

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Report of the Proceedings of the 88th Autumn Delegate Meeting held at
Head Office, London, on 10 and 11 October 1992

Saturday Morning

Comrade H. Vallar was elected to chair the meeting.

Swansea Branch sent a letter saying they were unlikely to be represented and sending best wishes. South East London Branch wrote saying that, as a branch formed in the last month, they felt it best not be represented. (In addition, South East Manchester and West Yorkshire branches were not represented).

1. The current position of the Belfast Document and the circular from SW London Branch members on the Socialist Party and the 21st century (Glasgow).

Glasgow explained that they had put this on the agenda to allow members to air their views prior to the special Party Meeting in January. Most delegates felt that there was no point in discussing the matter now.

E. Coffey (non-delegate): the reply to the Belfast document circulated by some members of SW London Branch had in fact been supported by a group of members of Central as well as of SW London branch, who were concerned about the implications of some of the proposals in the document; they felt they conflicted with the Declaration of Principles.

G. Wood (Central) was for maximum discussion, but also felt that some of the Belfast proposals contradicted the D of P.

W. Buchanan (non-delegate) emphasised that the reply had not been issued by South West London Branch but by a group of members.

S. Coleman (EC Member): the EC had condemned the reply, not for its content, but for the tone of part of it which had suggested that the Belfast comrades should reconsider their membership of the Party. Attacking the socialist credentials of members with different ideas had, unfortunately, been a tradition in the Party; the EC wanted to stop the debate taking place on this unhealthy basis this time.

R. Cook (Birmingham), as a member of the subcommittee set up to organise the meeting arising from the Belfast document, said that the special Party Meeting on the subject would probably take place on 9/10 January in Birmingham. The proposals in the Belfast document had been more or less dropped and the theme would be the general one of how can we best grow. Delegates should go back to their branches and come back in January with their ideas on this.

2. Why are EC Members not allowed to be branch delegates at Conference and ADM? (West London).

Those in favour of EC members being allowed to be delegates, at least on some issues, argued that most of the discussion at Conference and ADM was nowadays not about the past work of the EC, but about future plans, current events and points of theory. So why should EC members be discriminated against, especially as members of EC subcommittees whose work was also under review were not barred from being delegates?

Those in favour of the status quo argued that EC members couldn't be members of the jury when their own actions were under consideration; the present rule also prevented discussion at Conference and ADM being dominated by the same people and allowed more members to participate.

3. How can we make Conference less administrative and more political?
(West London)

O. Bond (West London): the branch felt that Conference should spend more time discussing current political, social and economic events as opposed to our internal affairs; these had to be dealt with of course but could they not be confined to a single day?

C. Slapper (Camden): his branch basically agreed. A few years ago Conference had passed a resolution calling for Conference procedure to be restructured including discussion of an annual political report from the EC, but nothing had been done.

4. Wouldn't it be more sensible to take the votes on Conference Resolutions after Conference discussions rather than before? (Islington)

C. Duffton (Islington), opening, argued that the present system did not make sense as the result had already been decided by votes in the branches before the discussion, which meant that the discussion couldn't influence the outcome. So it was more logical to have the discussion first, at Conference, and then for branches to vote on it after their delegates reported back.

C. Slapper (Camden): an alternative way round this problem had been suggested at his branch: that delegates should give in their mandated votes to the Standing Orders Committee at the beginning of Conference; these would then be quickly totalled up and made available, so that the discussion on the item at Conference could be about the implications of the vote.

R. Cook (Birmingham) and H. McLaughlin (Bolton) both argued that ADM and Conference should run in tandem: branches intending to put a resolution down at Conference should put it as an item for discussion at ADM (maybe this should be obligatory), so that discussion could take place before the vote at Conference.

5. Head Office maintenance and the need for a premises fund (Islington)

F. Morgan (Islington), opening, said that various repairs were needed to Head Office on a regular basis and suggested a special fund similar to that for the print machinery.

D. Deutz (Acting Treasurer) said we didn't really need a fund, only a provision for spending from the general fund on the repair and maintenance of Head Office.

Other delegates were in favour of the premises committee having an annual budget.

The EC had asked branches for their views on various designs for a Party logo which had been submitted for adoption in line with a Conference resolution passed in 1984 and included in the EC Report to ADM; in the meantime Lancaster Branch had submitted a further design.

