Conference commenced at 10.30 am.

1. P Bennett (Manchester) was elected to chair on a motion proposed and seconded by P Lawrence (South London) and R Donnelly (Glasgow).

2. Forms C were not received for West London, Birmingham and West Cornwall branches. On a motion proposed and seconded by R Donnelly (Glasgow) and H Vallar (Glasgow), it was agreed that the delegates be allowed to sit.

3. Apologies received from Akhtar Hussain from Mingora, Pakistan, who had been elected as a Central Branch delegate but could not attend Conference, having been refused an entry visa by the British High Commission.

4. Fraternal Greetings received from Alex Hart of South Africa.

5. Order of Business. Cde F Allen of the Working Party for the Leasing of Head Office could not attend on the Saturday and it was agreed that the relevant item (39 on the Conference Agenda) be dealt with today.


7. General Secretary’s Report.

Donnelly (Glasgow): Pointed out that the General Secretary and the HOO came from the North East and the Central Organiser from Glasgow. It would be preferable to have London members filling these posts. Was the Party dying at its heart? We needed to address this problem.

Parker (Central Lndn): The Assistant General Secretary came from London.

Easton (Central Lndn): The situation was not as drastic as had been suggested. Email meant we could communicate a lot more easily. True, the Party was not looking healthy, but it was encouraging that the posts were being filled.
8. Central Organiser’s Report

Buick (West Lndn): Had there been any developments with regards the comrades in Ireland?

Donnelly (Glasgow & Central Organiser): Read out a letter he had circulated to the comrades in Ireland regarding organising as an ‘all-Ireland’ party. The idea looked like a non-starter as only two of the Irish comrades had replied. It would be up to Conference to decide the next step.

Bennett (Chair): Asked delegates and members for suggestions.

McLaughlan (Manchester): Queried the geographical spread of the Irish membership

Donnelly (Central Organiser): Read out the locations. A problem arose with the comrades in Southern Ireland who were not in the Central Branch.

Browne (Standing Orders): How many were we speaking of? Could they be transferred to Central Branch?

Donnelly (Central Organiser): We were speaking of 11 members. They should be transferred to Central Branch. Asked for guidance from Conference. Glasgow was willing to accommodate these members, but wouldn’t this impinge upon future branch quorums?

McLaughlan (Manchester): We could make an exception. Transfer the comrades to Central Branch so they could be served by one department.

Buick (West Lndn): Proceed with Plan A – a Belfast/Irish Branch with the two Southern Irish members taking over.

Donnelly (Central Organiser): Were there any relevant resolutions being proposed on the issue? He was quite willing to go over to Ireland and help sort things out there.

Parker (Central Lndn): Was against inflating Central Branch.

Donnelly (Central Organiser): An all-Ireland branch was an idea, an experiment. At present Belfast was a paper branch. The members could be transferred to Central Branch.

A Floor Resolution (1) was moved and seconded by Vallar and Vanni (both Glasgow):

“This Conference recommends that Northern Ireland members be transferred to Central Branch.”

Lawrence (South Lndn): It was up to the members themselves, not us.

Donnelly (Central Organiser): Nine had not bothered to reply after six months. The resolution was an interim measure. It was not dictatorial.

Resolution carried: 7 For, 5 Against.
9. Head Office Organiser's Report

Vanni (Glasgow): The HOO talks of difficulty in getting help from London members especially when the Standard needs despatching. Expressed concern that London members could not go for one night to help out at head office.

10. Treasurer's Report 2000
Agreed to defer until the Treasurer arrived.

11. Item for Discussion from South London Branch: “Should the EC issue a grant to all branches at a set date in the near future?”

Watkins (South Lndn): Opening, said the idea was that this would be a spur for branches to get active.
Easton (Central Lndn): How much? We had over £120,000 at present, but this would easily be spent. It was not wise to hand out money in such a way to branches. If branches needed money they only had to request it.
Elworthy (Central Lndn): Sounded like a nice system, but was suspicious of the idea.
Donnelly (Glasgow): Bearing in mind the change of procedures involved, he wondered why the item had no accompanying circular. Suggested items were accepted unless accompanied by a circular - except the obvious. Glasgow Branch often had money spare and simply sent it to head office. We could support the comrades in India with the money; increase the Standard to 24 pages or put a bit colour into the Standard. Let’s do something positive with our money. This was a daft idea.

12. Item for Discussion from Lancaster Branch: “Protection of Party Finances.”

Best (Lancaster): Was in opposition to item 5 and concerned about the wasting of Party money. We needed a sound strategy for managing our finances. We were at a low ebb at the moment and it was understandable that there was a desire to do something positive, but spending money was not the solution. It didn’t solve our present political problems.
Parker (Central Lndn): Disagreed. We needed to spend money to make new members. Advertising boosted activity.
Shannon (Lancaster): How does this idea develop? Throwing good money after bad? We needed to protect ourselves from misuse of our funds and from misinformation.
Elworthy (Central Lndn): Was suspicious of money going overseas. The EC was there to protect Party money and to agree expenditure. Our money can be used wisely.
Pitts (non-delegate): Not all requests from overseas were cons. We take as much on trust alone here. Members were too cynical.
13. Advertising Department Report

Donnelly (Glasgow): More information was needed. We needed a breakdown of the report. We had the technology. Surely this was possible. Hopefully this can be addressed next time round.

Parker (Advertising Dept & Central Lndn): Ads. Dept. had wanted more figures, but he himself was not computer literate. Years ago we provided such information manually. Computer calculations were possible. We’d just have to try better next time.

Buick (West Lndn): Queried the advertising of the Socialist Standard.

Parker (Ads. Dept.): We intended supplementing the budget for the election campaign and this way advertising the Standard.

Buick (West Lndn): Read out a floor resolution.

Best (Lancaster): What of Party procedures now? This should not be a floor resolution, but one all the Party can vote on.

Browne (Standing Orders): The floor resolution was contentious.

McLaughlan (Manchester): Floor resolutions are supposed to come out of the discussion, not precede it as was the case in hand.

Best (Lancaster): It would be wise to delay further discussion of this until we discussed item 34 [item 34 being the Lancaster Branch discussion item: ”The status of floor resolutions at Conference.”]

Item 34 of the Conference Agenda was now taken: “The status of floor resolutions at Conference.”

Best (Lancaster): Was concerned about the nature of floor resolutions. The reason for the change in voting procedures had been in the interests of democracy and these came under question, not being voted upon by the Party. We needed guidance for the future with regards the status and relevance of floor resolutions.

Vanni (Glasgow): We shouldn’t abuse floor resolutions. They should only arise out of the agenda, and should not be prepared before hand. Floor resolutions had been abused in the past.

Hart (South Lndn): The previous floor resolution was slight of hand. It would have been worthwhile for the resolution to go on the voting paper. A Party vote could still take place after the floor resolution had been voted on. It seemed a perfect solution. The floor resolution was in order and would help show the mood of Conference.

Easton (Central Lndn): Include the lost resolution on the voting paper. Floor resolutions were moved to solve pressing problems. They were emergency resolutions if formulated after agenda.

