THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 93RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE HELD AT HEAD OFFICE, 52 CLAPHAM HIGH STREET, LONDON SW4 ON FRIDAY 28TH AND SATURDAY 29TH MARCH 1997

FRIDAY 28 MARCH 10.30am

1. R. Cook (Birmingham) was elected to Chair the Conference and P. Bennett (Manchester) was elected as Deputy Chair. Standing Orders Committee agreed to act as Tellers.

2. Fraternal greetings for a fruitful Conference received from Alex Hart (South Africa), Bolton, Swansea and Belfast branches and the World Socialist Party of the United States.

3. Conference welcomed Jim Sidders from Australia.

4. Apologies were received from John Bissett (North-East Branch) who, due to a bereavement was unable to attend.

5. Conference agreed to add the deferred item from ADM 1996 from Manchester Branch to the agenda: “Are we bound by decisions of 60 years ago?”

GENERAL SECRETARY AND PARTY OFFICERS REPORT TO CONFERENCE

Conference questioned why there had not yet been a report of the recommendation made at 1996 Conference that the EC set up an ad-hoc Committee to investigate a re-launch of the World Socialist journal.

S. Parker (for the Committee) responded that they are waiting for developments. He expects that the journal would be on the Internet and also in hard copy.

Conference questioned why the amended resolution moved by Central Branch members calling for “the EC to adopt an election policy and strategy to take effect forthwith which concentrates election activity”, was simply noted by the EC.

R. Cook (Birmingham) suggested that the resolution was difficult to pin down but that his interpretation was that the matter was in hand.

Conference questioned why the ADM floor resolution which asked the EC “to set up a Working Party to investigate the Party’s past and present financial practices and recommend changes for the future. The Working Party’s report to be included in the EC’s Report to 1997 Annual Conference”

M. Gill (Colchester) had suggested members who might be willing and able to undertake this work.

General Secretary answered that it may have been remiss of her not to have acted upon Comrade Gill’s letter and not to have answered it but she was under pressure and suggested that members themselves should self-nominate or be nominated by their branch. Calls for nominations to anything were not responded to very well.

P. Lawrence (Clapham) questioned why the floor resolution passed at the last ADM calling for the EC to “attempt to increase Party support for the Advertising Department, e.g. to create a network of members throughout the country to respond to telephone and postal enquiries received at Head Office” was simply passed to the new EC as reported in the November 1996 EC Minutes. Has nothing happened? The General Secretary said that this particular resolution had been responded to by the EC by asking the Advertising Department for a report and had not been passed to the new EC.

M. Browne (Advesting) said that the new Advertising Department will report to the EC but has delayed because it wants to do it properly.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey) raised a point of order by stating that the Terms of Reference of the Advertising Department did not cover phone and postal enquiries. The task of the Department should be simply to insert adverts.

P. Lawrence (Clapham) said the Conference is not discussing the merits of the resolution.

P. Shannan (Lancaster) noted that there were ten floor resolutions from ADM and that Lancaster Branch has circumvented Standing Orders and asked for their items to be for discussion.

V. Vanni (Glasgow) said that Conference has been taken advantage of, half of Conference was taken up with floor resolutions. He had never seen so many items on the EC Report before and he hoped that Comrade Shannan would be sparing.

Balloont Committee Report

R. Cook (Birmingham) said that it is worth noting that it costs £130 for a ballot.

It was suggested that it might be possible to invite members to send their vote in themselves on a postcard perhaps.

M. Browne (Ballot) said that Conference decides how ballots are conducted and that if there is delay on sending Central Branch members the EC Minutes, they would not receive the call to vote in time.

General Secretary thought that there may be legal reasons why such ballots are conducted in the way they are.

Standing Orders Committee Report

P. Shannon (Lancaster) asked that the Standing Orders Committee note that branches do not appreciate not getting a reminder about the deadline.

M. Browne (Standing Orders) said that there had been a small item at the bottom of the November EC Minutes. However, much time in November & December had been spent as Assistant Treasurer in sorting out the urgent financial problems of the Party and that the reminders had been overlooked as a result.

(Islington Branch delegates applied to join the meeting but had not supplied a Form C or credentials, which were in the post)

P. Shannon (Lancaster) and C. Begley (Camden) moved: “That they be allowed to sit.” Carried 11-1.

[M. Browne (Standing Orders) asked that the delegates for Lancaster and Camden hand in their credentials.]

E. Goodman (West London) asked whether the EC or Standing Orders deal with this. Branches should be reminded about the correct procedure of representation and running the Party.

Treasurer’s Report and Finances

R. Cook (Birmingham) pointed out that there was still a deficit for 1996.

M. Gill (Colchester) cited a number of examples of lack of seriousness towards the Party, today’s late 10.30am start and the EC not seeming to have pursued Conference and ADM decisions. Delegates without correct ID. If all the dues we could pay were paid we still could not meet the demands we are making. Another £1 a week and we could balance the books; many could spend more but don’t. Money spent on frills and fripperies should go to the Party activities. We should cut back at least £500 today. Some people are contributing from their supplementary benefit. Dues will never cover the situation. To the members who have given so much (in one case £1000), thank you.

T. Hilton (Central) suggested that we are overspending, there being no organised way of doing out the money. The election money should have been sacred, we are spending money we haven’t got.

A. Pitts (SE Manchester) asked if the direct debit requests were being responded to and, if so, how many?

M. Gill (Colchester): there had been 40 replies, but not sure how many are new or are increased ones. When banks are asked to make a direct debit, they do not consider to be another and will simply add it to the previous amount direct-debited. However Assistant Treasurer said the situation is slightly improved.

T. Lawlor (non-delegate): the accounts are a nightmare. A minority do not agree with contesting elections at this time. Can we choose to contribute but not to the Election fund?

D. Deutz (Treasurer): that there is nothional departmentalisation. Funds are not ring-fenced, but had they been the Party would have gone under.

R. Cook (Birmingham) pointed out that the opposite to what Comrade Lawlor said has happened; the members who want to contest elections have contributed to the running of the Party. He questioned if the candidates, deposits had been paid yet?

M. Browne (Assistant Treasurer): the proposed candidates’ bankers’ orders will go off in the next two weeks. The EC and delegates must not authorise excessive expenditure.

D. Deutz (speaking as a member): elections do not cost the Party anything, the contributions/donations come in. We get free
distribution of the manifestos. This is a good case for the cost of the deposit.

T. Lawlor (non-delegate) asked if the cost had been worked out in terms of feedback?

Conference discussed the best way to continue with the Agenda

M. Browne (Standing Orders): not all voting figures had been received. Last year the party agreed to hold voting on the majority.

M. Gill (Colchester) thought it a waste of time to discuss items, pointless holding uninformled discussion before we know what the voting is.

P. Bennett (Manchester) asked how many branches have included voting on the items for Discussion.

E. Goodman (West London): several items will be discussed more than once: under Items for Discussion, Voting and Amendments to Rules.

D. Permin (Standing Orders): the main problem is that branches have already voted, we could incorporate points to amendments, to rules and make them relate to the Items for Discussion.

J. Thompson (S.E. Manchester): it seems long-winded, going over the same ground again and again.

Comrades Headcar (EC) and Lawrence (Clapham) felt it important to hear the arguments, so that minds can be changed.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Item for Discussion: “Does equipment 50p per week minimum, with no waiving. Members who can afford more should pay more. All defaulters without exception should be lapsed after 13 weeks” (Lancaster).

V. Vanni (Glasgow): his branch wants to abolish dues but he sees this as a mistake, suggests that Lancaster item is too draconian, as active members may be thrown out because they are bad at paying their dues. No member should be lapsed because of lack of money.

E. Goodman (West London): her branch [felt?] that this is part of the attitude that the Party will run itself. Glasgow have complained about the late arrival of the Socialist Standard. Paying what you like, when you like, is unrealistic.

D. Gill (Colchester): the feeling of members is that more than £24 a year is unrealistic, he sees £24 as the bare minimum. To make the over-65s a special case is ageism.

7.2 Item for Discussion: “How can best can the EC monitor the work of its departments?” (Clapham).

Gareth Thomas (Clapham): the EC having re-instituted the liaison practice, he hopes there are continuing reports of activity as well as lack of activity. He does not want to change the Terms of Reference yearly, but believes they should be updated. Healthy to debate and review the Terms of Reference.

M. Browne (speaking as a member): this is a good idea. In January when it comes up either the EC has a lot of new members and doesn’t know what’s best to change or has a lot of long serving members who are content with the present terms of reference. Maybe the time to consider reviewing them is at mid year when the EC has had some experience.

