what constitutes a valid resolution.

"In deliberately choosing to act undemocratically by disregarding a resolution adopted in accordance with the Party's democratic decision-making procedures, the two branches have undermined these procedures. In so doing they have acted in a manner detrimental to the interests of the Party."

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

"In view of the fact that the former members of Camden and NW London branches have formed a new political party in opposition to our Party and are no longer members, this ADM cannot consider the charges brought against them by the Executive Committee".

The mover argued that it was absurd to proceed with a charge against people who were clearly no longer members of the Party.

Those who spoke against the motion argued that, now that the EC had initiated a charge in accordance with the rulebook, the full procedure laid down in the rules should be complied with.

The motion was lost by 4-18.

J. Usher (EC Member) presented the EC's case against the two branches. Despite being called to order by the 1989 ADM and on a number of occasions by the EC, the two branches had deliberately and repeatedly flouted the 1988 Conference resolution on the use of the Party's name. A Party Poll called for by six branches under Rule 26, held in April/May this year, had decided by 176 votes to 112 "that Camden and NW London Branches be expelled from the Party, having persistently chosen to act undemocratically and detrimentally to the interests of the Party". Immediately on the announcement of the result of this Poll on 7 May, the EC had charged the two branches under Rule 33 as the first step in the expulsion procedure laid down in the Party's rulebook. Since that date the two branches had been suspended from all Party activity except the matter in dispute.

H. Vallar (Chair) asked if any members of the two charged branches wished to reply.

H. Young (NW London) said he no longer wanted to be associated with the Party as it had gone reformist.

L. Lestor (Camden) said there was no charge for her to answer as she was no longer a member of the Party, having been expelled on 7 May 1991 in the Poll called by the six branches under Rule 26.

In the ensuing discussion there was general agreement that the two
branches had acted undemocratically and should not have done so, but there was disagreement as to whether or not this merited their expulsion from the Party.

Those who spoke in favour of expulsion argued that there were no mitigating circumstances: the 1988 resolution had not been inadvertently infringed: it had been defiantly flouted. By their actions the two branches had undermined the democratic nature of the Party. The membership had to re-assert that all members and branches, whatever their past contribution to the Party, had to defer to majority decisions. Otherwise the Party would either degenerate into a loose anarchistic federation or would be accepting the existence within it of an elite with a House of Lords type veto over majority decisions.

Those who spoke against expulsion presented various arguments. Some argued that differences over what name to call ourselves was too trivial a matter to expel members for and hoped that some reconciliation might be possible either now or at some later date: to expel members who were still socialists was to shoot ourselves in the foot. Others argued that other resolutions had been infringed without those responsible being charged: the two branches were being picked on: internal democracy was not the real issue as the two branches had been pushed into a corner by members who wanted them out for other reasons.

P. Lawrence (SW London) and F. Simpkins (SW London) moved:
“This ADM is opposed to the EC’s charges against the ex-Camden and NW London Branches as these branches are already expelled by Party Poll”.

The mover argued that the two branches had already been expelled in the Rule 26 Poll in May: to proceed with the charge under Rule 33 would be to accept the EC’s right to ignore a Party Poll result.

The motion was lost 2-25

H. Cook (Birmingham) and H. McLaughlin (Bolton) moved:
“That this Delegate Meeting finds that the charge brought by the EC in accordance with Rule 33 against Camden and North West London branches, that they have persistently acted in defiance of Conference Resolutions and EC written warnings and have thus engaged in action detrimental to the interests of the Party, is proven. In consequence this Delegate Meeting instructs the EC to call a Party Poll on the proposition: ‘That Camden and North West London branches and all members of those branches not dissociating themselves from those branches be expelled forthwith’

This resolution was carried 18-6.

Sunday afternoon

On the report of the Ballot Committee. A. Buick (West London) raised the question of the disagreement between the committee and the EC as to whether Head Office should send ballot papers directly to individual members or to Branch Secretaries for them to send on. which would have to be resolved before the coming poll.

After a discussion. K. Graham (Birmingham) and S. Coleman (Central London) moved: “That this ADM recommends that ballot papers in the forthcoming ballot be sent direct to individual members”. Carried 18-2.