Shannon (Lancaster): There was no reference in the Standing Orders that covered the issue. Not to be voted upon by Party? Expression of views of Conference? The change to
voting procedures left floor resolutions unchanged. They did not carry the weight of a full Party resolution. Change may arise from the new political situation.

**Bennet (Chair):** Read out section of Conference Standing Orders relating to floor resolutions. “A floor resolution moved, seconded and presented to the chair in writing, shall be considered provided it arises directly from the business currently before the meeting.”

**Buick (West Lndn):** We were on new territory now. Floor resolutions would be abused if put to a Party vote. Kill it here and now. No floor resolutions sent out with instructed resolutions.

**Shannon (Lancaster):** It was a new ball game now. The status of floor resolutions had changed. That’s why dealing with new floor resolution could be binding. The present floor resolution tried to circumvent democracy. The chair was empowered to rule the floor resolution out of order.

**Browne (Standing Orders):** Keep items separate.

**Headicar (non-delegate):** Nobody was that Machiavellian. Items may overwhelm us if the floor resolution was accepted.

**Browne (Standing Orders):** Branches might wait until last minute to present floor resolutions – preventing serious discussion of them.

**A floor resolution was then presented by Parker (Central Lndn), but not seconded.**

**Browne (Standing Orders):** It conflicts with Standing Orders item 10, already read out.

**Lawrence (South Lndn):** The resolution was out of order. It was improper and undemocratic. Standing Orders were decided by the membership.

**The floor resolution was withdrawn.**

**Donnelly (Glasgow):** How does the General Secretary deal with this?

**Easton (Central Lndn):** We’ll deal with this next conference. Discussion has to go to membership.

**Bennet (Chair):** Asked Lancaster Branch to wind up.

**Best (Lancaster):** Did not know how to proceed on behalf of branch. Things had changed. If voting was allowed on floor resolutions it raised the status of the floor resolution.

**Bennet (Chair):** Suggested floor resolutions still stood, still had status.

**Easton (Central Lndn):** Could we not wait until next conference to debate this?

*(General Secretary’s note – at this point the debate became heated with several members attempting to speak at the same time. As I could not keep pace with the recording of the discussion I halted the recording of the same until calm was restored.)*

**McLaughlan (Manchester):** Keep it as it is. Don’t change the status of the floor resolution. We shouldn’t ask the chair to change the status of the floor resolution. Only change it by an instructed resolution.
Shannon (Lancaster): Had prepared a floor resolution.

Buick (West Lndn): It was out of order. Rule 23 stated what could be decided after conference.

A Floor Resolution was again presented. The chair ruled this out of order. A motion moved and seconded by Shannon (Lancaster) and Donnelly (Glasgow) that the chair accept the resolution was lost 6 for, 10 against. The West London floor resolution was again read, but fell having no seconder (the text of the resolution not being passed to the Gen Sec).


Donnelly (Glasgow): A circular had suggested branches could arrange meetings at which we could launch the new pamphlet ‘Socialist Principles Explained’. This had been a good idea but had come to naught because the pamphlet was not yet in print. Glasgow Branch had gone ahead and booked a hall for the launch – but nothing. Let’s learn by our mistakes and proceed in future in an organised manner. It seemed we were only playing at being revolutionaries.

15. Motion 1 from North East Branch: "That Non-Violent Direct Action is an acceptable form of Party propaganda."

Peacock (North East): Opening, referred to the branch supporting statement and anticipated it had been misunderstood. At the European elections only 19% had bothered to vote. People did not seem interested in politics. The trans-national corporations now had more power than nation states and anti-capitalism events attracted a lot of support. The focus of attack was shifting. Our methods appealed to very few people. We needed new tactics. NE Branch were primarily concerned with the principle of direct action and it was not the place of Conference to come up with ideas. We have to ask ourselves how do we get maximum publicity.

Parker (Central Lndn): It was wise not to list methods of direct action. There were many forms of NVDA which did not advance the case for socialism. Opposing capitalism, as we did, was itself a form of direct action.

Foster (Birmingham): NVDA could be a great way to publicise ourselves. Was worried that we could get misinterpreted and classed in with anarchists if we were not careful. Nevertheless it was a good way of advertising ourselves.

Donnelly (Glasgow): The North East accompanying circular was an anti-SPGB tract. Anarchists demanded; we did not. Direct Action hardly swelled the anarchists ranks. Thoughtful and democratic methods were what we needed. We did not show 'respect' for the state, but fear. The circular suggested anger was something socialists should feel. Anger was not an attribute. Clear thought was required. Direct Action would make us the clowns of politics. It was an atrocious idea. Where we expected to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with
anarchists who smashed shop windows? Clear thought and logical argument was all we needed.

**Elworthy (Central Lndn):** The painting of Churchill's statue was not carried out by 'toss pots'. The party did have good ideas, but these could be expressed in many ways. We were more than a group that expressed theories - we were about expressing ideas. If members wanted to get involved in NVDA then good for them. Many people - not just us - had doubts about capitalism.

**Easton (Central Lndn):** The branch view was that we were disconnected from public opinion. There was a difficulty as to what the party could sanction. We carried out fly posting - but the EC had never sanctioned this. We should be quietly sympathetic to anything that furthers our case. Past operations should not be dismissed - they had had varying degrees of success. Respect? Legality concerned members. Whether it was democratic was what mattered. Our approach should be careful. Direct action could mean anything. If it got our ideas across then all the better.

**Bissett (Gen Sec):** Things had changed since 1904 but we still had a 1904 mindset. Capitalism was still with us but it was a whole new ball game. One TNC had a bigger revenue that 5 European countries; they could control small nations. A growing number were not bothering to vote and there was a growing feeling that involvement in politics achieved nothing - hence protests against globalisation. We played a game of bourgeois democracy at which we always got our arses kicked. We had been forced to register as a 'minor' political party. Look how many branches bothered to contest elections. Direct action would make us more visible.

**Shannon (Lancaster):** Was worried about elections. NVDA was a disaster. Let's get real - we could not even get a quorate EC last meeting. Yes, we were conservative, but there was no political objective to NVDA. The problem was resistance to new ideas. Was sympathetic to the idea, but we would not know how to get involved in NVDA. Let's look at the experts and to an extent help them. We get to gain from helping the anti-capitalist movement and their search for new ideas. We have what they need and vice versa.

**Vanni (Glasgow):** Criticised examples of NVDA. The NE Branch circular had been the worst he had ever read. It was pure romanticism. It seems the party is full of anarchists. There was hostility to the circular - this was a 'wake up call'. Central idea of North East Branch was ignorant of our position. This had been a Communist Party strategy for 60 years and an SWP tactic. 'Shoulder to shoulder' with anarchists! North East Branch had not carefully thought out their circular - this was a lease for disorganisation. This did not win us 'brownie points'. What it was proposing was illegality. It invited us to get involved in single issue politics and would mean the end of the Party as we knew it.

**Best (Lancaster):** Had been attracted to the Socialist Party by the NVDA of Lancaster Branch. The two things were linked together. Was curious about NVDA as the Party clearly opposed certain forms of it. We did need to discriminate on the matter. Agreed that we should open discussion with anti-capitalists, a starting point being our opposition to capitalism.
Deutz (non delegate): If the workers would not vote for socialism, they certainly would not fight for it. CND were not interested in changing society. Direct actionists achieved little. They did not act in the interests of the masses. North East Branch did not have the monopoly on anger. Our case was not about morality, but about what was in our interest. It was not our fault that the 'penny had not dropped.' Socialism has to come out of people's experience of material conditions and a desire to change it.