In the discussion, preferences were expressed for only two of the designs, the Lancaster one and the first (on top left) on the back of the EC Report to ADM. The delegates also discussed how a final decision should be made. Some felt it should go to a Conference vote; others felt that a committee of members with some knowledge of design should decide.

A. Kerr (SW London) and F. Simpkins (SW London) moved a floor resolution "that this Delegate Meeting approves of the Lancaster branch's suggested Logo, to be used with the Party name". This was lost 5-14.

Saturday Afternoon

6. The need to plan for a major socialist campaign in the 1994 European elections (Camden).

7. For the publicity, including Party Political Broadcasts, which we would gain, should we aim to contest 50 seats at the next general election? (West London).

8. Is it not time for the Party to consider possible alternatives to contesting elections? (Islington).

C. Slapper, opening on Item 6, said that when we contested the last European elections, in the North East, our candidate got nearly a 1000 votes, we got local TV and radio coverage, and had some 70,000 leaflets distributed free by the Post Office. Admittedly, the follow-up had been somewhat poor. European elections had the advantage of being very much larger (about 7 or 8 times) than Westminster constituencies which meant that our name on the ballot paper would be seen by many more voters. Also, the issues were not so parochial.

D. Bond, opening on Item 7, said that the branch had not taken up a position either for or against contesting 50 seats but, in view of the potential advantages, wanted it discussed. Contesting 50 seats would give us our first Party Political Broadcast, really put us on the political map and bring us thousands of enquiries.

K. Mohideen (EC Member) was given permission to open up on Item 8 on behalf of Islington Branch. She said we should consider whether our emphasis on contesting elections now was not to the detriment of our other potential political activity. In putting up candidates we were jumping ahead of what people wanted; we represented nothing but ourselves as we were not responding to any popular demand from the community to contest; this made us appear to be no different from Tory and Labour politicians: as outsiders seeking votes. What we should be doing is building up our credibility in the local community; Head Office, for instance, could become a centre for people living locally, providing facilities for educational activities, literacy classes, historical discussions, a cafe and the like.

N. Snell (Lancaster): European elections might be better for us than Westminster elections as in them, as was shown with the Greens last time, people were more prepared to vote for what they believed in than to vote tactically.

K. Beveridge (Camden): the branch had had a good response from its campaign in the General Election in April; the Party was now known locally and people knew that the Labour Party had nothing to do with Socialism. In European elections we can reach many more and, if we contested, one seat in London, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham and Lancaster, we would not only reach many more workers but this would be good practice for the next General Election.

C. McEwan (Glasgow) wanted to pour cold water on the idea of contesting 50 seats. It was completely unrealistic and, anyway, the results at the present time made us look ridiculous.

J. Bradley (Enfield & Haringey): what Islington seemed to be proposing was on the right lines; there were thousands of people out there who were concerned about real problems but still found our approach too remote and abstract; we should be prepared to listen to what they think about how to get a better world; our theoretical understanding should lead us to realise that this was how the movement for socialism would grow: by people organising to deal with the problems they faced.

S. Dowsett (Islington): it couldn't be denied that at election times workers were more interested in discussing political, economic and social matters; so we should be there, ideally with a candidate. Contesting elections also allowed us to concentrate socialist activity on a particular target. What was the alternative? In practice doing

nothing. Getting involved in the local community and opening a coffee shop was not a real alternative; we must remember that we were a revolutionary not a reformist party and had to avoid getting too much involved in day-to-day problems.

P. Hart (SW London): her branch was for contesting the European elections, but against the 50-seat idea which just wasn't realistic. The argument that we shouldn't contest elections till the consciousness was there would mean that we would never get off the ground; we had to start somewhere even before there was even a small minority of socialists.

S. Coleman (EC Member) agreed that we shouldn't sit around waiting for the working class to ask us to do something; we had to take the initiative ourselves and put up candidates.

A. Buick (EC Member) challenged the view that putting up 50 candidates was unrealistic. We could raise the money. £4000 had been raised in less than a year to contest a seat in the last General Election and we have 4 or 5 years to raise the £25000 needed for the deposits. This would be worth paying for the publicity, including a party political broadcast.

C. Begley (Camden): was 100 percent in favour of putting up 50 candidates. This would be good for Party morale and would also allow us to get across our urgent case to many more workers that socialism was the only way out of the present capitalist mess.

P. Bennett (Manchester): putting up 50 candidates would be a waste of money; we might as well write out a cheque for £25000 direct to the capitalist state. As to alternatives, they weren't really alternatives as they were activities we could engage in between and alongside elections. He felt European constituencies were too large to contest in the proper sense of the term.