On the report of the Premises Committee. S. Coleman (Central London) referred to the work being put in by Comrade W. Buchanan in connection with the re-arrangement of Head Office.
W. Buchanan (Premises Committee) confirmed that the print machinery had been moved to the old canteen area. so freeing the front area for meetings again.

19. Is the Socialist Party hostile to the "political party" established at a closed meeting on 11th June which has used our name and object? S. Coleman (Central London). opening. said we had to be hostile to this organisation which had usurped our name. attacked us in leaflets. at outdoor meetings and in Friday's ad in the Guardian. According to Clause 7 of our Declaration of Principles, we were the socialist party in this country and had to be hostile to all other parties: they were imposters. They were committed to the idea of a "socialist state" and to the view that the rich did not get richer under capitalism, they had attacked us for pandering to "so-called 'ethnic minorities'" and had introduced the confused concept of an "anti-capitalist reform party". They were an undemocratic leadership group of about 20 individuals which would fall to pieces within a couple of years through being unable to resolve the political differences that existed amongst the leading "personalities" involved.

C. Trainer (Glasgow): Comrade Coleman was being complacent in thinking they would disappear in a couple of years. They could well survive longer than this and do some damage to the Party.

W. Lawler (SW London) and K. Yudt (SW London) moved "next business". Carried 11-1.

20. The wisdom of the Party having one disciplinary sanction only. i.e. expulsion. and the need to consider possible alternatives

O. Bond (West London). opening. said that at the moment the only sanction available under Rule 33 was expulsion -- the death penalty. We should consider whether other sanctions should not be available such as suspension for a period. dissolution of branches and transfer of their members to Central Branch and written warnings.

L. Humphries (Birmingham): could not see what other sanctions there could be except warnings. reading the Riot Act.

21(a) The Party’s position vis-a-vis capitalist democratic reform movements.

(b) Should Socialists refuse to support workers’ struggles for one person. one vote unless workers are likely to use the vote for socialism?

J. Dunn (West Yorks). opening on (a). said that what had happened in East Europe and Russia and no doubt would happen too in China had been reform from the top down as well as struggles from below. The ideas underlying workers’ movements for democracy sprang from capitalist conditions. from ideas about "equality". "justice" and "human rights". Democratic liberalism was a product of capitalism. as Marx. Engels and Kautsky had pointed out. State capitalism in one country could not survive and it was the pressure of competition under capitalism and the inefficiency of the state-capitalist elite to meet competition from other capitalist countries that had brought down the Berlin Wall. State capitalism had been unable to provide the workers with the standard of living they expected: this was why the workers had got involved in the struggle: to try to improve their standard of living. not for some abstract ideal of democracy. In East Europe the outcome of this struggle for democracy would be higher productivity, higher efficiency. i.e. increased exploitation. These democratic reforms didn’t need our support to succeed: they had the support of Bush. Major, Thatcher, Kinnock and other capitalist politicians. Democracy didn’t mean freedom: it meant wage-slavery and increased exploitation. Our strategy for using the
ballot box and Parliament was not based on support for the neo-Gothic institution at Westminster as such. It didn't make us supporters of liberal democracy and so-called pluralism. Our position was that we merely wanted to use these institutions to get socialism. We did not support democracy as such since it was something that made capitalist exploitation easier. For that reason we shouldn't support democratic reform movements: we should leave the requirements of the capitalist economy to the capitalists and tell workers to fight for socialism and nothing but socialism.