M. Gill (Colchester): his branch welcomes these two items to focus on two areas of work which are much neglected.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): in the past this was done routinely. Terms of Reference of the SSPC and Pamphlets were fixed by Conference.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): we are a democratic organisation so affairs should be democratically controlled; clear Terms of Reference let people know what to do, the authority that they have to act. The EC can see that the sub-committees are doing what they should. Members must be appointed to a post but other things are done. The Central Organiser’s Report has nothing to do with the Central Organiser’s Terms of Reference.

CENTRAL ORGANISER’S REPORT

The 1996 Central Organiser, Chris McColl, sent apologies for not being able to attend Conference.

R. Headcar (EC): this post is not redundant, it’s essential. Not having one meant that he has had to step in and arrange accommodation at Conference. The Central Organiser acts a co-ordinator between branches.

C. Begley (Camden) thinks that what Comrade McColl is talking about—the front window display—is innovative and attractive.

A. Pitts (S.E. Manchester): more responsibility from members individually is needed. Too much work by two few members at HO.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): an important question arising from the report is that the post has degenerated. The post is directly elected by the whole Party. The principal work is to co-ordinate work of the sub-committees and branches and, e.g., a Rally in Trafalgar Square. The Central Organiser has the right to attend any sub-committee meeting, this may have caused resentment in the past.

J. Thompson (S.E. Manchester): his impression in past few years, is that there has not been much contact with branches because there has been too much else to do.

E. Goodman (West London): her branch was appealed by the report. The post should liaise with branches, encourage activity, support and co-ordinate. The Party is fragmenting and branches doing their own thing.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): as a provincial member he doesn’t know what is going on. Communication in the Party is bad there seems to be a demarcation war. Who was asked about the front window display? More honesty needed.

R. Cook (Birmingham): if the Central Organiser worked to the old terms many of these problems could have been resolved.

R. Headcar (EC): in the meantime there are people needing places to stay.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): proposed thanks to Comrade Headcar for stepping in.

A. Buick (West London): that as one of our contested constituencies is Vauxhall, there are leaflets to distribute, election manifestos for overall distributing and leaflets for distributing in areas where there is a Militant candidate. He is distributing in the afternoon in the Vauxhall area.

MEMBERSHIP DEPARTMENT

Report considered but there were no comments.

[ROLL CALL at 12.40pm 18 delegates representing 11 branches]

BRANCH REPORTS

Belfast. Not present.

Birmingham. Very low level of activity, due to current political climate. Cost of meeting room is high. The branch has joined the Birmingham and Midland Institute where they meet weekly cheaper.

Bolton. Not present.

Camden. We pay £20 for our room and we hold public meetings and debates. Our speakers go to other organisations and they are leafleted and have educational meetings on a three-monthly basis.

Central. No report.

Clapham. We do not have many active members at present.

Colchester. Meetings twice a month. Eighteen Socialist Standards are given away but recipients can sell at their own price. In 1996 one ward will be contested. Bespoke leaflets are distributed four times a year. So far we have received four replies, one came to a meeting. The branch tells the ground, sows the seed and reaps the crop.

Enfield & Haringey. Meets weekly and are laying the groundwork for expansion. Letter from Islington Branch calling a meeting in Conference week ended. Colchester Branch was a surprise. The branch had had little time to discuss it.

Glasgow. An ageing branch but in the last two years thousands of leaflets distributed with no response. The last two propaganda meetings were well attended. A literature table is displayed every Saturday afternoon in the heart of the constituency. But Glasgow is now apolitical. There will be a Charter 88 meeting where Comrade Vanni is to speak. Kelvin has a Militant candidate where he is standing under Scottish Socialist Alliance.

Islington. The letter we sent out was not a diktat. The branch is often-minded on activity, it has a good core of active members. The Militant meeting at Conway Hall was well attended by members.

Lancaster. Still meet weekly. Three to four regular visitors. The branch carries out a business meeting and then becomes social; the visitors don’t seem to mind. The branch has stopped public meetings as they are not useful. We have recently worked on the “Bad Penny” activity which has had encouraging results.

Manchester. Meet twice monthly and have had to change their meeting place.

S.E. Manchester. Still sell the Socialist Standard but no propaganda meetings. The branch has gone stale but some members will be helping with the North East election activity.

West London. The meeting called to be held at Conference by Islington Branch did not give prior notification. Branch still has a cheap meeting place. Active members have moved or are working away. Twice monthly meetings—one business, one public. Branch are suffering political fatigue, for the Scargill meeting members had to be drummed up to attend.
West Yorkshire. No report.
Swansea. No report.

M. Browne (Standing Orders) said that he is trying to revive the compilation of the Master Form C'.

R. Cook (Birmingham): members are disillusioned. There are opportunities on the Internet. All political parties asked for comments on topics. As one door shuts we should push at others.

P. Bennett (Manchester): not all the population is in contact with the Internet. Whilst it is useful we shouldn’t give up on public meetings.

[Conference broke for lunch at 1.15pm. Delegates were asked to return at 2.00pm. Conference re-commenced at 2.25pm]

DEVELOPMENT PLAN SURVEY REPORT

M. Gill (Colchester) thought it regrettable that there has been so little response; it shows a lack of comradeship. How did the call for the Plan come about?

General Secretary replied that it was called for at the 1996 Conference by Belfast Branch, and they agreed to do the work.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): members are questioning how best to organise, and how his branch can make the best use of resources.

Trainer (Glasgow) and Vanni (Glasgow): “to allow West Yorkshire delegate to sit though without credentials.”—Agreed.

Item for Discussion: “The need to restructure our activities to maximise returns on our limited time and resources by 1) putting more emphasis on, and increasing the number of 1 and 2-day schools organised around particular themes and with accommodation/crèches preferably provided; 2) encouraging branches wherever and whenever possible to collaborate with other branches to organise joint events rather than persist in holding what are often poorly attended branch public meetings and 3), where such inter-branch collaboration is not feasible, urging branches to hold fewer but bigger events within a yearly or half-yearly schedule, permitting more time for preparation and publicity.”—Islington.

Item for Discussion: “The following ‘ergonomic’ strategy be adopted for co-ordinating Party and Branch activity: A) A call to be made to all members and sympathisers to pledge not money but time, in the form of ‘Time Units’. B) These contributions for purposes of planning should preferably be regular. C) A national computerised ‘map’ of available Time Units be created from which the Central Organiser can withdraw ‘Time Units’. D) All work done to be agreed beforehand by all relevant parties. E) Branches create their own local ‘map’ of sympathiser’s ‘Time Units’. F) Audit Committee to produce report of how the Party can benefit from receiving ‘grants’ from this fund.”—Lancaster.

P. Shannon (Lancaster) said that letter writing was very effective, donate an hour, see the time unit plan. If tremendously bureaucratic, perhaps we shouldn’t do it.

R. Cook (Birmingham): the “Contract” idea is simply to heighten the awareness and responsibility of the people involved.

Item for Discussion: “That the Audit Committee address as a matter of priority the following key areas in the Party: a) The speed of communications between Branches and committees including the EC. b) The effect of gossip on Party culture and efficiency.”—Lancaster.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): key areas are notional. Other branches may have different ideas.

Gareth Thomas (Clapham) asked if the Interim Report to be followed by another one? M. Gill (Colchester): said that the Interim Report asks for further action.

Item for Discussion: 1) “The abolition of Central Branch” Glasgow. 2) “Central Branch should cease to exist as a Branch, and the members thereof transferred to a new group to be called Central Group.”—Lancaster.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): Central Branch should be a clearing house but it is 46% of the membership. Recent changes are unsatisfactory; the only way it could be a branch is if every member were on the Internet. A solution would be if Central Branch members pick the branch they are willing to be in. even overseas members. The work of administration would be shared by the branch secretaries and the branch quorum would remain the same. The rump that was left could be called members-at-large.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): what would be the procedure of distribution, geographical?

J. Thompson (S.E. Manchester): some Central Branch members live next door to a branch. Why do they not join that branch?

E. Goodman (West London): her branch agrees with the enfranchisement of Central Branch members, but these latest suggestions for changes go the opposite way. Too much will be pushed on to the branch secretaries.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): members at HO are overstretched and members who are distributed all over the country cannot form a branch.

M. Gill (Colchester): this is a challenge as 46/49 cannot participate in any meaningful way. Eleven to twenty-four members felt isolated and unable to contribute whilst 7/11 would be active if they could.