R. Headicar (Islington): the real issue was not whether we should contest 2 seats or 50 seats but whether we had the political conviction that it was right to contest elections. This was the issue we should settle first.

F. Simpkins (SW London): it was unthinkable that as a political party we should not contest elections. If members were saying that the way to socialism wasn't through parliament and capturing political power, that was fair enough. They were free to do so and he was quite prepared to discuss any alternative to the parliamentary road they might come up with.

I. Corry (Central): had participated in many election campaigns in the past, but still felt that the time was not yet ripe to contest.

C. McEwan (Glasgow): he was not against contesting elections at some stage, but not now. He didn't agree with Comrade Mohideen's alternative: it was not our job to try to compete with the Sally Army.

P. Deutz (East London) agreed with those who said that it was premature to contest elections now. We needed more support amongst the local working class before putting up candidates.

K. Beveridge (Camden), winding up, said that the free postal delivery was worth the cost of the deposit, and what was important was not the number of votes obtained but our success in getting over our case.

K. Mohideen (EC Member), winding up, said the basis of our case was that to change society workers had to organise themselves, not necessarily exclusively in the Socialist Party but on the same non-hierarchical, democratic basis as us. So encouraging this was just as much a part of our task as putting over socialist ideas. Parliament was not the only form of democracy nor voting the only expression of it. Demonstrations were also expressions of democracy as they provided a chance for people to express their views on particular issues, and we could take part in some of them as she had done over the Gulf War. We lost credibility not by not contesting elections but by not being supportive of workers organising themselves democratically.

9. Is there a need for a preamble, e.g. "This Object and Declaration of Principles were formulated by our founder members in 1904" to appear with the Object and D of P? (West London)

O. Bond (West London): one of our political assets was that we had been going since 1904 but we rarely made use of this. If we mentioned this with the D of P this would help explain to some who might not otherwise realise the reason for the somewhat dated language of parts of the D of P.

C. Duffon (Islington): a majority of his branch were not in favour of the D of P appearing on all our literature, but if it did it should be accompanied by some sort of statement explaining that it was our founding statement.

N. Snell (Lancaster): her branch was in favour of the D of P being totally updated rather than being preceded by a preamble. It didn't mention key issues like our attitude to war, abolishing money, etc. At the least, there should be some accompanying statement to the D of P which brought out these other aspects of our case.

L. Humphreys (Birmingham): his branch was not worried one way or the other. He had never met anyone who had been put off by the D of P's language.

S. Coleman (EC Member) had no problem with the wording of the D of P; he was more concerned about avoiding a religious attitude towards it.

C. Pegley (Camden) was in favour of having a summary of our case, such as had appeared on the back of "World Socialism", alongside the D of P.

G. Wood (Central) agreed we shouldn't have a religious attitude to the D of P. Its importance lay in demonstrating the consistency of the Party's case over the years.

M. Judd (Central): the Declaration of Principles was a piece of fine, excellent, rhetoric, which was what it was intended to be. There was nothing wrong with that: rhetoric had a useful role to play.

G. Thomas (EC Member) had no objection to the D of P being accompanied by some other statement, but would prefer a "post-amble" to a preamble.

P. Lawrence (SW London) was against a preamble. If the problem was that the language was archaic, the solution was to re-write it in modern language. What was of paramount importance was that there should be no barrier to understanding our principles. In their present form there were inaccuracies . . .

H. Vallar (chair) ruled that Comrade Lawrence was straying from the item for discussion, which was not the D of P as such, but whether or not it should have a preamble.

A vote of direction "that the chair allow Comrade Lawrence to continue" was carried 11-0.

P. Lawrence continued that the term "master class" did not come from 1804 let alone 1904 as it referred to the old guild-masters; to talk of some "order of social evolution" as if it was predetermined was nonsense; "aristocratic privilege" no longer existed as it had become capitalist privilege. So why want to retain these references?

C. McEwan (Glasgow): of course aristocratic privilege still existed. What about the Duke of Westminster and the royals?

A. Kerr (SW London): "order of social evolution" was OK, since there was one.

P. Hart (SW London): members didn't join just on the basis of the D of P, but on the basis of other principles too.

L. Humphries (Birmingham): Clause 1 defined the "master class" as the "capitalist class", so what was the problem?

L. Cox (EC Member): it was wrong to nit-pick about some 19th century archaic words. There was no need to change the D of P. All that was needed was to explain whenever it was published when it was drawn up.