Conference adjourned for lunch at 1.15 pm and recommenced at 2.40pm, with the North East Branch motion still up for discussion.

Flynn (Central Lndn): Two views were emerging - the isolationism of Glasgow Branch and the leftism of North East Branch. North East Branch simply were not satisfied with the way the party related to the class struggle. There were different camps of anti-capitalism and some did discuss abolishing money. There were also a lot of reformists. Disagreed about the power of TNCs. North East Branch had stumbled on something - our mechanisms were not perfect - and it appeared we were heading in the right direction.

McLaughlan (Manchester): North East Branch had raised this issue before. Then it had amounted to fly posting! This time nothing was being proposed. NVDA was a semi-anarchist position, an SWP strategy. These groups pursued their own agenda. If we 'up the anti' then the state responds accordingly. NVDA was a clamouring for some colourful form of activity. Those groups that involved themselves pursued single issues.

Elworthy (Central Lndn): "I'm not childish, I'm not a romantic." Abolishing capitalism was a single issue. What immediate effect do we seek? Any effect will do. We're not entryists. He had spoke with other anti-capitalists about our case.

We were not living in a democracy, but a repressive and violent society. The language we used was horrible, too theoretical, which only 600 spoke.

Stair (non-member): Yes we should be involved with anti-capitalists, but via dialogue, putting across our strengths. Their advantage? They had imagination and a sense of fun. Suggested a text for a new leaflet.

Buick (West Lndn): No Branch members had favoured the motion. The North East circular appeared to oppose the motion. The issue had been confused. There were lots of people involved in NVDA, including Ghandi. Branch had wanted to amend the resolution. Agreed with publicity stunts. We had already broken the law. We must generate an idea of just what anti-capitalism means.

Headicar (non-delegate): NVDA was confusing. It included fly posting, but also civil disobedience - cutting wires of military bases and sitting down in front of aeroplanes. He had been involved in some exceptional circumstances - in which he would do it again - but never in the name of the Party. It was not a Party issue.

Corry (non-delegate): We should take part in demonstrations. What use were our banners. The North East circular had awoken fear. Their ideas were not contemptuous. We are anti-capitalists and should take party in demonstrations to achieve publicity. What was bad
publicity? We had nothing to fear. Elections, which we took part in, were manipulated by the state, and we knew it. Yes, direct action, but democratically decided.

Lawrence (South Ldn): His branch had discussed the idea in general terms. The arguments were that NVDA was 'reformist' and 'single issue'. Agreed with Cde Shannon - had no problems with the party engaging in NVDA. We have never taken part in demonstrations or protests. We can do this and still maintain our socialist integrity. We can participate without compromising our position. The activities of direct actionists must have altered the mindset of governments and helped raise political climate.

Peacock (North East): Winding up. The discussion had been polarised. Propaganda was an end in itself. We had ideas to lend other groups. If 20% of people supported us we would be forced to become more active.

16. **The Roll Call of Branch Delegates was then taken.**

Lancaster (2), Enfield and Haringey (2), Central London (3), Birmingham (2), West London (2), Glasgow (3), Edinburgh (1), North East (1), South London (2), Manchester (2), Swansea (1).

17. **Collection taken: £118.25.**


Nothing was raised.

19. **Premises Committee (Working Party) Report (item 39 on Agenda, but agreed at commencement of Conference that it be taken on the Friday).**

Parker (Central Ldn & Working Party): was in agreement with the criteria (that the building should be within 30 minutes journey time of central London; size – plus or minus 20% of size of HO; sufficient space for relevant purposes, as at HO; tenure – freehold; cost - £150,000-£200,000).

Best (Lancaster): Why London? Because the bulk of the work had to be done there?

Bissett (Gen Sec): The Gen Sec and HOO came from North East and the Central Organiser from Glasgow. Moreover 5 EC members travelled down from up north. An NUM office, complete with meeting hall, upstairs flat and an attached house had been on the market in Seaham for £30,000 all in.

Buick (West Ldn): 52 Clapham High Street fitted the criteria suggested.

Vanni (Glasgow): Would there be a further valuation?

Allen (Working Party): Not just yet. We were after a free valuation.

Vanni (Glasgow): Property prices were high in central London.

Allen (Working Party): The criteria suggested half an hour’s travelling time. A move would generate income.
Vanni (Glasgow): Why not just renovate head office?
Allen (Working party): We could put £200,000 on our property. If we let the property this would bring in up to £400.00 per week. Anyone taking over would renovate the place anyway. We still had the freehold – maybe worth £240,000, which we could use to get a lease on our next property.
Vanni (Glasgow): Would we maintain another property? We didn’t maintain our present one.
McLaughlan (Manchester): We could buy an old pub with a wide area, lots of storage space, a meeting place and offices. What if the WP came across ideal new premises quite soon, bearing in mind the slow pace of democracy in the Party? It would then be too late. And why London? We could get premises half-price further north. It had been suggested we could move out of no. 52 within 6 months; more like 60 years. No matter where we move, members will not attend. Members didn’t even attend HO now. The report of the WP had just gone out and had not been properly discussed.
Donnelly (Glasgow): opposed WP recommendations. The report was for discussing and adopting, not necessarily agreeing to.
Lawrence (South Lndn): It seemed we were being asked to endorse guidelines. We should go ahead and find new premises.
Easton (Central Lndn): Head office was squalid, though it had been worse. There was rarely anybody there. We needed something more practical, and somewhere that addressed issues such as disability access.
Thomas (non-delegate): Going to head office was like stepping back 50 years.
McLaughlan (Manchester): What did the WP want us to do? Who makes the decision?
Parker (Central Lndn & Working Party): The WP wanted agreement – amendment on need to find new premises. The London members needed to take the initiative.
Lambert (non-delegate): We should investigate the possibility of a face-lift at head office.
Corry (non-delegate): Let’s be honest. We knew members would leave and head office would be run down.

A Floor Resolution (2) was then moved and seconded by Buick (West London) and Simpkins (South London): “That the Party gets a commercial estimate for renovating and bringing up to standard head office.”

McLaughlan (Manchester): Opposed the idea. It papered over the original idea. There was money tied up in head office, from which we reaped no benefit. The idea was to generate income for the Party.
Easton (Central Lndn): Members felt it too big a risk. Insisted the EC consider disabled access.
Shannon (Lancaster): Doing up head office would make no difference. It would be gutted by buyers anyway. We have changed head office four times. We argue about how we can change the world, but we cannot make a decision on head office.
Donnelly (Glasgow): Our last move had been 50 years ago. All previous offices were rented. The resolution does not stop us moving premises.

White (non-delegate): Why was head office in such a state? The Premises Cttee should report repairs to the EC. Could we maintain other premises?

Vanni (Glasgow): Yes, we should stay in London. Our biggest concentration of members was here, but would we gain financially from the move?