We should ask Central Branch members what procedures/organisation they favour and how best they can be involved.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): we have been given something to think about. There will be a big shift to branch secretaries, this work placed in the hands of the vacuums of the secretaries.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): how can they participate? They can’t; they are isolated. There is a better chance if they are 10-50 miles away than 10-10 miles away than 100.

Item for Discussion: “Are we still bound by decisions of 60 years ago.”—Manchester.

P. Bennett (Manchester): we should not be bound by such decisions, they are not like the Declaration of Principles. It’s undemocratic to be governed by the ghosts of the past or make rules for the middle of the next century.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): will, there be a threshold beyond which we do not count?

A. Pitts (S.E. Manchester): we have the mechanism to change things.

D. Trainer (Glasgow): life support system for old resolutions will be needed.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): we make mistakes and we correct them. We stand on the shoulders of others. This is the fallacy of the open mind. We are part of a developing tradition.

P. Bennett (Manchester): we do have the mechanism for change. It may take a year, it’s a question for now. We could re-affirm old decisions.

[At 4:30pm the Conference was quorate with 21 out of a possible 36 delegates sitting]

Item for Discussion: “That the following Party decision-making procedure be adopted: A) ADM and Conference henceforth be considered identical. B) Preliminary and Final Agenda as usual. c) Delegate voting power limited to electing Chair, order of business etc. D) All resolutions including floor resolutions to be voted on by branches, who must hold a Special Meeting within 28 days following ADM or Conference to cast votes. E) Minutes of ADM and Conference must be sent out to branches within 14 days.”—Lancaster. [Note: this involves changes to Rules 4, 8, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, 31, 32, & 33. See Appendix B of Lancaster Br circular.]

P. Shannon (Lancaster): let’s agree that this doesn’t work and try the proposed change for ADM.

General Secretary suggested that the proposed change would double up on the work at HO but not half the problems.

Several comrades said that the suggestion contradicted Party Rules.

Item for Discussion: “Standing Orders Committee to be given some latitude in power to accept or reject Items for Discussion, Resolutions and A. Amendments. However: A) Standing Orders shall operate with the criteria of simplicity and clarity only. B) All rejected material to appear as a printed supplement to Standing Orders report to Conference or ADM together with reasons for rejection. c) Branches to be given reasonable opportunity to re-frame their proposals if rejected.”—Lancaster.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): this is an effort to help Standing Orders to help us.

M. Browne (Standing Orders): we are empowered to do the same according to Terms of Reference but tight deadlines cause difficulties. We do not want to composite motions as we were not a Trade Union.

HEAD OFFICE ORGANISER’S REPORT

P. Lawrence (Clapham) congratulated the HO on his report and work. General Secretary questioned the necessity of a new label.
ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT REPORT

D. Perrin (Standing Orders): what plans are there for advertising during the General Election?

M. Araya (Advertising): there is to be spent on Guardian ads.

M. Gill (Colchester): most people entering do so through adverts. Forty percent would applaud notion of branches handling contacts.

Item for Discussion: “The outdated style and terminology of the Party’s publicity” Lancaster

P. Shannon (Lancaster): after BBC2 Newsnight it’s clear we are regarded as a tiny little sect and our old-fashioned image puts people off. The term “working class” is off-putting; we would better use the “peoples” of the world” or “most people”. Words like socialism create confusion; terminology is not important. We should make ourselves approachable and friendly.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): more and more people consider themselves members of the working class. We still have to explain what is meant by “most people”. We are all looking for ways to put over the message but gimmicks are not the answer.

P. Lawrence (Clapham) agreed with Comrade Vanni and the problems are getting less. It is difficult to convey what categories mean to people understand differently.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): the Socialist Standard, December 1993 was an example of the use of abstract language. We used a new title “Imagine” and “Unite for World Socialism”.

C. Begley (Camden): we should be adventurous and experimental, in our propaganda. Most dictionaries define socialism as the State or strengthening the State, that’s how people understand it. We should have meetings and not use jargon or technical language.

M. Gill (Colchester) said look at the evidence; he doesn’t think that people are locked or put off by certain words or language. Members are different in their linguistic styles. We do not have a Party language. We may be speaking to Greens. We have to be flexible and should use horses for courses. The barriers that put people off who do join the Party are said to be the aggressive behaviour of socialists or the bureaucratic barriers of the Membership application. It’s how we behave to people.

S. Coleman (non-delegate): the suggestion that the Party’s terminology is outdated and that terminology does not matter is mistaken. Words do have meanings and terminology does matter. He agreed that most people define themselves as working class. We must not give up clarity of word use.

A. Pitts (S.E. Manchester): it is horses for courses — individual contact: different styles. We are sometimes too quick to get rid of the kill. Our behaviour at meetings is important. We don’t get visitors.

P. Shannon (Lancaster) was impressed by contributions made and was not grinning an axe. People not there to provide the evidence that they have been put off. Agrees we do need terms and accuracy.

CAMPAIGNS DEPARTMENT REPORT

V. Vanni (Glasgow) had been to several of the summer schools. There was not a theme: a lot of work and organisation but the level of talks did not reach the required standard. Spare us the guest speakers. The idea is that we can learn from outside speakers. He had learned that we could learn nothing. Too many sessions fitted in, and the timetable was not sent to. There was never enough time for questions and contributions.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey) was pleased to see “Alternative Visions” Comrade Gill was an excellent Chair. On the platform we had an opponent and a sympathiser, and we had to listen to the opponents outcry against the Party. The specialist ecological issues were useful to listen to but they were unaware of our work on these issues and we had no time to put him right. The Chair should have the last word to sum up, otherwise the money spent is wasted.

C. Begley (Camden): it’s important to have guest speakers, and thought we had ample time to answer the opponent’s points. Better to have large meetings, plenty of publicity. We should have fewer but bigger events.

P. Lawrence (Clapham) thought the guest speaker a failure. We should have chosen more carefully.

P. Bennett (Manchester) argued for branch meetings: one-and two-day schools are important in Manchester even members won’t come to business meetings. Lancaster are lucky to have outsiders go to theirs.

M. Araya (HOO and Campaigns) hoped that comments will be passed to the next organiser of events to be taken into account.

Item for Discussion: “The need for the Party to allocate its resources more in line with its most effective campaign methods” Clapham.

P. Lawrence (Camden): the Party is questioning its campaign methods. It is inevitable to cling to one’s way of doing things, though changes in the environment disqualify them. Undeniable most successful campaign method is placing small ads. We should pay less attention to electorate, and concentrate on advertising. Forty percent of membership comes from adverts.

C. Begley (Camden) agreed that our resources should go towards advertising. Customised responses to enquiries are being made by the Advertising Department. Targeted responses, but this costs a lot of work. The computer system is being set up to be user-friendly so everyone else can step in and do the work.

M. Gill (Colchester): this suggestion seems to point to exclusivity, putting one’s eggs in one basket. A sufficient reason to contest elections is to keep our name in front of the public. Colchester efforts over four drops seem to build up a response. J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey) was pleased to see Comrade Lawrence stress importance of total concentration. Extremely important to use small adverts — this is the only way to get national cover. Comrade Gill pointed out that as an isolated member he was pleased to see our adverts so that he could show them to colleagues. Content and form should be carefully worked out. Offprints from the Socialist Standard could go into the packs sent to enquirers. It doesn’t require special letters.

S. Coleman (Camden): agreed with the opener. He proposed thoughts of caution; we need to appeal to people. The growth of Central Branch is indicative of an intellectual fulfilment, but organising for socialism is inherently social. There is an inseparability between theory and practice. Research Report is excellent, methodology good. People rarely join by one thing and he suggested that the least thing is a single advert. Comrade Lawrence overstates his case.

P. Lawrence (Camden): I did not mean to give the impression that this is all. We know we have an occasional self-indulgent exercise. In Hackney we had 900 votes, but we didn’t get one member or one enquiry out of it. Comrade Coleman has touched on an important point; social contact is getting less and less. In the USA a report that suggests that people have given up on socialism. We need to get our act together on this.