S. Coleman (Central London). opening on (b). said he profoundly disagreed with the previous speaker who had put a rather economic determinist case: that because the capitalist economy needed universal suffrage, trade union rights, freedom of speech, etc. therefore this would happen. The history of capitalism did not bear this out. as comparisons between political institutions between countries at the same level of economic development showed. Historical factors, including the struggle of the workers, were also involved. Nor was democracy simply a way of running capitalism: it was a form of organisation that had existed in other societies and would exist in socialism which would be the highest form of democracy. Within capitalism a form of democracy existed, but we called it "constitutonal democracy" to distinguish it from the true democracy of socialist society. It was not true that democratic "opportunities" (a better term than "rights") under capitalism always came about from the top down. They had also been part of the class struggle and Marx had gone on record as saying that if the Chartists had succeeded in getting the vote for (male) workers this would have been the single greatest thing they could have achieved at the time. We could now say the same about Africa today: what could be expected to develop here were movements for constitutional democracy that would create the conditions for the later growth of the socialist movement. Democracy was an aspiration felt by workers. Of course we should oppose the hi-jacking of these aspirations by capitalist politicians and ideologues but we shouldn't knock the aspiration itself: in fact we should latch on to it and try to show that it could only be realised in a socialist society. The real test of our commitment to democracy as an organisational form was the answer we gave to the question posed in the Item for Discussion: did we support workers demanding the right to vote, even if we knew they were going to use it to vote for capitalism? In his view, we had to answer "yes" since democracy under capitalism was an advantage in itself, quite apart from its use as an instrument to establish socialism.

K. Smith (Bristol): a distinction should be drawn between what the Party does and what individual members do. If there is a movement for democracy somewhere, Socialists can't just sit back and do nothing when their support might contribute to the success of the movement, but any involvement would have to be as individual socialists and workers, not as a Party.

G. Woods (non-delegate): this question of the Party's attitude to political democracy, and to movements to establish or defend it, had always been a difficult one in the Party. It had come up at the time of the Spanish Civil War when a section of the membership had argued that we should support workers in Spain who wanted democracy. After much discussion, the conclusion was reached that we could not support the democratic government in its struggle with Franco as this would mean siding with one capitalist group against another. The logic of those who wanted us to support the movement for democracy in Spain had been that we should support the Second World War, but the Party as a whole did not take up this position. We opposed the war. Yes, the socialist movement does need democracy but we only need it to get Socialism. Because we are
so small we should concentrate on making socialists not on getting
democracy.

V. Stephanian (West London): the attitude to bourgeois democracy that
had been expressed by members revealed a somewhat insular attitude
determined by conditions existing in this part of the world.

L. Humphries (Birmingham): gains such as democracy could be made by
workers within capitalism. But we must always point out that the goal is
socialism.

C. Elworthy (Birmingham): there were two dangers. One was to say that
democracy was not important: that was a sectarian attitude. The other
was to say that democracy under capitalism was an end in itself, but
democracy could be seen as a development of capitalism. We should
welcome it but should not get over-enthusiastic about it.

K. Mohideen (Islington): some of the views expressed in this discussion
were insensitive to the position of the millions of workers in the world
who did not have the same political conditions as workers in Britain and
who couldn’t hold meetings of this sort without the police or some thugs
breaking it up.

C. Skelton rose. D. Donnelly (Glasgow) asked if she was still a member
in view of her statement that morning. After some discussion of the
issue, H. Vallar (chair) ruled that as her resignation had not yet been
received she was still a member entitled to take part in the debate.

C. Skelton (non-delegate): the movement in Russia had been a top-down
reformism initiated by Gorbachev in 1985 rather than a class struggle
initiated by the workers. When the Suffragette movement had developed in
Britain before WWI the Party had not supported it: we had said that
enough workers had to vote to allow socialism to be established when the
working class wanted it. So we didn’t support democracy as such, but
only as a tool to use to establish socialism.

P. Lawrence (SW London): the Islington delegate had reminded us that we
were tending to take political democracy for granted whereas millions of
workers suffered from not having it. Comrade Dunn’s attitude, in
attributing the fall of the Berlin Wall to the drive for capitalist
democracy, was rather detached. He had overlooked the fact that the
inefficiency in the countries of Eastern Europe had been brought about
by the attitude of the workers who, because there was no democracy,
could only protest by not working properly. So the situation had been
originally provoked by the workers. We must say that the coming of
democracy was a very important gain for the workers: it brought about a
freedom from political repression, a freedom to discuss, a freedom to
organise in trade unions and political parties. These were vital
freedoms for the working class. We couldn’t be committed to the view
that there was no difference between Stalinism and democracy under
capitalism because they were both capitalist.