**Vote on Floor resolution: For 10, Against 7.**

Browne (Standing Orders): We should discuss this at ADM. The EC had not seen this report as it had not been circulated prior to Conference.

20. **Development Plan Report**

Greenwood (Activities Sub-Cttee): Explained the context of the report. This was requested by Conference last year with the first draft being presented to ADM back in October. The report would be an ongoing process as there was a recognised need for us to continually update it.

Donnelly (Glasgow): To what end was the report aimed? Would anything come out of it? Was critical of the report on the Socialist Standard. This was a stepping stone to the socialist case and we risked losing the introductory role of the Standard.

Buick (West Lndn): The SS should continue as now – not too much basic stuff.

Browne (Standing Orders): The Standard was good, informative. The things outlined in the report needed to be put into practice.

21. **Report of the Internet Department**

McLaughlan (Manchester): Sixty percent of those who accessed our site did not move beyond the opening page? Could this not be improved?

Greenwood (Internet Dept.): We considered this a success. It did not mean the 40% others had no interest. We had introduced new cartoons to the site. He did not claim to be a web designer.

Donnelly (Glasgow): Just cartoons? There was a need for better artwork.

Best (Lancaster): We should be optimistic. Forty per cent was high. Most sites had only a 12% interest rate beyond the first page.

Elworthy (Central Lndn): We did have a good site, though it could be better.

Easton (Central Lndn): Several other sites gave links to ours. Quoted examples.

Greenwood (Internet Dept.): The readership was akin to the Standard’s readership.

Non-member (no name given): Had tried accessing the Party site, but had kept getting the site for the Ashbourne Court group.

Easton (Central Lndn): We needed a Media Dept. Asked for nominations and would be happy to go on the department himself. Requested members to contact him.
22. **Item for Discussion from South London Branch**: “The role of the World Socialist Discussion Forum and its democratic control.”

**Watkins (South Lndn)**: It was becoming like a speakers’ corner. Any idiot could take it over. Wanted a communist forum which would attract the half converted. Well moderated discussion groups already existed.

**Elworthy (Central Lndn)**: We could introduce threads on the Forum and subscribers could choose what to read/ignore.

**Donnelly (Glasgow)**: True, the Forum contained a lot of irrelevancies, but the delete button existed. It was confusing at times with 20 users discussing different topics. It could be split up. Was a worthwhile site.

**Lawrence (South Lndn)**: Was impressed by promoters. A lot of the discussion was on a low level. There was a lot of prattle and a lot of insults.

**McLaughlan (Manchester)**: The insults had lasted a while and it was easy to scupper a debate. The Forum was supposedly set up to attract socialists.

**Bissett (Gen Sec)**: Had been so fed up with the ‘crap’ on the Forum he had unsubscribed from it. Had better things to do with his time.

**Shannon (Lancaster)**: The Forum didn’t exist three years ago. It has exploded now. The Forum contained people we had met on the streets. The insults were not surprising – we were insulted on the streets also. Yes, the debate was low-level, but there is a general low level of debate everywhere these days. Censorship had been discussed but had been bomed out. The freedom of speech was appreciated by subscribers. We could edit our ‘ inbox’ ourselves.

23. **Election Department Report**

**Buick (West Lndn and Election Dept)**: Two branches had since decided not to contest the coming election. This left us contesting Jarrow only. Leaflets would be prepared to hand out elsewhere during the election. We had experienced problems, i.e. not being able to put our name on the ballot paper.

**Parker (Central Lndn)**: The Ads Dept. and the Election Dept. should get together and spend some money on a larger ad in the Big Issue – something beyond our normal budget for elections.

**Lawrence (South Lndn)**: Referred to a meeting of the London branches regarding the possibility of contesting the coming election. The branches had since opposed the idea of contesting the election. Asked delegates why the sudden change of mind.

**Bond (West Lndn)**: Reflected views of his branch – that it was a waste of money.

**Easton (Central Lndn)**: Had been enthusiastic. But there were questions re. time limit and the length of the campaign and uncertainty of date. A campaign also needed preparatory work, but not had been carried out. Believed the branches should contest local elections first.
Peacock (North East): Questioned why such a sum of money was to be spent on a Big issue advert. Would it not be better directing the money at the Jarrow campaign?

24 It was agreed that motions submitted by Edinburgh Branch (items 14 and 15 of the Conference Agenda) be taken together.

Motion 2 from Edinburgh Branch: "That Conference resolves to accept the principle that the Party should establish a 'front party' registered as a major political party - solely for the purpose of electoral activity - within the UK."

Motion 3 from Edinburgh Branch: "That, in the (possible) event that a front party has been sanctioned by the membership of the Socialist Party and solely established for electoral purposes in the future, that this party be called The World Socialist Party."

Gardner (Edinburgh): Apologised that no circular had been submitted in support of the motions. Few Edinburgh Branch members had supported the motions and these had been a last minute response to changes in electoral law. We were in a ridiculous situation. Is this how we wish to progress? We were faced with 3 options: 1. To leave things as they are at present. 2. Open books to the state? Why not? 3. Set up a back door movement to get money in - not a new party. How can we stand as socialists in elections while hampered by legislation? A front organisation was far from ideal, but we were in a desperate situation.

Donnelly (Glasgow): It was a good idea not to have parties' names on ballot papers. It was never done this way in the past. We used elections as a means to establish socialism. It was no great tragedy if people voted for us, but not the candidate. More chance of gaining the socialist vote this way.

Buick (West Ldn & Election Dept.): Why had we decided to register the way we had? 1. To protect our name. 2. So that we could accept donations. 3. So that we did not have to register all branch treasurers. Our books were always open. It was not this principle we objected to. It was not unprincipled or illegal to accept donations from a front organisation. The wording of the motion was a little unfortunate. We could register twice, but what name would we use? It was a passionate issue - a question of principle to do what Trots do.

Lawrence (South Ldn): The word 'front' had repugnant connotations and concealed the real nature of the organisers.
25. **Enquiries Department Report**

**McLaughlan (Manchester):** There were problems getting the names and addresses of contacts with regards meetings. An updated list was needed.

**Bissett (General Secretary):** Had been perturbed to learn at the interdepartmental meeting, that branches were only informed of enquirers in their area if the enquirer had re-contacted the party. The previous practice had been to contact the branch as soon as the enquiry came in. NE Branch had made many contacts this way.

**Buick (West Lndn):** The computer system we used was difficult to master. The old system was far easier to use.

**Greenwood (Ads. Dept.):** The database had easier functions that comrades at head office knew about. The Enquiries Dept was aware of the problem and was addressing it. Emails had been sent regarding the issue, but had not been answered.

**Eastwood (Central Lndn):** Surely if the information had been put in it could be extracted?

26. **Item for Discussion from Lancaster Branch:** “*The definition of religion.*”

**Best (Lancaster):** Some branch members felt relaxed on this issue and believed our stance lost us potential members. Others took a materialist view. The boundaries were not that simple as to what we identify as religion. Paganism? The branch simply looked for clarification.

**Foster (Birmingham):** We needed to widen our stance or narrow it down. Any religious belief contradicted the materialist view of history.

**Headicar (non-delegate):** It would have been helpful to have had the Lancaster branch comrades putting forward the ‘for religion’ case.