M. Araya (Advertising): please send the Advertising Department any ideas for adverts.

[The first day of Conference ended at 6.15pm]

SUNDAY 29 MARCH, 10.20am

EC AD-HOC COMMITTEE REPORT (INTERNAL INTERIM AUDIT)

M. Gill (Colchester): the report remarks on the workload of a few individuals and perhaps it would be possible to involved Central Branch members who would like to contribute but do not know how to possibly writing to enquirers. We should re-examine the Terms of Reference of the HOO and advertising. Departments are over-stretched during the election time. Thanks to all individuals who helped print and pack election leaflets and manifestos. There is a lack of lines of communication: working in small groups. Departments’ workloads are not in proportion to their membership. Advertising is nominally two members. Perhaps it’s possible to co-opt but do not know how or if its possible to do this. There is a need to know the available resources. Perhaps it’s possible to appoint a three-year term of office, with one person on a sub-committee being replaced annually. HOO needs help; he was holding telephone calls on Christmas day. Possible there will be a full report in July
Suggestions for a two-day Conference, perhaps a workshop in front of ADM to be instituted in 1998.

D. Trainer (Glasgow): on a point of order, probably permission is not needed from Conference to carry on with the work.

R. Lawrence (Camberwell) welcomed the thorough report. If taking the work seriously, there is need to evaluate. Possibly we need an Assistant Central Organiser. Who draws up Terms of Reference? The Central Organiser is a Party Officer in their own right. Allocations of budgets, judgments are made about relative importance of work of departments.

P. Shannon (Lancaster) echoed Comrade Lawrence. If Lancaster’s Terms of Reference are useful, please use them. Will this Internal Audit go on to include the branches?

M. Gill (Colchester): yes.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): who are the members of the ad hoc committee? The membership as a whole should be aware of the natures of projects of small organisations, because underlying the formal structures there are informal structures. Members have their own ideas of what the Party should be doing now. Personalities may be a barrier but members should behave democratically. Rules may be drawn up but what matters is the intention of the members concerned.

P. Hart (Clapham) agreed with Comrade Lawrence’s points. She questioned the role of the General Secretary, perhaps some element of delegation was possible. It is difficult for the HQO to cut off from his formal capacity and then go into voluntary work for the Party. A three-year term of office is a good idea and co-opting is a part of the Terms of Reference of sub-committees.

C. Begley (Camberwell) asks an important point not dealt with - the question of HO in the party. It could be fairly easily resolved so that we could work together harmoniously. When ideas conflict the Central Organiser could sort out the problems. We should get in touch with our underlying concepts. Need facility to encourage tolerance and empathy.

R. Cook (Birmingham) hoped for a knock-on effect. The degree to which the report is received with enthusiasm. Three years is a good idea.

M. Brown (Assistant Treasurer) needs to know how much we are going to get in. Possible a three-month budget but annual budget impossible.

C. Begley (Camberwell): members helping take on board ‘time units’ privity given to practical tasks, maintenance of the building is necessary.

K. Scholey (Islington): departments can still estimate and then be told by the EC whether their estimate is possible in financial terms.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): we need a free-ranging enquiry. They should pursue the logic of the report as the work proceeds.

M. Gill (Colchester): if helpful to resolve the dilemma, an indication to be made after section five, that further audit-investigation to go on elsewhere is not time by July. ADM to decide.

K. Scholey (Islington): a total report as far as possible including everything.

A. Pitts (S.E. Manchester) welcomed the report and would like to look into the branches. Use of HO is good. A neutral audit is a worthwhile exercise.

P. Lawrence (Clapham) and C. Begley (Camberwell) moved: “This Conference recommends that the EC give urgent consideration to section 4 of the interim Audit Committee report.” Carried 13:0.

P. Lawrence (Clapham) and P. Hart (Clapham) moved: “This Conference welcomes the Interim Audit Report and endorses the proposal in item 5.1 that the Audit Committee should continue its work along lines decided by the Committee.” Carried 13:1.

M. Gill (Colchester): my two comrades on the Committee. Gerry Blake and Robin Cox thank you for your response. We are grateful for the good response. Maybe we should have two Central Organisers. Application to the EC a way to clarify the financial and practical intentions of the departments. Thanks too, for the sage and wise advice offered by comrades. The long-term planning seems to encourage and increases commitment.

ELECTION DEPARTMENT REPORT

M. Gill (Election): 200,000 manifestos cleared, about 58 members positively involved in the five constituencies. The next European election is in 1999 and the department will ask for decision to contest.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): who is in charge?

R. Donnelly (EC): the Conference is in charge, through the EC, through the Election Committee. We seem to be going in for more and more navel searching, and will have an administration bigger than NATO.

A. Buick (non-delegate): the Election Committee deals with the work on the ground, Media Department with the Press but there is nothing to have been a press statement issued. The advertising Department has not placed any adverts during the election and I am dealing with the Militant campaign.

MEDIA DEPARTMENT REPORT

The comrades on the 1996 Committee were Nick White and S. Coleman but there is no report.

R. Donnelly (EC): this is the nitty gritty, people are not coming forward. Democracy of the Party is “going down the Swanee”

SOCIALIST STANDARD DEPARTMENT REPORT

V. Vanni (Glasgow) suggested that the price of the Socialist Standard should be £1.

R. Donnelly (EC): the theme of “One World, One People” was used for the August 1996 issue but wouldn’t have know that from reading it. He thought the Editorial Committee didn’t quite like the idea. The issue dealing with housing was clearly housing.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): the Committee does brilliant, wonderful work but this was not an example of it and seems to have been done with bad grace.

A. Buick (Socialist Standard, editorial): it was not bad grace, the August issue was on the theme of “One World”. Companion parties were written to asking for contributions but didn’t submit suitable articles. The 1995 policy was used on the layout of the Socialist Standard, a special issue would have got rid of these columns and made a different layout necessary.

M. Brown (West London): any plans for the summer?

A. Buick (Socialist Standard, editorial): we’re still thinking about the election.

Item for Discussion: “The need to build on improvements to the Socialist Standard by addressing the chronic problem of how to make its contents less predictable, or even monotonous - a problem which may deter subscriptions - by incorporating new features such as a ‘Debate Platform’, distinguishable from the correspondence columns, to provide, for example a forum for the many interesting theoretical debates going on within the party itself which are not currently aired in our journal, thus highlighting the fact that we are not a monolithic organisation of identical clones.” Slignton.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): we have lost four pages, now down to 18 we would lose more pages with this suggestion. The Socialist Standard is a propaganda journal, no virtue in disunity. There should be harmony in the Socialists Standard, we should not indulge whims.

F. Edwards (W. Yorkshire): where has “Scorpion” gone? The theatre articles are interesting and “Scavenger” is good but why lose “Scorpion”?

J. Thompson (S.E. Manchester): some covers make selling difficult as the message is unclear. “You are mad” is a case in point. We need a simple eye-catching message. The whole of the Socialist Standard should be used to put across our ideas.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): that cover may have given the impression that we could run capitalism.

M. Foster (Colchester): the tone of the Socialist Standard sometimes seems that we are looking down on the world, we seem too distant, 22:46 percent were persuaded to join by reading the Socialist Standard, 27:46 percent made favourable comments. It can’t be an in-house magazine, some members, after joining, need something more in-depth. Maybe we should have an in-house journal as well.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): we have had all this before. What Comrade Vanni said was deplorable. Surely it was possible for comrades to have disagreements without being disunited. The logic of what he said is that the greatest virtue is in glossing over differences. Our general propositions did not appear out of the blue they arose out of discussion. Would favour one page in the Socialist Standard as a debate forum but not over fundamental issues.

K. Scholey (Islington): the branch had a long debate and thought that it would be useful to all to see that we may disagree but not over fundamentals.

A. Buick (Socialist Standard, editorial): the Socialist Standard is the main way that people enter the Party. There should be another journal for discussion. We should leave the Socialist Standard to do its main work, as it’s not possible to do both things in the one journal. The Editorial Committee do choose diverse views and there
is correspondence between members in the letters—Newbury, for example. Going down to 20 pages meant something had to go, there was a choice between “Scorpion” and “Scavenger”. “Scorpion” lost but perhaps when we increase up to 24 pages again, it will return. As to the cover, the job of the Committee member who deals with the design and layout is the least enviable in the Party; all of us are looking at it.

D. Flynn (EC): Comrade Vanni points are good but we do need something that expresses different views. Debates don’t detract from propaganda. The Socialist Standard does appear to be monolithic. What is its rôle?

P. Shannon (Lancaster): the Socialist Standard borders on the doctrinaire at times. People like it when we argue, when this happens at meetings they say that they never get this at left-wing meetings.

S. Parker (EC): there is an invitation in the Socialist Standard on page 2 which invites division. It should be a main propaganda journal, though one page as a forum would be all right.