M. Judd (non-delegate): what did the Islington delegate expect the Party
to do about the lack of democracy in other countries? In September 1927
the Socialist Standard had answered a question by a reader about the
campaign in South Africa by blacks for the right to vote by saying “we
would strongly urge them to agitate for the franchise”, but then
followed a “but”. This was our position: we would like workers
everywhere to have the vote, to be free to form trade unions, to be free
from arbitrary arrest, etc. but this was not enough.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): the Party had never given unconditional support
to any movement and we weren’t doing this now. What we were saying was
what we had always said: that democracy was necessary for the triumph of
the socialist movement and that it was nuts to say that there was no
difference between limited bourgeois democracy and dictatorship. We had
always rejected the quietist Marxism which argued this. We favoured the
view that our class was the dynamic class in society. In fact, the
Chartists, the movement which had been the beginning of the coming alive of our class, had been a movement for political democracy.

W. Mohideen (Islington): said in reply to Comrade Judd that recently there had been a demonstration by 10,000 women in Sri Lanka for the right to free speech. If she'd been in that country she'd have been there and would have liked to think that she would have had the support of the Party. We should refrain from attacking movements protesting against the lack of democracy in countries like Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

W. Ghebre (Central London): Ian Smith had once said that "one man. one vote" would never come to Rhodesia, but he hadn't lasted. Nor was apartheid in South Africa. Politically Africa was years behind what existed in Britain in 1904 and without democracy you couldn't make socialists. In Eastern Europe state capitalism had dominated all: now it had gone and we can contact workers there. But it was still true that it was Socialism and not capitalist democracy that meant freedom.

R. Headicar (Islington): what we should say to workers struggling for democracy was not "yes, but" as our support for them was not conditional. It was "yes, and". Yes, struggle for democracy and struggle for socialism.

P. Deutz (East London): the reason she had joined the Party over 30 years ago had been that she had been concerned, among other things, about apartheid but had reached the conclusion that the best way to oppose this was to work to win over workers in this country to socialism. She agreed with Comrade Dunn, but didn't think there was all that much difference between the two points of view that had been expressed. The Party had never said, or even thought, that political democracy didn't matter. Socialism had to be democratic. We needed political democracy to get it, and political democracy did make life a little easier for the workers. When this matter had come up in 1972 the Party had endorsed an EC statement which had said that "while declaring our sympathy with the exploited in their resistance to the exploiters it is essential, in order to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, and in the light of the Party's attitude of not advocating reforms that we should avoid using the word 'support' in relation to actions of reformist parties, groups and individuals". She felt we should stick to this position: we should express sympathy, but not support, for workers struggling for democracy.

G. Shapson (non-delegate): there was some confusion of terms. Freedom of expression, organisation, etc., whatever their merits, were not democracy. True democracy -- the power of the people -- could not exist under capitalism but only in a socialist society.

J. Dunn (West Yorks.), winding up on (a), said that of course socialism was the highest form of democracy, but we did not in favour of democracy under capitalism because it was some noble idea; we wanted it as an instrument to get socialism. Comrade Lawrence's praise of democracy would have got cheers at the Conference of any capitalist party. We should be clear that democracy was a way of running capitalism, a way that allowed a higher rate of exploitation than under conditions of political dictatorship. Socialism was historically necessary and what we should say to workers was: if you are going to organise, don't organise for the idealistic slogans of capitalist democracy, organise for what is historically necessary.

S. Coleman (Central London), winding up on (b), said that we could not say to workers struggling for democracy: we support you but only if you will use it when you get it to vote for socialism, which implied that we wouldn't support them if they used it to vote for capitalism. The workers had the right to vote for capitalism if they wanted to. Regarding the Spanish Civil War, the Party's position had not been that there was no difference between Republican Spain and the Franco
Dictatorship: it was that democracy was important but that it could not be defended by taking sides in a capitalist war—the same position we took up in the second world war.