**Lawrence (South Lndn):** Queried the religious view of the branch.

**Elworthy (Central Lndn):** How do we respond to well-meaning Christians? Religion was not our enemy. The Party response was difficult. We were opposed to believers in religions joining.

**Begley (non-delegate):** The Party literature on the subject was negative. What of humanistic religion? A distinction was to be made as the latter enhanced man’s power of reason. The Party response was not clear, not plain black and white. It would be good to get outside of our ego. God was a symbol of the highest powers in man. The kingdom of God was in us. We needed a more positive Party attitude on the issue.

**Easton (Central Lndn):** Why do we need a symbol (God)? Members had been rigorous and unfair over the issue. Philosophically and politically we had a materialist outlook. A belief in God can subvert the belief in socialism. There was always room for dialogue on the issue, but not change.

**Flynn (Central Lndn):** Let the religious in the Party? No! Buddhism was based on a reactionary humanism. A belief in Karma was reactionary. It was too individualistic. To believe in God was to have a slave mentality. If Christians join, I’m off. The MCH was the basis of our organisation. Our stance could not be softened.
Browne (Standing Orders): Opposed a ‘blanket ban’. We should go through the religions one by one.

Thomas (non-delegate): Our case sometimes implied you could join if you had a few religious beliefs and kept them to yourself. We were opposed to the idea of non-control over our own destiny.

Simpkins (South Lndn): Just how many religious people wanted to join? Religion causes damage all over – in the past, the present and in the future.

Shannon (Lancaster): We had had a four-month battle in the press with the religious and the debate threw up notions of how the religious viewed us rationalists.

White (non-delegate): If religious people wanted socialism they should pray for it.

Vanni (Glasgow): It seemed the smaller and smaller we got, the more desperate we become. We were clutching at straws to get members. This issue never arose in the past.

Lawrence (South London): The church was reactionary in 1904. The Party was more hostile to religion then. But the church is no longer as powerful as it was. It was becoming harder and harder to define religion. It meant all things to all people.

Corry (non-delegate): Religion will exist as long as capitalism exists. It is still the opium of the people.

Headicar (non-delegate): ‘Religious’ was different from ‘religion’.

Best (Lancaster): Speaking personally – religion hijacked reverence for nature, ourselves and the universe. Religion will not abandon belief in the face of science and a retreating God. We don’t have a ‘belief’ in socialism, bit a ‘hope’. The rationalist approach must take a harder view.

Conference adjourned on Friday at 6.15 pm.

27. Conference recommenced Saturday 10.55 am

28. Membership Department Report

Parker (Central London): How many members had we at present?

Vein (Enfield and Haringey): 460 at present. We had lapsed quite a few in recent months – loss of contact and non reply to circulars sent out for dues.

Vanni (Glasgow): Eighty of these were overseas.

Best (Lancaster): The active membership was falling. How many were actually active?

Was there a way we could pursue the inactive? We seemed to be administering to a largely inactive membership.

Browne (Standing Orders): The only gauge of activity was the return of ballots. Between 120-160 members bothered to return ballots. About 300 paid dues.

29. World Socialist Correspondence Club Report
Browne (Standing Orders): Had the WSCC been advertised in the Standard?
Pitts (WSSCC): No, not yet. He had asked. There were now 83 members in the WSCC.
With email, the possibilities of communicating had improved. More help was needed. There
was a lot of work to do and this did strengthen socialist ties.
Watkins (SSPC): There was no problem with advertising the WSCC in the Standard.

30. **Communication from absent delegate.** At this stage, the Chair informed Conference
that Cde Akhtar Hussain, the Central Branch delegate who had been unable to make the
journey, had emailed a speech he had planned to make at Conference. **It was agreed the
Chair read the speech and that relevant sections be recorded in the Conference report.**
The relevant sections follow:

“My Dear Comrades….I hail from an extremely conservative region in Pakistan, indeed in
the lap of the Taliban, where there exists no tolerance as far as dissent of opinion is
concerned. Dissent against the prevailing view is simply blasphemous. This makes our work
more difficult. Coupled with this you always have this fear from the state and agency sleuths
who might take you for an enemy agent or someone involved in subversive activities.
Anyhow, this is not something to deter us. Before joining the SPGB I knew what it meant to
be a socialist. I have not had any great trouble over the past for or five years that I have
been a member. But you hardly find anyone agreeing to your views. One has to have steel
nerves to deal with such a situation. Recently the whole of Pakistan and the NWFP in
particular have been swept by a wave of religious militarism and fanaticism… I know the
situation in Pakistan is more than clear to you. Capitalism does this to every regional and
country in the world. The need, however, is to approach those who understand the workings
of the system and join them in a campaign that promises a world entirely different than that
they have seen so far. I would be more than glad to have your support and guidance in my
efforts to expedite our struggle in this party of the world. Socialism has to be given a new
meaning. Accommodating more and more people with clear understanding of the system can
help us a great deal. I hope the SPGB will extend its support in whatever way possible. I
thank you all. Warmest regards to everyone out there. Yours for Socialism. Akhtar
Hussain.”

Simpkins (South Lndn): It certainly sets our problems here in context. The Comrades in
Pakistan faced mammoth intolerance
Buick (West Lndn): A fraternal reply should be sent.
Overseas Contacts Dept. Report

Vanni (Glasgow): Had been impressed by the Ukraine article in the Standard. However, it should not have been printed with the language slip ups.

Parker (Central Lndn): It was nonsense to have members in the Ukraine.

Bissett (Gen Sec): They had actually sought us out.

Buick (West Lndon): They had also contacted the SSPC via the web.

Donnelly (Glasgow): The report asks for Conference to act. It was dangerous to organise overseas. Each condition had to be taken in to account. We take a lot on faith. A lot were isolated. This was to be expected and hence the often strange ideas. This was more the case where English was not the first language. A lot shouldn’t be in the movement. Kenya had only recently recorded 11 members. They now had 40+. It was preferable to send members out there than to communicate via post and email. It was different with India – they had been learning the Party case for years before joining us.

Shannon (Lancaster): Speaking as an EC member, there was no real Party policy on this. We had put forward interim measures for those considering companion party status:

- That they have six members;
- That we see copies of the constitution and that these go out to the companion parties;
- That the OCD consider an action plan, taking into account terrain and political climate;
- That the OCD present the EC with a final proposal and that these underwrite a fraternal visit.

Gluck (non delegate): How had they come into contact with us?

Bissett (Gen Sec): Outlined past procedures for spreading socialist understanding. This was initiated by targeting the African Press. Spoke of the references in the report that asked for guidance from Conference about funding overseas and formation of WSM.

Browne (Standing Orders): Two motions had arisen out of this discussions at last conference. Views from the companion parties had been circulated. We do need someone to take this issue on board and produce a report.

Donnelly (Glasgow): This was an EC decision. We learn as we proceed.

Buick (West London): Himself and Cde Newell had been delegated to contact the Ukraine groups via email. They did not speak Ukrainian, hence anticipated slow progress.

A Floor Resolution (3) was then moved and seconded by Parker (Central Lndon) and Donnelly (Glasgow): “This Conference agrees with the principle of developing the World Socialist Movement by encouraging the formation of Companion Parties along the lines agreed by the EC meeting of March 3rd 2001.”