V. Vanni (Glasgow) thought he may have exaggerated himself badly. He was not trying to gloss over difficulties, but these shouldn’t be aired, in public, in the Socialist Standard. People always like to see a fight. There is a mechanism in the Party for airing differences. The Party has worked on its case over the years, refined the arguments but this was not done in the Socialist Standard.

[A Roll Call, at 11.45am, had 18 delegates representing 13 branches]


V. Vanni (Glasgow): there were too many difficulties in printing in Belfast. The collating was done at HO and there was the cost of shipping here. The London printers would like it back again. There have been continuous grumbles about late deliveries.

R. Cook (Birmingham): between editors and designers there are last-minute decisions, the designer/printer, at this time, is the same person. The front cover is contentious. The design is an extremely difficult job. We try to use ours to say something about us; there is the problem of the choice of what to use, photos, copyright considerations. The cost of the design and layout is relatively low at present.

C. Begley (Print): printing in London would give the Committee an opportunity to start towards printing ourselves; we could do one page in one month and then increase the number.

A. Buick (Socialist Standard, editorial): Comrade McCullough has put his finger on the problem—the design. There is an element in the bill from the printer to cover the cost of design. We get two colours, but he only charges for one. It’s work that has to be done month-in-month-out, without a holiday.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): we need the right specialist for the job in the Party, so we should head-hunt when recruiting new members.

D. Greenwood (EC): what would be the price if Comrade McCullough just did the design?

A. Buick (Socialist Standard, editorial): Comrade McCullough wears two hats—as a Party member and a printer.

R. Cook (Birmingham): there are practical problems; work is often done at the last minute.

PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT REPORT

D. Perrin (Publications): Comrade McCullough apologises for the delay in the new pamphlet. It is printed and is on its way.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): we have printed pamphlets before, provided we don’t go in for a lot of illustrations we could do so in London again.

D. Perrin (Publications): Comrade McCullough has printed the inside free of charge. The cover isn’t easy to do, but he is also doing this. We have re-printed other pamphlets. Text alterations make for problems (e.g. references to ex-Russian Dictatorship). New ones being set up more difficult. Socialist Principles Explained (1975) due to be updated.

S. Parker (EC): is it possible to have a two-stage Information Pack?

D. Perrin (Publications): Comrades Greenwood, Aarya, Coleman and I met and brought the pack up-to-date and, depending on where the enquirer is coming from, e.g. Anarchism, there will be related items and topical leaflets will be included.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): how many members are dealing with this? Which departments?

D. Perrin (Publications): the invitation was on the end of the EC Minutes; an open invite.

PRINT DEPARTMENT REPORT

D. Perrin (Publications): the Election Manifestos were printed without going to the Publications Department; they have noticeable mistakes, didn’t have final proof-reading. Why were they sent to the Print Department before proof-reading? Two years have been spent over this and there is a mistake over police and policy.

R. Donnelly (EC): we didn’t spot the error on the EC. The previous leaflets were produced by Comrade Johnson of the Election Department.

K. Beveridge (Camden): this is the problem of proof-reading and editing. Items should/could have been stamped as passed or cleared by the member or department responsible.

C. Begley (Print): I always ask for camera-ready art-work, not scripts of paper. The manifests were received from the Assistant General Secretary. To have the Socialist Standard printed here is impossible at the moment, we could work up to it gradually. We need three competent members for the Print Department who are keen, willing and reliable. We need calls for another member to join the Department. Printing pamphlets is a problem because we are not used to doing it. There are problems with ink distribution, etc. If an A4 format we could do them.

[Conference adjourned at 11.30pm. with a call to reconvene at 2.10pm]

[Conference reconvened at 2.20pm]

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT REPORT

R. Cook (Birmingham): “On joining the Socialist Party” report is going to the EC. Thanks to the department.

TAPES DEPARTMENT REPORT

There are no members on this department, so no report.

D. Trainer (Glasgow): there is a willing Glasgow member—Tony McNeill who, with Comrade Donnelly’s assistance on his visits to London, the work starts. They need to know.

M. Browne (member): the tape recorder is not working.

R. Donnelly (EC): there are cassette players available, refer this back to the EC to liaise with Glasgow Give the Comrade a list. (I am in London once a month, and could be a go-between Comrade Tony McNeill and the work at Head Office. We should put out a call for one other member of this committee.

General Secretary: there are practicalities to be considered: who will field enquiries at HO, who will post off the tapes, who will re-file them?

Item for Discussion: “The Socialist Party and Trade Unions” Glasgow.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): this item arose out of the “Which way to organise” article in the Socialist Standard (December 1996). This is a left-wing, IWW viewpoint. Talks about official betrayal, often TU officers are more class-conscious than the rank-and-file. In 1908 the Party arrived at this position on trade unions after heated discussion. Comrade Carr said he offered to put a disclaimer rder at the end of the article but the Editorial Committee did not do this. Comrade Carr was obviously aware that his article might not be acceptable.

D. Perrin (Editorial Committee): we had changed the article. The Party supports trade-union action on sound lines. The article did not put the straight Party case but the points were qualified. This is being blown out of all proportion.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): only noticed that it didn’t have the usual last paragraph “Only in a socialist society…”

R. Donnelly (EC): Comrade Vanni is reporting what I said. Comrade Carr didn’t say anything about the changes, only about the rder. He says that trade unions power in the corner, the alternative would be for them to work outside of legislation. It is the IWW argument to work outside of the unions and involve the community. What alternative is there, other than to work inside the legislation?

D. Flynn (EC): the Glasgow message is that the capitalist class is shaking in their boots, but the Party pamphlet on trade unions doesn’t say that, the capitalist class accept trade unions. Most individual stoppages are halted by the leaders.

T. Lawlor (non-delegate): the Party attitude on trade unions goes back to the beginning. Socialist members of trade unions would support action against cutbacks in pay. We are on the sidelines here because most members are not active trade-unionists. Why is an
OVERSEAS CONTACTS SECRETARY REPORT

K. Beveridge (Camden): who are the Platform Red Vienna? HOC: Comrade Matthews and all the rest of the members on this committee. Gets requests for postage costs? What is the status? Committee needs new terms of reference which the EC should sort it out.

General Secretary reported that she had written to all new and old members of the department asking them to decide who does what and who will co-ordinate the Membership applications as two of the long-serving members have decided to leave the Committee. Comrade P. Bentley was the link person with the EC. Comrade R. Cooper has also left the committee. Comrade D. Porter remains. The new members are J. Bissett, A. Pitts, G. Blake, S. Colborn. D. Greenwood is the new EC member and H. Roberts has also agreed to stay on. It is important that the Membership/Forms ‘A’ procedure is carried on. Has not yet heard that Comrade Matthews is on the Committee.

H. Roberts (Overseas Contacts): the Platform Red Vienna were active during an election in Vienna and there was some contact between them and the Austrian comrades. She has been running in tandem with the Membership Committee. The literature is in the name of The Socialist Party, not the World Socialist Movement.

T. Crowe (non-delegate) suggested a vote of thanks for the hard work of Comrades Bissett and Roberts.

AD-HOC LOGO COMMITTEE

M. Arya thought the report of the Logo Committee was unsatisfactory.

P. Shannon (Lancaster) questioned why a logo, which was usually to plug a corporate image? We have to decide what we want to project.

T. Crowe (Logo): I am the other member of the Committee and was surprised by the report. Several logos were shown to the EC, who were not enthusiastic about any Happy to have suggestions from anyone else. Continuing to work on the logos.

WORLD SOCIALIST JOURNAL COMMITTEE REPORT

D. Greenwood (WSJ/internet): There will be a World Socialist Movement site next week. National pages will link to the World pages.

Gwynn Thomas (non-delegate): what is the cost of the Web site?

D. Greenwood (Internet): the E-mail address can be used for all sorts of things. The E-mail account is £16 a month. There is a certain amount of free time, after which the use of the telephone link has to be paid. The Web site cost is nothing.

M. Browne (member): how many members on the ad-hoc committee?


[A roll call at 4.20pm had 18 delegates sitting for 12 branches]

Item for Discussion: “Administration of the World Socialist Movement” North East. Agreed to postpone.

Item for Discussion: “Does membership of the Socialist Party carry with it assumptions about participating actively in the Party’s revolutionary affairs?”

S. Wigley (Colchester): this should be a statement, not a question. A party of equals is as strong as its weakest link. Inactive members suffering once joined, it’s up to them to get involved. We need to be better at solving Party conflicts. Schools could be used to get together. It would make the word Comrade have meaning.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): membership of the Party does not carry with it any assumptions about activity, just agreement on the Declaration of Principles and the Object.