21. How can the Party show solidarity towards the struggles of fellow workers?
K. Mohideen (Islington). opening. said what the branch wanted discussed had just been discussed under the previous Item. In their circular the branch had argued that we are opposed to political parties that seek to administer the capitalist system, but not necessarily to all other defensive organisations that workers might form, not just trade unions but also tenants associations, human rights groups and campaigning charities. Socialists could participate in some of these groups where they could insist on them being organised democratically so as not to be taken over by capitalist and reformist politicians.
C. McColl (non-delegate): when Bournemouth Group had discussed this they felt it smacked of "entrvism". If so, they were against it. The time and energy of Party members should be devoted to the Party, not to helping what were essentially reformist organisations to continue in existence.
K. Mohideen (Islington). replying, said that what was being advocated was not entrvism. She was not saying that the Party should get involved in them, nor that members should be in these organisations to try to win them over to socialism. All she was saying was that socialists could be in them as individual workers helping these fellow workers to fight back against capitalist exploitation and oppression on the basis of their democratic self-organisation.

The Report of the EC and Party Officers to 1991 ADM was adopted on a motion of S. Coleman (Central London) and V. Stephanian (West London).

J. Dunn (West Yorks) said his branch would not insist on items 16 (changing the name to "World Socialist Party of Britain") and 24 ("That the Party should oppose the concept of statism as opposed to state capitalism in its propaganda") standing in their name being discussed.
R. Cook (Birmingham) said his branch did the same regarding its item. 26 ("That the Party re-assess its position on Engels’ contribution to Marxism") and 27 ("Does the Party take a moral stance against capitalism?”).
K. Yudt (SW London) said his branch withdrew its item. No 25.

23 (a) Has the Party a clear and consistent interpretation of the cause of economic crises and is this a Marxian interpretation?
(b) The Party’s views of the worsening economic crisis.
R. Cook (Birmingham). opening on (a). said that because most of Marx’s writings on crises were in the form of unrevised notes it was possible to interpret his views in different ways. This was why various different Marxian theories of crises had flourished. Some had argued that crises were caused by overproduction resulting from working class consumption being inadequate to consume enough of what they produced. But that was a permanent feature of capitalism and so could not explain something like crises which only occurred from time to time. Others saw crises of overproduction as resulting from the "anarchy of production" that existed under capitalism leading to one sector of the economy expanding too much in relation to the rest of the economy. This "disproportionality" theory was the one that had been expressed in the Socialist Standard in recent years. He found it an unsatisfactory theory as it failed to show why crises had to happen under capitalism. A crisis was a halt in the process of capital accumulation but why did accumulation stop? Because of a fall in the rate of profit (separate
from the permanent long-run tendency of the rate of profit to fall discussed by Marx). but what would bring this about? As capital accumulated so did the total amount of capital seeking profitable investment but as the mass of profit could not indefinitely increase at the same rate as the accumulation of capital, it was mathematically inevitable that at a certain point the rate of profit would fall. A crisis would then result. The crisis would eventually create the conditions for a resumption of accumulation and the whole cycle would be begin again. This was the most credible Marxian theory of crisis and the Party should adopt it.

T. Lawler (SW London), opening on (b), said that it should be clear that we were now in a world-wide slump just as 1929 had been. During the last world war the Party had thought that the war would be followed by a slump. It wasn't, but why? The Keynesians claimed. while the post-war boom lasted, that this had been due to their policies of deficit financing and the like, but it was clear that this had only postponed the big slump. Things had began to go wrong for them with the recession of 1972-4. then that of 1981, then the stock exchange crash of 1987. Now we were in another world slump, with the only issue to be decided being whether or not it was going to be worse than 1929. All the factors were there: banking scandals to be followed by collapses, falling commodity prices, and the welfare state collapsing under its own weight: the Japanese economy was in difficulty and it could be its collapse that would trigger off the thing.

D. Perrin (Merseyside): there were three main theories in the Marxist tradition as to the cause of slumps: (1) the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, but this had to be ruled out as an explanation since it would require the organic composition of capital to rise at an unrealistically fast rate: (2) underconsumption, as for instance by Rosa Luxemburg, but this neglected the fact that in a boom the percentage of income going to the working class went up, and also that the income of the working class and the capitalist class together is always sufficient to purchase the whole social product: (3) that the cause of most industrial, as opposed to banking, crises was the dislocation of the circulation and accumulation of capital caused by one key sector of the economy overexpanding in relation to the market for its products, i.e. disproportionately with regard to the other sectors. This was the view the Party had tended to endorse. As to Comrade Lawler's view, we cannot say that every crisis necessarily has to be "worse" than the previous one in terms of the depth of the fall in industrial production, but it could be said that, as with accumulation capitalism spreads over a wider area, each succeeding crisis affected a wider area.