Parker (Central Lndon): These steps were the way forward. Let’s develop the WSM.

Browne (Standing Orders): Asked of Criteria on funding at the EC.

Bissett (Gen Sec): The Gambian comrades had used the money we had sent on the purchase of an office and computer. They were now skint, and the organisation was being funded by its two working members. Could we help them financially?
Vote on Floor resolution: For 17, Against 0.

32. At this stage it was agreed to take the Item for Discussion from Lancaster Branch: “Policy for sending money overseas.”

Shannon (Lancaster): Lancaster had asked the same questions as raised in the OCD circular. Quoted from the EC discussion on grants: that they go to recognised groups; that it be used for political activity only; that receipts be provided. This of course did not bind us to this idea as there would be exceptions.

Donnelly (Glasgow): The EC were doing the sensible thing here. We were not a bottomless money pit nor a charity. This should be left to the EC to decide.

Simpkins (Central Lndn): The Gambian comrades were in dire straits. We could send them a donation, if only £500.00.

Browne (Standing Orders): Presented a breakdown of the membership overseas: Tanzania (1), Swaziland (3), Botswana (1), South Africa (2), Namibia (2), Zambia (4), Zimbabwe (9), Nigeria (2), Uganda (11), Kenya (11), The Gambia (16), Pakistan (4), Sierra Leone (1).

A Floor Resolution (4) was then moved and seconded by Simpkins (South Lndn) and Vanni (Glasgow): “That a donation of £500.00 be sent to our comrades in The Gambia, in view of their present financial situation.”

Donnelly (Glasgow): Disagreed with the resolution. The EC had the background to the issue. Conference was unaware of the merits. This should be a ‘no’ vote. Leave this to the EC to decide.

Watkins (South Lndn): Agreed. This was an EC matter.

Simpkins (South Lndn): Would withdraw the resolution if he knew the EC would address the matter.

Bennet (Chair): Asked for suggestions for a change to the motion.

Resolution withdrawn.

33. Overseas Group Secretary Report

Buick (West Lndn): Raised the issue of sending typewriters to Africa. The report ask anyone interested in sending them to contact Cde Shannon. Would it not be easier to send the money?

Browne (Standing Orders): Second hand manual typewriters could be got for £5.00. It cost £40.00 to send them and about £70.00 to buy one Africa.

Patrick Anaele (non delegate from The Gambia): Typewriters, even second-hand ones, cost up to £100.00 in The Gambia. Manual ones were best because of the unreliable power supplies in Africa.
Donnelly (Glasgow): Asked if he had misunderstood report. Was this from the OGS or the OCD?
Browne (Standing Orders): Explained there was overlap with the departments.
Pitts (non-delegate): Cde Cox had initiated and still pursued the South African project.
Buick (West London): Queried the cost of sending typewriters to different parts of Africa.
Shannon (Lancaster): It was £60.00 to countries such as Kenya, and £4.00 to West Africa.
Vanni (Glasgow): Queried the pamphlet on religion that had been written by a comrade in Uganda.
Shannon (Lancaster): Several comrades, including himself, had read it and it seemed well enough written. Nothing we could disagree with.
Pitts (non-delegate): Explained the problem of syndicated letters as had been proposed by the OGS.
Bissett (Gen Sec): Referring to syndicated letters and to previous OCD experience, said that one letter in a Ugandan newspaper had brought 67 replies. We feared being snowed under with replies if we sent out hundreds to Africa’s press.

34. Item for Discussion from Lancaster Branch: “That we target Eastern Europe.”

Shannon (Lancaster): We had targeted Africa and now had communication with Kiev. The item speaks for itself. Why couldn’t we target countries such as the Ukraine in the first place? We have people in the party who could speak East European languages and who were knowledgeable on this area. The workers there were aware of state capitalism, had put their faith in western capitalism and been shafted by it.
Gluck (non-delegate): Eastern Europe was a massive area. Don’t get too exited because of communication from Kiev. Asked why we had targeted Africa in the first place and how this was done.
Bissett (Gen Sec): Explained that the targeting of Africa had been initiated by replies from Africa in response to articles we had had in new African magazine. Two article alone had brought in 50+ replies from right across Africa.
Gluck (non-delegate): We once did have good contacts in Eastern Europe. East European workers were antagonistic, religious and nationalistic. There was little trade union activity there and social issues were not discussed. There had been no protests at recent factory closures. There were, however, lots of Marxist economists there who could be sympathetic towards us. For the present it seemed the only way was to contact the English speaking countries.
Best (Lancaster): All communications with the groups in Kiev should be via the relevant committee. The Austrian situation had not been handled well.
Buick (West London): There was a distinction. Eastern Europe had been influenced by Russia. We would have thought that state capitalism’s collapse would have helped us win converts. Marxist ideas had rubbed off on some groups. Read extracts from material produced by Russian groups and suggested there were people there we could communicate with...
Donnelly (Glasgow): The Austrian issue head been handled perfectly well. Explained the relevant procedure. Bad rumours had given their side of the story credence.
Simpkins (South London): There were lots of young people who had had no experience of state capitalism. There was a growing disillusionment in Eastern Europe. Promises were not being kept. Many were now worse off. There were grounds for optimism. The nucleus of people would be on our wave length.

35. Motion 4 from West London Branch: "This Conference instructs that, in order for the party to be better informed of the views and activities of the Companion Parties, their minutes be circulated together with the EC minutes."

Bond (West Lndn): The motion speaks for itself. It would be a good idea to keep members updated as to the activities of our fellow members elsewhere in the world. We simply request that the minutes of the companion parties be circulated once a month with the EC minutes.
Shannon (Lancaster): Had for years felt cut off from wider activity within the movement. It was really only through being a member of a department that you got a wider picture of what was going on.
Vanni (Glasgow): It was a good idea, but had generated little interest in he past. Nobody had shown interest in the minutes of the companion parties. Nobody had read them. The companion parties had not even known of the split within the Party. Would it make any difference to the attitude of members?
Simpkins (South Lndn): Agreed with ideas expressed. A lot of members were certainly unaware of ongoing matters. If the relevant minutes were sent out they would be read.

36. Item for discussion from South London Branch: “The implications for socialism on the uneven development and the wide difference between the standard of living of workers in different regions of the world.

Simpkins (South Lndn): The accompanying circular spoke for itself. There were two points here. There was the umbrella view that 95% of the working classes lived in poverty. This was wrong. Here, only one-third lived in ‘poverty’. Globally, the issue was more complicated. In India, 250 million were doing okay. Read from leaflets showing overseas wage rates. Were we all in the same boat? No! 79% of kids had their own TVs, phones and other commodities. It was wrong to categorise the working class together. Our concept of free access needs challenging because of the strains this would have on resources and ecology. How would disparity be solved in socialism? We could not solve the needs and ecology problem together.
Headicar (non-delegate): decommissioning would take a long time. Immediacy would not be possible because of ecological needs.
Donnelly (Glasgow): Socialist society would have different values. People nowadays were gauged by consumption. Conspicuous consumption was the standard now. Ten per cent did
useful work and there was 90 per cent wastage. There would be no designer labels in socialism. In the US there was a 1% - 99% disparity. Poverty was still relative.