C. Begley (Camden): agrees with Comrade Lawrence. Rightly so, that there are no definite assumptions on what members should do.

However voting to take part in an election requires supporting activity.

General Secretary was uneasy about weakest links. She joined because she agrees with “from each according to their ability to each according to their need.” But agrees with Comrade Begley perhaps if not intending to work for an election members shouldn’t vote to contest elections just for the sake of supporting those who are eager to take part.

P. Hart (Clapham): who is to say what is activity?

P. Shannon (Lancaster): when joining the Party we are not just required to agree with the Declaration of Principles but to pay dues. If not working and not paying dues, what is the point of being in the Party?
D. Perrin (Standing Orders): this is one of the imponderables. In the North members didn't like the Socialist candidate so they didn't vote for him.

I. Corry (non-delegate): people join the Party to make-up a fighting machine to fight capitalism, however, we are saying it's not incumbent on comrades to work for socialism. They could at least sell the Socialist Standard.

S. Wigley (Colchester): Comrade Corry has wound up better than I could.

Item for Discussion: "That gossip relating to Party members' socialist credentials is undemocratic and should therefore be seen as action detrimental to the Party" Lancaster.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): calling member non-socialist is not on. Communications are bad, the perfect climate for gossip to flourish. We have heard that Lancaster is a suspect branch. This creates suspicion and paranoia. The frictions are resolvable. By being careless our strength is being undermined.

K. Beveridge (Camden) hadn't heard anything against Lancaster.

C. Begley (Camden): rumour-spreaders are not the only ones at fault, it's also the listeners.

R. Donnelly (EC): this is like the Women's Rural Institute. However, I will question the socialist credentials when the "Bad Penny" item comes up. Don't think that questioning socialist credentials is action detrimental. It's authoritarian and doctrinaire to charge talk.

P. Hart (Clapham) raised a Point of Order on the sexist talk which she and Comrade Carter had several times remarked upon. A visiting woman would not be impressed by some expressions heard here.

R. Donnelly (EC) apologised.

R. Cook (Birmingham) tried to distinguish between talking to and gossip behind someone's back.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): Comrade Shannon has said that people liked a fight. Now he is saying no.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): generally we have this sort of matter in hand. In the past there have been relentless smear campaigns against some members. In the 1970s the EC fabricated evidence that a member was reformist.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): Comrade Vanni said that a Lancaster Branch member said she was an anarchist but that was before she joined the Party, I was an anarchist before joining the Party. The EC should have asked Lancaster Branch.

THE ADOPTION OF THE EC AND PARTY OFFICERS' REPORT WAS MOVED by P. Lawrence (Clapham) and O. Bond (West London). Carried 16-0.

[There was some discussion on the votes to amend Rules and Motions for Resolution]

R. Donnelly (EC): we should make Conference important again and do away with postal voting.

On Motion 6, V. Vanni (Glasgow) we should emphasise the differences between them and us. In the May Day procession in Glasgow, we would be at the tail-end with all the little Communist parties.

P. Lawrence (Clapham): the Glasgow motion failed in Clapham Branch because it just covered too much. With a TUC demonstration against anti-trade union legislation, we ought to be able to join the march.

P. Shannon (Lancaster): Lancaster abstained because of the wording. The Criminal Justice Bill was an example. We need freedom of assembly, we wear two hats, we wouldn't expect the Party to march in the CJB march.

C. Begley (Camden): we would march against racism, wouldn't we?

I. Corry (non-delegate): we should show our banner, we should decide at the time. People are already mixed up. We don't have to march without our banner.

R. Donnelly (EC): this arose out of the Tolpuddle discussion on the EC. There was a Party Poll on a May Day meeting and the result was that we shouldn't take part. I suppose that still stands. Glasgow Trades Council affiliated with the Labour Party. Anti-racist demonstrations usually organised by the SWP. It's a question of principle. We could lose our unique position.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): Comrades Lawrence and Shannon confirmed that votes were cast against our resolution because of the wording. It doesn't say individual members. Single issues of racism and nationalism could mean we are tarred with the same brush as all the reformists. We won't impress them by our presence.

A vote of thanks for the food preparation was made.

CONFERENCE CLOSED AT 5.55pm.

CONFERENCE FINANCE

Collection (Friday): £450.81

Collection (Saturday): £233.91

Total: £684.72

Less:

   Food (two days): £92.00

Balance: £592.72

Mike Browne, Assistant Treasurer
Introduction.

Why do people join the Socialist Party? Are they convinced by what they read in the Socialist Standard and/or hear at public meetings? Or is it discussing things with party members which is the key? Alternatively, perhaps some combination of all the above is important? And then again why are only some people interested? Have certain kinds of experiences - perhaps discussions at home or at work, formal study at college or university, etc - made it more likely that when people are presented with socialist ideas these will take root and flourish? And on another tack are there lessons about why people join the Party which we could use in an attempt to increase recruitment? In a sentence, if we better understood why members were persuaded to join the Party, might we be in a better position to use this knowledge to persuade others to join?

This research report addresses these questions. The report is in five sections. It begins with a headline summary of the major findings (Section 1.) Thereafter, in Sections 2 - 5, respectively, mention is made of how the research was managed (Section 2); the results of the investigation are comprehensively detailed, analysed and summarised (Section 3); the results discussed (Section 4); and, finally, some tentative conclusions and recommendations are offered (Section 5).

It is assumed that most readers will be interested primarily in the major research findings, and the conclusions and implications which seem to follow from the findings. Accordingly, Sections 1 and 5 are being published separately and widely distributed. Copies of the full report are, however, available on request.

Michael Gill.
Stan Parker.

February 1997.
Section 1. Headline Summary of Major Findings.

1.1. Question 1.
   1. New members are three times more likely to hear of the Party by reading and replying to an advertisement than by any other way.

1.2. Question 2.
   1. Most new members read the Socialist Standard regularly before applying to join the Party.
   2. Nearly a third of those questioned had previously been either members or supporters of other political groups.
   3. Two thirds of those questioned mentioned party pamphlets and books as important in the spread of socialist ideas.

1.3. Question 3.
   1. Most people join the Party within a year of first hearing the Party’s case. Two thirds of these join within six months.
   2. Other people can take up to 15 years before applying for membership.

1.4. Question 4.
   1. People applying for membership a long time after first hearing the Party’s case, mention the need to “think things through”, and “complete their personal education”, etc.

1.5. Question 5.
   1. All but four of the 46 people questioned thought they had “at least the beginnings of the being a socialist” before they heard the Party’s case.

1.6. Question 6.
   1. 95% of those questioned said they were interested in politics before they heard the Party’s case.
   2. Most people were persuaded to join the Party in large part as a result of reading the Socialist Standard.

1.7. Question 7.
   1. The Socialist Standard was praised by 60% of those questioned.
1.8. Question 8.
   1. About 60% of those questioned had some complaint about “the Party, its members or the case for socialism”, which put them off.
   2. “The aggressive and inappropriate behaviour of members” and “the way that admissions were dealt with”, were the basis of more than half of these complaints. Other criticisms were made of the Socialist Standard and of the perceived triviality of party business/actions.

1.9. Question 9.
   1. More than 20 different suggestions were made about ways of “making more socialists”. The most popular, “advertise more widely”, was offered by five people.

1.10. Question 10.
   1. Two out of every three people had suggestions to make about helping new members to feel at home.
   2. Most of these suggestions dealt with combating isolation and loneliness, and supporting people.

1.11. Question 11.
   1. Nearly a third of those questioned said they felt “not at home” in the Party.
   2. Almost half the members of Central Branch in the sample said they felt isolated, etc.

   1. Isolation and loneliness were offered as the main reason why people felt “not at home” in the Party.

   1. Without exception all those who said they felt “not at home” in the Party also described themselves as non-active.

   1. Leafletting and talking to people are the most favoured ways of recruiting more socialists.

1.15. Question 15.
   1. Apropos 14 above leafletting is seen as the most important activity.
1.16. Question 16.
   1. 80% of inactive members wish to become active.

1.17. Question 17.
   1. Feeling isolated and being pressed for time were offered as the major reasons why members remain inactive.
Section 5. Conclusions and Recommendations.

5.0. Introduction.

1. In an attempt to help the reader the discussion in Section 4 is re-visited, section by section, and a series of conclusions drawn.

2. These conclusions are suggestive of both the desirability of further research and actions which individuals, and the Party as a whole, might take. These latter actions are associated with four major recommendations.