J. Dunn (West Yorks): Crises were brought about by the increased level of exploitation that took place in a boom; as a result the labour value of commodities fell, which sooner or later would manifest itself in a fall in prices and so in incomes, leading to a state of generalised overproduction. Comrade Lawler seemed to be waiting for the Big One but there was no way of saying in advance how severe a crisis would turn out to be. What we can say is that as long as capitalism lasts there will inevitably be periodic crises.

L. Humphreys (Birmingham) suggested that the average diminution in the value of money might be a factor that provoked a crisis.

A. Buick (West London): Comrade Cook had claimed that the Party said that crises arose merely out of the anarchy of production that existed under capitalism. In fact, what we had said was that crises resulted from this plus the drive to make profits, which together inevitably led from time to time to the economy being dislocated, generally by the disproportionate growth of the producer goods sector. Comrade Lawler had been expecting the Big Slump, the one that would be bigger than 1929, to
happen every year since 1945. It never had, but now he thought he had evidence that it had begun. Comrade Buick was sceptical about this but we should know by next Conference who was right. In any event there was no reason in Marxian theory why there should be another 1929 nor was such a crisis necessary for socialist understanding to grow. This was not related to economic slump conditions as the 1930s with the growth of totalitarian movements like Fascism and Stalinism had shown.

R. Cook (Birmingham), winding up, said that even with the addition of the drive for profits the anarchy of production could not explain crises since both these features were always present under capitalism yet crises weren't.

T. Lawler (SW London), winding up, quoted Engels' statement in the Preface to the English edition of Marx's Capital about productive power expanding geometrically while markets only increased arithmetically. The implication of this was that sooner or later there would be a big slump. He wouldn't bet on a quick recovery.

The meeting ended at 5.30pm.

Branches not represented: Eccles, Lancaster, Newcastle and Swansea.
STANDING ORDERS FOR USE AT ANNUAL CONFERENCES, AUTUMN
DELEGATE MEETINGS AND SPECIAL CONFERENCES.
(as amended at 1991 Annual Conference).

1. A quorum for the conduct of Conference or ADM business shall be one half of the total number of delegates entitled to sit.

2. A resolution shall be before the meeting when it has been moved, seconded, and accepted by the Chair. Resolutions standing in the name of Branches shall normally be moved and seconded by two named delegates representing those Branches.

3. Delegates shall signify a wish to speak by raising a hand. They shall speak only when called on to do so by the Chair, and shall address their comments to the Chair. A delegate’s contribution shall not normally exceed five minutes, except for a Delegate opening or winding up on an item, whose contribution shall not normally exceed ten minutes. Delegates shall be given priority of speaking.

4. No interruption of a contribution or of the proceedings shall be allowed except by the intervention of the Chair or by the raising of a Point of Order. The ruling of the Chair as to whether or not a Point of Order is valid shall be binding unless challenged by means of the procedures provided for in Clause 16.

5. No delegate except the mover of a resolution, or a delegate who has opened on an Item for Discussion, shall be allowed to speak more than once on any subject, except with the consent of the meeting, indicated by a show of hands, or in answer to a question. The mover of any resolution, including a resolution to amend or addend, or a delegate who has opened on an Item for Discussion, shall have the right to reply to criticism but shall not introduce any new point.

6. Party officers, members of the Executive Committee, subcommittees and others whose conduct or work is under review at the time, shall be allowed to take part in discussion subject to the conditions of preceding Clause 3.

7. Any member of the Party shall be allowed, subject to the consent of the meeting, to take part in discussion, but must not exceed five minutes on any item without the consent of the meeting.

8. All contributions not strictly relevant to the matter under discussion shall be ruled ‘out of order’ by the Chair.

9. Only one Resolution shall be before the meeting at any given time. An Amendment or Addendum may be moved on any Resolution. The acceptance of an Amendment or Addendum implies that for the moment it has obscured the Resolution and takes priority of discussion. It must be cleared away before another Amendment or Addendum can be moved. If an Amendment or Addendum is carried, the resulting Substantive Resolution is open to further