P. Bennett (Manchester): it was the complicated sentence structure and not just the language that made the D of P difficult.

10. The rise of neo-fascism in Europe (West London)

D. Bond (West London): in Germany neo-nazis had attacked refugees and immigrant hostels while in France Le Pen's National Front had become the most successful far right party in Europe since the war. In Britain the NF and the BNP were still fringe groups, though 2 BNP candidates got over a 1000 votes each in the East End of London at the last election. Would their support grow with the slump? Was there in fact a direct link between slump economic conditions and the success of far-right groups? He thought this too simplistic an explanation; political factors were involved too. The last time they expanded was under a Labour government at the end of the 70s but in the 80s they fragmented and declined. The reason was because the Tories under Thatcher stole their clothes. While it was true that the BNP was marginal today, it was an illusion that Britain was less racist than France or Germany. The reason for the low level of support for the BNP was probably that racism in Britain was more institutionalised than in the other countries. There have been ferocious attacks on immigrants in the East End of London, and also in other towns, just as bad as on the hostels in Germany, but this has not been publicised on the television. The potential for the growth of the far right was there, with an ineffectual Tory government and a feeble Labour opposition. So what to do about it? In Britain there were at least two "anti-fascist fronts", the ANL and the ARA, which were bitterly opposed to each other. Our attitude to them was that, although they might be opposed to fascism, they were not opposing the society that gave rise to it. We were the real anti-fascists, able to explain why capitalism is going through a slump and how it causes the problems the fascists try to exploit.

S. Dowsett (Islington): the events in Germany had a lot to do with the re-unification of Germany which had a great significance for fascists. But what can we do? Obviously, run meetings saying that we are the real anti-fascists and that if you want to get rid of racism you should go for socialism. Equally obviously, if at the same time people are having petrol bombs thrown at their homes, we can't simply say "wait for the revolution"; we had to show some understanding of their plight and their need to something about it.

K. Beveridge (Camden): he had worked in Germany and could confirm that, at least in the part of Bavaria he was, nostalgia for Nazism had never died.

F. Simpkins (SW London): Nazism may have only been dormant in Germany but it was still disturbing to see young workers attacking immigrants cheered on by middle-aged workers. This showed that behaviour was not just rational; there was an anti-rational psyche amongst sections of our class. Events also showed that in times of crises, even the moderate Right becomes more extreme appealing, as Major had just done at the Tory Party Conference, to primitive nationalism. This irrationality was not just a passing phenomenon but was clearly pretty deeply-rooted in modern capitalism.

S. Coleman (EC Member): Comrade Simpkins had identified a very worrying trend in modern capitalism. The German capitalist class had wanted to use Hitler to impose their authority on the working class and then get rid of him, but they found that the working class wanted to go further. As in Northern Ireland, they lit the match but the working class kept the fire going. We must analyse the psychological attraction of authoritarian politics and for this we needed to read not just Marx and Engels but also Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich. The problem was not just capitalism but workers who wanted capitalism.

C. Begley (Camden): we should say to workers being harrassed by racist thugs that they should organise to protect themselves. He would even be prepared to go so far, if he met a BNP seller outside a tube station, to ask if he repudiated racist attacks and if he didn't to try to prevent

him selling.

R. Cook (Birmingham): we should not forget that some workers are anti-racist; we should aim to reach them.

L. Humphreys (Birmingham): racism was caused by fear and ignorance, exacerbated by capitalism.

A. Buick (EC Member) agreed with Comrade Cook. We were in danger of talking ourselves into a position where we regarded all workers as psychologically twisted, whereas in fact he would say most workers were anti-racist. We should be approaching them and trying to prevent them being manipulated by the various Leninist vanguards behind the so-called "anti-fascist fronts". There was, however, one part of our traditional position that might need changing and that was our willingness to debate with far-right organisations. This was impractical anyway since any such meeting would be broken up by the "anti-fascist" vanguards.

A. Kerr (SW London): there was no point in beating up racists and fascists; we had to try to debate with them rationally and democratically.

A. Easton (Camden) agreed that the SWP was trying to exploit anti-racism to gain a following and also that there was no point in us debating fascists. However, he disagreed with Comrade Begley about trying to stop fascist lit sellers if they refused to condemn racist attacks. We didn't have to offer to physically help the victims of such attacks, but at least had to express some recognition of what they were doing if they used violence back.