Buick (West Lndn): We have never said a magic wand would be waved. The first task would be to eradicate material poverty.

Lawrence (South Lndn): Cde Simpkins was justified in raising the issue. The Standard often produced glib articles in which practical problems were glossed over. These fostered ideas of unworkability. Socialism would be a developing society and we must stick to this approach.

Watkins (South Lndn): Cde Simpkins had spoken of workers in India and Clapham. It was wrong to make this comparison with Indian standards and wine bars in Clapham. Stress and depression was far more intense here and this was one of the biggest killers in the west. People here could not relax after work.

Bissett (Gen Sec): Surely people suffered stress and depression in poorer countries. What state of mind must you be in knowing you can only feed your children wet cardboard while you yourself rummage on a rubbish dump?

Lambert (non-delegate): We need to appreciate what we have and what we have to gain. We need to identify more with others. To be is more important.

Shannon (Lancaster): We don’t praise capitalism. This was a mistake. We should frighten people. We presented ‘revolution’ in a classical way. It scared people who worked hard for things. We should understand points of view of the working class. Yes, we were better off now. We didn’t want to take all of this away, but to improve upon it. We needed to put revolution in a positive way.

Parker (Central Lndn): Disagreed with a previous speaker. We say positive things about socialism. It was about ourselves – about how we relate with others; alienation! Not about upgrading material things.

Simpkins (South London): Winding up, said relationships were important, but let’s deal with material things first. 95% of the world lived in poverty? These were now on a higher material plane. We do not recognise any interim period. The top one fifth consumed 86% of resources. The bottom fifth consumed 1.3% of resources. We could not ecologically sustain the raising of the world’s people to the same level.

Conference adjourned for lunch at 1.15 pm.
Conference recommenced at 2.45 pm.

37 Publications Department Report

Shannon (Lancaster & Print Dept.): Referred to the Socialist Principles Explained pamphlet. The text had since been sorted and this was in a monochrome version. Presented a draft full colour version. Though attractive it would be costly to produce. It would not date and we could use it when needed. We could produce two versions – one to sell and the other to give away to enquirers. What did Conference want? Let’s not penny-pinching here. To hell with the expense.
Parker (Central Lndn): The Wm. Morris pamphlet had been well designed, but it had been a waste of money to have it in colour.

McLaughlan (Manchester): Queried the cost for the Socialist Principles Explained pamphlet.

Shannon (Lancaster): Perhaps an extra £200-300 for 2000 copies.

Begley (Print Dept): Confirmed price. Opposed the idea of a colourful pamphlet. Would there be a Human Nature pamphlet?

Bennet (Chair): When could we expect to see Socialist Principles Explained?

Shannon (Lancaster): Within the next few weeks.

Buick (West Lndn): His branch had arranged a meeting to promote the pamphlet and copies had not been received.

McLaughlan (Manchester): Asked of the two designs.

Shannon (Lancaster): Lightweight paper would cost less.

Lawrence (South Lndn): This was for the EC and the relevant committees to decide.

McLaughlan (Manchester): We need attractive leaflets, as distinctive as possible. We have to try and sell these.

Lambert (non delegate): Nothing wrong with colourful pamphlets if they were eye-catching.

Browne (Standing Orders): The Socialist Principles Explained had 16 pages. We should use colour on larger pamphlets.

Lambert (non delegate): Could we not incorporate two pamphlets together – the Human nature pamphlet?

A Floor Resolution (5) was then moved an seconded by Best (Lancaster) and McLaughlan (Manchester): “This Conference recommends that full cover colours be used on pamphlets wherever possible.”

Perrin (non-delegate): If we did have a better cover would this may enable us to get pamphlets into bookshops?

Browne (Standing Orders): Queried the plans for the Heather Ball collection of stories.

Parker (Central Lndn): One way or other there would be a full colour cover.

Vote on Floor Resolution: For 12, Against 2, 4 Abstaining.

38. Roll Call of branches in attendance
Enfield and Haringey (2), Central London (3), Birmingham (1), Glasgow (3), |West London (2), Edinburgh (1), North East (delegate had left at end of morning session), South London (2), Manchester (1), Swansea (1), Central Branch (1), Lancaster (2).

39. Motion 5 from South London Branch: "This Conference instructs the EC to call for nominations for a committee to consider further work on the question of the positive
proposals that the Party can put forward on the organisation of socialism, and report to ADM."

Delegates agreed that discussion on this motion be taken with item 28 of the Conference Agenda - Item for Discussion from Edinburgh Branch: "Setting up a Production Cttee. How can this best be achieved, ensuring maximum participation by interested comrades around the world, alongside effective operation and democratic control by the companion parties?"

Lawrence (South Lndn): Opening, said there was nothing much to add to the circular [presented as part of the Final Agenda for Conference]. Cde Simpkins item had been a good introduction. It was time we got together to prepare an updated discussion document. There had been similar reports in the past - 1982 and 1984 - but these were outdated and needed revising and updating as much had happened since then (i.e. the rise of information technology and its impact on democracy). This would be a discussion document only and anticipated different views from a wider membership.

Gardner (Edinburgh): In the past we had had a UK-centralist approach. The technology now existed to involve all of the companion parties. Feedback could come from around our global membership.

Best (Lancaster): We could draw in the views from people outside the party, from universities etc. We could have a website that encouraged a lot of public input.

Donnelly (Glasgow): This predicts what is going to happen in socialist society and smacks of utopianism. Maybe this could be settled via the WSM Forum. Was against an open forum. It would not be democratic. The contributors would prove troublesome and we could meet with sabotage. It was much better that a committee be set up.

Browne (Standing Orders Cttee): Wondered at the size of the committee. What timescale were we speaking off and what of parameters?

Perrin (non-delegate): We would need to look at technical matters, as we had done previously, or such things as social compliance and associated mechanisms.

Lawrence (South Lndn): In-Party communication via email now existed. Discussion could be restricted to Party members. The work would not 'predict'. We would not speculate. The work is about recognising that socialist society would have to deal with existing problems and practical proposals. A materialist method helps us present a more positive, practical case. It was not futuristic.

Gardner (Edinburgh): Agreed with previous speaker. This was not a leap into the abyss. The 'golden age' and rationing had already been discussed and showed the need for serious discussion. This could be an open discussion. As for timescale? This was not a one off exercise. Production for use was a massive task and needed careful thought.
40. **Research Department Report**

**Parker (Central Lndn & Research Dept.):** Had circulated a document on membership trends since 1904 and awaited feedback from party members.

41. **Socialist Standard Department Report**

**Donnelly (Glasgow):** Raised the ongoing issue of late delivery of Socialist Standards. Quoted from report and suggested that the publication date be brought forward one week. Other publications were printed with the following month’s date, in advance of that date. Why couldn’t we do likewise? Agreed the SSPC were overworked, but this did not stop us criticising what was happening.

42. **Collection Taken:** £80.84

43. **Item for Discussion from South London Branch:** “What is the role of the Socialist Standard and who reads it? And does it dictate the ‘Party case’ rather than debate issues and therefore give credence to the notion of the Party as a monolithic and dogmatic organisation?”