5.1. Question 1.

1. Replying to adverts is the most usual first contact for intending new members. At least a third (14 out of 39) of the respondents who were new members had been recruited in this way. (see 4.1.1.) Attending outdoor meetings and talking with party members were also each mentioned by four people, but no other item claimed more than two votes. (4.1.5.)

2. On the evidence of current practice, advertising is the most effective way of reaching potential new members. It would seem sensible to spend more money on advertising, and give attention to the establishment of a much larger enquiry and answering service.

Recommendation A,

The Party should ask the Advertising Department to prepare a longterm advertising strategy, paying attention to such matters as aims; objectives (number of adverts per year in various identified newspapers and magazines, etc); costs (money, time, staffing an appropriate enquiry and answering service); monitoring and evaluation (assessing effectiveness); implementation (who is responsible for what over what timescale); with the intention of providing an expanded service by 1998.
5.2. Question 2.

1. Reading the Socialist Standard regularly seems the activity which most frequently transforms an interest in the Party’s case into a wish to join the Party. 25 of the 46 people who took part in the investigation read the Standard regularly before applying to join the Party. (4.2.1)

2. On the evidence of this investigation a third of the Party have either been members or supporters of other political organisations before joining. (4.2.3.)

3. Books and party pamphlets were also offered as powerful catalysts in the spread of socialist ideas. (4.2.4)

5.3. Question 3.

1. A little over half (25 out of 46) joined within a year and of these three quarters joined within six months. (4.3.1.)

5.4. Question 4.

1. A minority took longer to be convinced. They seem either to have personal commitments (especially work commitments) which left them with little time, or else they already had political beliefs which they had to, at least to some extent, unlearn. (4.4.2.)

5.5. Question 5.

1. All but four of the 46 respondents thought they had the beginnings of being a socialist before they heard the Party’s case. (4.5.3.) Most of these seemed to need little persuasion to join. Others, perhaps still mistakenly believing that reformist movements were the answer, needed, as one person put it, “to complete their political education”. The Party has always argued that it is experience of capitalism which prepares people for the socialist alternative and that our task is to help in this process of discovery and enlightenment. This piece of research would seem to confirm this point of view.
2. On the other hand what of the four people who answered “no” to this question? These people say that they had no socialistic predispositions. It would be of interest to know why they were persuaded to join the Party. Some further research seems in order.

3. For 29 of the 46 respondents the family was an important source of political insights (4.5.5.). But 12 people mentioned that their kith and kin were not interested in politics. So it appears that if most applicants are, as they claim, predisposed to the socialist case, this cannot simply be attributed to political socialisation at home. Indeed two or three of those questioned, whose families were not interested in politics, report that as early as aged 10 or 11 they were asking questions about why people were starving to death, and showing a commitment to democracy and equality, apparently without any stimulation. (4.5.5.)

4. The picture that emerges from answers to question 5 is of people with questioning natures, who are already convinced that society is fundamentally flawed; people with a strong commitment to democracy, equality and social justice. (4.5.1.) Why people - especially those who are not encouraged by parents, grandparents and other members of the family - should be attached to such ideas is not clear from this piece of research. We know what kind of opinions future members share before they hear the Party’s case, but we are no nearer knowing why they think as they do.

5.6. Question 6.

1. Most of those who apply to join the Party confirm a previous interest in politics. Only two of the 46 people in the sample said that they were disinterested in politics before they became familiar with the Party. (4.6.1.)

2. Many people apply to join within six months of first hearing the Party’s case. This kind of behaviour is entirely consistent with the idea that most intending members are already predisposed to socialist ideas. Indeed for many conviction seems almost instantaneous. For example, “When I heard the Party’s case I wasn’t convinced. It was just what I
3. For a minority, however, the predisposition has to be squared with other political experiences, reflection and, occasionally, with the often painful realisation that their present political attachments are invalid. (4.6.3.)

4. The Socialist Standard turns out to be the most substantial ‘persuader’, followed by individual party members and party members generally. (4.6.4.) Why some members seem to make effective recruiters may be of interest. If we knew more about the dynamics of interaction (material used, personal style employed, etc) we might be better placed to recruit more members.

5.7. Question 7.

1. The research confirmed the effectiveness of the Socialist Standard in communicating socialist ideas to potential new members. (4.7.1. and 4.7.2.)
   The Party has long taken the view that the Standard is first and foremost a means of spreading socialist ideas, and new members see it as being very successful in this role. (4.7.4.)

2. But focussing primarily on the needs of potential new members and sympathisers means that the needs of other readers may suffer. The very success of the Standard in recruiting new members is perhaps reason to ask whether the Party doesn’t need an additional, occasional house magazine. There is support for this idea from some new members. (4.7.5.)

5.8. Question 8.

1. Nearly two thirds of new members had critical comments to make. These centred on the aggressive behaviour of members (eight mentions), dealing with applications for membership (six mentions), the Socialist Standard (five mentions) and the triviality of party business (four mentions).
In this context it seems worth re-visiting some of the comments at 4.8.3. and 4.8.4. Thus: “It is perhaps especially unfortunate that would-be members are put-off by cold over-formal procedures, by being made to feel foolish and, particularly, by the aggressive and seemingly inappropriate behaviour of members of the Party. Something is arguably very wrong when 20% of new members complain about the behaviour of party members.” (4.8.3.)

“Can we be sanguine when a new member can say: ‘There is too much internal competitiveness in the Party; too much ego-centricity and an inability to admit error or say sorry.’?” (4.8.4.)

5.9. Question 9.

1. There was support for more advertising - perhaps understandably given that so many of those involved in the enquiry had first heard of the Party by replying to adverts. (4.9.1 and 4.9.2.) But advertising is expensive and presumes the existence of a cadre of volunteers who can deal efficaciously with enquiries.

2. Other respondents argued that the Party needs to seek a higher profile without saying how to manage this. (4.9.3.).

3. There was also support for more leafleting (three mentions); involving and supporting new members in party activities (three mentions each); and for more attention to be paid to elections and other activities (again three mentions each). See 4.9.4.

5.10. Question 10.

1. Two out of every three respondents had some suggestions to make (usually referenced to their own experience) about how to support new members. (4.10.1.) Most of these suggestions centred on people’s emotional needs. They focussed on what the Party should do to support new members, and how the various support activities should be managed. “Question 8 showed that about 20% of new members were put off by aggressive and inappropriate
behavior. Now we have over 40% of new members suggesting that the Party needs to take action to make people feel at home, etc.” (4.10.2.)

Recommendation B.

The Party should commission some work on the introduction, initiation and induction of new members, the intention being to produce a modest handbook of good practice which would inform future behaviour.

5.11. Question 11.

1. When asked whether they felt at home in the Party and able to contribute, 26 people said “yes” and 12 “no”. (4.11.1.) “That a third of those who replied to this question said they felt either isolated or not at home, must be a matter of concern. It has been established from studies of other organisations that isolated people have little energy and see themselves as ineffective; they also feel lonely and are prone to leave.” (4.11.3.)

2. 11 out of 24 members of Central Branch in the sample reported that they felt either isolated and/or not at home: from which it might be concluded that nearly half the membership of Central Branch is, in a significant sense, at risk (4.11.4.). This discovery seems to add weight to the recommendation at 5.10.


1. When asked why they didn’t feel at home and able to contribute, those questioned made further references to party members who were seen as, for example, “not comradely” and “intolerant and over-bearing”. (4.12.2.) “The Party’s rules and procedures make mention of the possibility of expulsion on the grounds of ‘action detrimental to the interests of the Party’. In the past this charge has been invoked when members act undemocratically or express opinions which fly in the face of the Party’s Object and Declaration of Principles, etc. It is arguable that we need to be similarly scrupulous about our behaviour to one another”. (4.12.2.)
2. Perhaps the idea of fraternity needs to be elaborated in such a way that we are clear about the kind of behaviour that is expected of a socialist? It is not suggested that we ape the behaviour of luvvies or that we elevate fawning and obsequiousness to a high art. But socialism carries with it implications for personal actions which are based on fraternity and unsentimental care and concern. In our treatment of one another we perhaps need to show more clearly that our actions are referenced by a commitment to such ideas.

3. At the very least we can show respect and consideration for one another, and avoid the macho, couldn’t-care-less attitudes so characteristic of capitalism. The imperatives associated with membership of the Socialist Party could, and arguably should, anticipate the kind of socialistic behaviours which will be characteristic of socialism. And pragmatically we are much more likely to sustain our membership if we take note of such matters.