K. Mohideen (EC Member): it had to be central to our position on this question that we express solidarity with workers on the receiving end of racist attacks. And as individuals this should be more than verbal: if a neighbour was being attacked we should be there to help them; you had to make your position absolutely clear.

O. Bond (West London), winding up, said that there undoubtedly was a psychology of fascism but this wasn't the only factor; social and economic factors were also involved. He had strong reservations about Comrade Begley's idea of stopping some people from selling. Our position was that we don't break up or picket fascist meetings. But this did not mean that we said to workers under racist attack that they shouldn't resist nor that we refused to express our solidarity with them. The way to eradicate racism and fascism was not to prevent them expressing their ideas, but through the establishment of socialism which would eradicate their cause, capitalism.

Sunday Morning

H. Vallar (chair) asked the World Economic Crisis Committee to give an interim report.

I. Lawler, of the Committee, said that not just Britain and the US, but the whole of the industrialised world was in a slump. The Committee had started its work and hoped to have something out by the new year. One member was working on the big slump of the 1880s, another on that of the 1930s and a third on the present slump. A number of members and sympathisers had sent in material for which the Committee was grateful. We should be aware that what had happened in Los Angeles was going to happen here too. Riots in Manchester, Birmingham and London were real possibilities as the slump led to the expansion of an urban under-class. There were no signs of economic recovery and governments had no idea what to do. Keynesian theories were dead, even if they had not yet been buried. What we had to do was to use Marxian economics to explain satisfactorily what was going on.

R. Cook (Birmingham): the Party hadn't yet got a theory of crisis. All we had was the outline developed by Hardy in the 50s and 60s; this was OK as far as it went but wasn't really adequate as it only spoke of

disproportionality and anarchy of production which were permanent features of capitalism and so couldn't explain non-permanent features such as slumps; changes in the rate of profit and what caused them had to be brought into the analysis; this had yet to be done.

P. Simpson, also of the Committee, said that a world recession was in existence and a global stock market crash was a possibility, yet some members thought that the present slump was simply a case of history repeating itself: that there would soon be a recovery. The evidence was against this: things were getting worse every day; events were developing towards a climax. The daily catalogue of financial fraud, currency instability and the like pointed towards the coming breakdown of the world economic system.

P. Lawrence (SW London): we must not ignore that we had to explain how a socialist society would deal with the problem of disproportionality, of how it could keep production, distribution and consumption in reasonable balance on a world scale.

C. McEwan (Glasgow): how could disproportionality occur in socialism since it wouldn't be an exchange system?

P. Lawrence: of course more, or less, of what was needed might be produced in socialism; the point was that this wouldn't have the devastating effects it does under capitalism, but it was still something we would seek to avoid.

A. Kerr (SW London): anarchy existed not inside the workshop, but outside in the marketplace; to avoid this there had to be some central planning.

P. Bennett (Manchester): there were a group of opponents in Manchester who were saying that the only way capitalism could get out of a world slump was by a world war and that this would be the case this time as in the past. Would the committee be dealing with this view? He thought the answer was that a war was one possible way-out of a world slump, but not the only one, in fact not even a common one.

S. Coleman (EC Member): we should be thinking in terms of using the material in the coming report as material for a pamphlet, to be issued in the nearest future and which should also include material along the lines Comrade Lawrence had suggested. Perhaps because it had been in existence for so long, the Party had a tradition of saying everything goes in a cycle. While this might be true, the phases of this cycle could last a long time as was happening now, when things were clearly going to get worse before they got better. He thought that it could well turn out that welfare state capitalism was an aberration that lasted for 40 or 50 years and that the real capitalism was the 19th century variety, to which we seemed to be returning.

I. Lawler, winding up, said the Committee would take on Comrade Lawrence's point and invited him to submit something on it.

P. Lawrence agreed to do this.

11. The Third World and its implications for the Socialist Movement (SW London)

P. Lawrence (SW London) read a statement written by Comrade Simpkins who was unable to be present: "Third World" was not a satisfactory term, but there was a clear gap between the developed and the undeveloped world. The whole world came within the ambit of capitalism even if all parts were not fully capitalist. The income per head gap between those at the top and those at the bottom was widening; also within those at the bottom the gap between the rich and the poor was widening. What were the implications of all this for socialism? Some members have said that "by the time" we get socialism capitalism will have solved the problem of underdevelopment. But, as a revolutionary party, we couldn't accept this sort of argument: our case was that socialism should be established now, in all parts of the world, so we had to say how socialism would tackle

this problem. His answer was that we would have to envisage some sort of "lower stage of socialism" in which full free access would not be possible.