**Watkins (South Lndn):** Made it clear he was not criticising the Socialist Standard production team. Queried if the Party wanted to change the SS and asked who the SS was targeted at. The SS should be used to debate issues. Many criticisms of the Party still rang true. Other ‘left-wing’ publications were apparently more open than ourselves about themselves.

**Donnelly (Glasgow):** Objected to the language behind this - the SS was less democratic than other papers? We had few propaganda outlets. Disagreed with previous speaker. Was against minority opinions. The fault was not ours, but was located in the political maturity of the working class. We joined because of the ideas we represented.

**Flynn (Central Lndn):** Agreed with South London item. Other journals were far more democratic than ours and published criticism. The SS makes the Party appear monolithic. What is it we are propagating? Speaking as one member of varying opinion in the Party, the Standard never reflects the mixture of ideas in the Party. We should be more democratic with regards to change.

**Lawrence (South Lndn):** Socialist history was the history of the development of ideas. The SS presented us with a dilemma – could we express party views and other views? There was a dynamic element here in incorporating change.

**Best (Lancaster):** Was unsure of the purpose of the SS. It appeared to attempt to do too much. What attempt had been made to make it more democratic?

**Bennet (Chair):** The SS had published letters which had been critical of the Party.

**Vanni (Glasgow):** The discussion had not been helped by the lack of circulars on the issue from South London. They presented opinion as fact. Was critical of suggestions that the SS
was dogmatic and monolithic. It presented the Party case only. This criticism arose out of
the delay in progress, so we shouldn’t criticise the SS. Years ago the SS carried no colour
and no pictures, but we had a bigger membership and a higher circulation. This was a result
of the times. The political climate has changed now. There now was little interest and a lot
of confusion. The Standard could improve if we had better writers and fewer typographical
errors. Don’t change the SS.

McLaughlan (Manchester): The role of the SS changes with the political climate. It was
an addition to our propaganda. We did not introduce ourselves well to first time readers. We
aimed to do too much in one journal. It should be more educational. The SSPC had to please
the membership and express the main views. Look at past issues and how we addressed
them.

Gardner (Edinburgh): This was not just a fetish. Image mattered. We should include other
styles, other ideas. Didn’t we discuss colour in our pamphlets. The SS should include Party
news and a page of dissent. Let’s make it look like humans are behind it.

Shannon (Lancaster): There was a parallel – this and the way our case was presented by
Cde Simpkins. We come over as priest-politician-preachers. The working class was more
intelligent than we think and yet we still patronise them. There was a convergence here –
how we are and how we are perceived. We should communicate how we exist exactly.
Communication was important. How do we write? In a formulated way. Heather Ball had
broken the mould.

Headicar (non delegate): The primary aim of the SS was party propaganda. But let’s have
a page to lay bare our different views. This was a genuine issue. Dynamic issues needed
airing.

Lambert (non-delegate): leave the SS Editorial to do their job and encourage them to use
new ideas.

Buick (West London & SSPC): The Weekly Worker was democratic? We were far more
democratic. The Editorial Committee has no say in such matters. We reflect general Party
opinion. The Standard is our flag ship – what we are gauged by. The WSM forum was for
debate, but some contributions could be included in SS. Some articles we don’t like – such
as an abstract one on determinism. As for theory, we rather articles related to the real world.

Perrin (non-delegate): How liberal should we be? Some members had very unusual views.
One member believed the capitalist class did not exist. What remit should we have?

Watkins (South Ldn & SSPC): Typographical errors? Had experience of working on
magazines and sometimes, with 5 people proof-reading, mistakes got through. Applaud such
suggestions; don’t shoot them down in flames.
44. **Tapes Committee Report**
No report was presented and no discussion followed.

45. **Standing Orders Committee Report**
Debate followed as to how voting should proceed after Conference – should members vote through branch or would this be a postal vote. Rule 27 was quoted in the SO report. Branches would still have to hold a meeting as previously. How you vote had not changed. When you vote had changed.

46. **Amendment to Rule from South London Branch:** "Amend Rule 21 so that it reads: "A Conference of the Party be held annually in the Spring."

**Buick (West Lndn):** We should always have a fixed date for annual conference The amendment suggested this could be moveable.

**Hart (South Lndn):** The spirit of the wording was 'flexibility'. Booking long-term, in advance, might mean we have to cancel.

**Donnelly (Glasgow):** Friday and Saturday would have to be a holiday. The idea had no merit. Why couldn't we just have conference at head office?

**Best (Lancaster):** Bank holidays were difficult if kids were involved.

**Headicar (non-delegate):** The amendment does not tie us down.

**Browne (Standing Orders):** The Easter Conference had come about in 1904 because this was the only four day weekend.

**Shannon (Lancaster):** Queried why Conference had been held at Conway Hall.

**Bissett (Gen Sec):** Discussion at the EC table suggested that Conferences attracted bigger turn outs if they were not held at head office. It was the general opinion that members were less inclined to attend a Conference at head office.

47. **Ballot Committee Report**
No discussion followed.

48. **Motion 6 from West London Branch:** "That this Conference instructs that nominations for Party Officers and EC members who have not previously held office must be accompanied by a supporting statement. In cases where members have previously held office, this is optional."

**Amendment by South London Branch:** "Insert after 'statement': 'on a standardised form'."

**Bond (West Lndn):** The motion had arisen from the fact that there had been new faces on the EC in recent years and members had no knowledge of them or their abilities. A supporting statement got around this.
Hart (South Lndn): Speaking on the amendment, said it was simpler just to state all the information necessary and to keep it brief. Was uncomfortable with the second sentence.

Browne (Standing Orders): Was not comfortable with standardised forms.

49. Item for Discussion from West London Branch: “Should the rules be changed so that, if a vacancy arises on the EC after the first Saturday in September, the EC can appoint a member to fill the vacancy for the last three months of the year? If there is a vacancy earlier in the year and only one nomination has been received, should the EC be able to appoint that member, rather than putting the matter to a full Party Ballot?”

Bond (West Lndn): The branch felt the vacancy could be filled by a simple appointment. This did prevent votes against, but a ballot was time consuming and cost money.

Browne (Standing Orders): This would mean a slight change to Rule 12. Was not happy with the EC appointing people. Much preferred branch nominations.

Lawrence (South Lndn): Nominations should still come from branches or we end up with self-appointed ECs.

50. Central Branch Secretary Report

Mostyn (CB Sec): There was little to report. Mail-outs were dealt with by the Head Office Organiser, as were notification/collection of dues.

51. Adoption of the EC and Party Officer Report to Conference 2001

Vanni (Glasgow) and Donnelly (Glasgow): “That the report be adopted.” Agreed.

John Bissett (General Secretary) 2/5/01

Results of votes on Conference items as presented to the EC on 9th June 2001

- Item 1: MOTION from North East Branch:
  "That Non Violent Direct Action is an acceptable form of Party Propaganda."

  Vote 1: FOR 44  AGAINST 82  Not carried.

- Item 2: MOTION from Edinburgh Branch:
  "That conference resolves to accept the principle that the Party should establish a 'front party' registered as a major party - solely for the purpose of electoral activity - within the UK."

  Vote 2: FOR 30  AGAINST 96  Not carried.