4. One Central Branch member wrote to other members in his area suggesting some joint activity, and not one of his correspondents bothered to reply. Another Central Branch members describes a similar experience: he wrote to ten people and got one reply. And this piece of research failed to persuade nearly 40 comrades to answer letters, even though stamped addressed envelopes were included for reply. When 40 supposed socialists can’t be bothered to return a simple proforma in a stamped addressed envelope - requiring only that they tick a box saying whether they are either willing or unwilling to take part in an investigation - the discovery seems very depressing indeed. Are comrades behaving fraternally on such occasions? Might we reasonably expect comrades to answer letters?

Recommendation C.

The Party commission a discussion paper on the practical consequences of the idea of fraternity.

1. There was a perfect correlation between not feeling at home in the Party (question 11) and not being an active member (question 13). (4.13.1.) If we don’t make people feel at home they will be unable to function as active members. Making people feel comfortable is not an optional extra. This enquiry suggests unequivocally that it is a necessary pre-condition for becoming an active socialist. The longer we take to address people’s emotional need to feel at home in the Party, the longer will party members remain inactive, and the longer we will delay the socialist revolution.

2. Not all of those who feel at ease, however, are active. Feeling at home seems a necessary condition for being active but it is not a sufficient condition. (4.13.2.) People also need, for example, time and opportunity if they are to be active.


1. This question, as asked, was ambiguous and we must plead guilty. Most of those replying read the question as if it was asking about what they did as active socialists, rather than reporting on the kind of activities which might be successful.

2. This said new members believe that leafletting and talking to people are the most effective way of spreading the socialist message. (4.14.1.)

5.15. Question 15.

1. When respondents were asked to choose one activity as more important than any other, leafletting emerged as by far the most favoured choice. (4.15.1.)

2. Why members should place such faith in leafletting is not clear. Only one of the respondents was recruited in this way, most having been persuaded to join the Party after reading the Standard, usually after having replied to an advert in a newspaper or magazine.
At first sight it seems odd that people who have made contact with the Party via adverts and the Socialist Standard should apparently be so smitten with the power of leafletting. Unless, that is, leafletting is seen as a kind of advertising - a way of bringing the Party to people's attention - presumably associated with an invitation to send to Head Office for further information.

5.16. Question 16.

1. Most of those questioned (17 out of 21) want to become more active. (4.16.1.)

5.17. Question 17.

1. Many blame being isolated for their passivity, thus confirming the finding discussed at 5.13.1. above.

2. "Geographic isolation was claimed by seven of the nine people who reported that they felt isolated. Feelings of isolation thus seem to have a strong spatial basis." (4.17.2.) In such circumstances it might be sensible to ask whether the present system of party organisation -which seems based on the assumption that most branches and groups have restricted catchment areas - is appropriate. Whilst it may be impossible for party members living in the Isle of Man, or remote parts of Scotland to join branches, should we accept that this must be the fate of people living in, for example, Hampshire or Leicestershire? If there was an expectation that branches should have, where appropriate, a regional rather than a local focus, the needs of many Central Branch members who report themselves as not feeling at home in the Party could be seriously addressed. As it is, the present system of organisation seems to encourage isolation and, by extension, make it more likely that members will be unable to contribute to the Party as they seem to wish.
Recommendation D.

The Party should examine ways of changing the assumptions which underpin the organisation of branches and groups, with the object of combating feelings of aloneness and isolation, and ensuring that all those who want to have an opportunity of contributing actively to the Party.

4. For those members who were not isolated, lack of time was blamed for their inactivity. “Nine people offered this reason only two of whom were members of Central Branch.” (4.17.3.)

5. It seems then that as a general rule it is isolation which prevents Central Branch members from being more involved in party activities, and lack of time which is the major barrier for those who are members of other branches. We may not be able to do much about member’s lack of time - especially when for most people this is a consequence of the exploitative activities of the capitalist class - but isolation seems quite another matter.
Overseas Contacts

Comrades,

Further to the report I made for the EC Report to ADM 1996, I am pleased to announce that the number of new contacts we have made since we first embarked upon this experiment in mid-1996 is bordering on the 100 mark. Of this number, 6 have been accepted as members and several contacts have since returned Forms A which are yet to be processed.

36 contacts have been established in Uganda and 16 in Botswana. Elsewhere we have found some very interested individuals in Namibia, Zimbabwe, The Gambia and Sierra Leone. Another contact in Oman still corresponds, requesting literature, but is afraid to request membership in case this brings him into conflict with a repressive Islamic regime.

In recent weeks an organisation known as RAWA (the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) have been in touch and a contact in Pakistan, who we've corresponded with for 6 months and at last sent a Form A to, says he has marxist friends in Iran and Afghanistan who are interested in our case.

In Uganda, a group of students now hold socialist discussion meetings at Arua High School, while in Kabale a member tells us he has 3 friends who are interested in membership. In Namibia and Zimbabwe new contacts have written back requesting literature and leaflets to distribute to friends, and in Sierra Leone, an IWMM member, already familiar with the 'abolition of the money system' idea, has been in touch saying himself and friends would be interested in forming a socialist branch in Freetown.

One contact I made in Pakistan was the editor of a magazine published by the Islamic Research Institute entitled 'Universal Message' (a current affairs journal). Having requested free copies of the Standard, he went on to reprint two articles from the Standard (Why is Iraq singled out and Capitalism is Obsolete). Another article from the Standard is being reprinted in the next issue of Universal Message.

Several members have been in touch here in Britain wishing to get involved. Again I am pleased to say they've done a fair bit to put the party case to the workers of the world and their results are included above.

The biggest set-back is finance. Sending literature overseas is a costly business, moreso when contacts write back requesting literature to give to friends. North East members have so far donated in excess of £200.00 to this venture uncomplainingly and we hope to step up our efforts in this direction as soon as the election is over.

The results, whatever the cost, speak for themselves. For £200.00 we have put the socialist message in 22 countries, the vast majority of which the real socialist message had not been heard in before. At the moment, we await replies from other countries to whose newspapers etc we have written.

If we are to have an effective Overseas Contact Department we need money, members who are prepared to get stuck in and literature aimed at a global working class (the Standard is not the best of publications to send out to first time enquirers).
Those wishing to get involved and help coordinate the Overseas Contact Department need patience and staying power. It's not just a case of sending a new contact a Standard with a letter saying 'please find enclosed a copy of our monthly journal. Let us know what you think'. It's more a case of sitting down and writing a long personalised letter of at least 500 words. We need to speak to these new contacts on a one to one friendly and informal basis, for instance beginning a paragraph: 'When you think about it,umbuto, the world is in a pretty sorry state, with wars and famine, unemployment and pollution. You yourself could no doubt tell me a thing or two about capitalism and the misery it gives rise to'. The point is if we show new contacts we are interested in them, then there is more a chance that this will be reciprocated. I mean, how often do you think a Namibian gets a letter from someone who doesn't want his money, from someone who is friendly and has a deep understanding of the misery he endures every day? Not every day!

We also need to recontact those people who initially requested our literature, to whom we not only sent literature but also a pleasant letter. They at least must have some leaning towards our ideas or they would never have written to us in the first place.

What we are also desperate for is our own literature. Literature written in simple language – no high-sounding jargonised stuff. Literature that covers most aspects of our case or at least those aspects that contacts in the 3rd World will identify with initially. This may take the form of a simple literature pack consisting of perhaps 10-20 pages, loose pages, with each sheet covering a different topic and an accompanying Standard.

It might also be helpful if we could get hold of stamps belonging to the country a contact writes from. On at least three occasions contacts have written to me apologising for taking so long to reply to my letter in their paper for no other reason than they could not afford a stamp. This is just one of the problems we hit up against, and again one of the problems we can overcome. For the sake of sending out a stamped addressed envelope to a new contact we may lose a potential member. And when has poverty ever precluded a fellow worker from receiving literature? - this should in fact spur us to action. We're not all that hard-up here in Britain!

I regret not being able to be with you today – domestic problems make it impossible for me to attend. I hope the above, and what other comrades will contribute to the ensuing discussion, will set the Overseas Contact Department in motion (hell, it's already in motion) and encourage other members to get involved, even if it's only striking up correspondence with one contact overseas. You might like to consider a question: 'What would we find more pleasing – five new members in Britain or one new member in The Gambia?'. And another: 'What the hell is a World Socialist Movement doing without an Overseas Contact Department?'

Kind regards,

John Bissett

PS. RAWA (third paragraph) is an organisation that campaigns against Islamic fundamentalism.