H. Vallar (chair) read a written contribution from J. Bissett (Central): Is the term the "Third World" still relevant in the light of recent international developments? Considering the term was first used by French intellectuals in the early 50s to mean non-aligned countries (the capitalist West being the First World and the Soviet bloc being the Second World), by what criterion can the term still be used now that the "cold war" has ended?

R. Headicar (Islington): his branch too felt that the term "Third World" was inadequate and that we should stop using it. As to the "by the time" argument, it was valid in the sense that we couldn't establish socialism tomorrow since the necessary world socialist consciousness didn't exist, so we could talk in terms of "by the time" majority socialist consciousness develops.

R. Cook (Birmingham) could accept in general Comrade Simpkins' point, but didn't like at all the term "lower stage of socialism" which echoed too closely the language of the Bolsheviks. We should speak rather of a progression, starting with clearing up the mess left by capitalism.

P. Deutz (East London): the solutions to the problem of undevelopment were already known; they were prevented from being implemented by the money factor. In any event, we socialists in Britain didn't have to work out now how to solve the problems of all parts of the world; the people of the other parts could work this out for themselves.

S. Easton (Camden): "free access" should be understood as a relationship not as an activity; people could only take freely from what was available and could still do so even if they might not be able to take all they might want; it was not incompatible with the notion of self-restraint. He thought that the underdevelopment of parts of the world was due to the past existence of Empires and, now that these had gone, saw no reason why capitalism might not be able to rectify this anomaly.

A. Kerr (SW London): the underdeveloped countries were so not because the people there were biologically inferior to Europeans, as the racists claim, but because they had less means of production at their disposal.

N. Snell (Lancaster): the basic problems of the people in these countries were quite different from ours. She was on social security but she still had access to food, clothing and shelter; many of the people in these countries didn't even have these needs met. This was partly due to a lack of economic development, but political factors were also involved, as even some of the charities recognised. In order to repay their debts, land that could be used to feed people had to be used to grow cash crops for export, and the existence of large private landowners also prevented land from being used to grow food to feed local people. Also, many of these countries were dictatorships which hampered people fighting back in the way they could in this country; it also hampered them organising for socialism. We should recognise that it was in our interest to help them in this; that was why she was still in Amnesty International which was doing a good job here.

G. Thomas (EC Member) suspected that behind arguments such as Comrade Simpkins' there was a "closet Malthusianism", the view that the problem arose because there were too many people in the world to be fed. Personally, on the basis of the statistics he had seen, he had no doubt that the world could produce enough for everyone; in fact it already did. The problem was not how to produce enough, but that the market system prevented it being distributed, even destroying what had been produced and paying farmers not to grow food. We could stop world hunger the day Socialism was established.

E. Goodman (West London): we should not forget that we cannot achieve real democracy under capitalism and should not be diverted from working

for world-wide socialism.

K. Mohideen (EC Member): the Lancaster delegate was right. We should be involved in organisations that were trying to help workers in these parts of the world fight back.

C. Slapper (Camden) disagreed that feeding the world was just a problem of distribution. Certainly capitalism prevented what was produced being properly distributed, but it also involved a massive under-production. This meant that socialism would have to increase production as well as distribute food rationally. He too had seen the figures for world grain production, but it should not be overlooked that much of this was to feed animals and was not suitable for human consumption.

C. McEwan (Glasgow): some members seemed to have a thing about democracy. We should not forget that even here so-called democracy was not all that it was supposed to be; we've got enough problems with it here than to get involved with its inadequacies in other countries too.

S. Coleman (EC Member): democracy under capitalism wasn't perfect, but it was better than dictatorship and workers were right to struggle against dictatorship; we couldn't, and didn't say, that it was a matter of indifference to workers whether they lived in a democracy or a dictatorship. If anyone believed that, they should tell it to the hundreds of thousands of workers released from the gulags when the Bolshevik dictatorship collapsed. We were on the side of workers everywhere struggling for democracy even under capitalism.

P. Lawrence (SW London), winding up, said that Comrade Simpkins had been trying to get the Party to take up a more realistic attitude on this matter. Capitalism was not going to solve the problem of underdevelopment; socialism would inherit it. Nor did capitalism produce enough for human needs. The fruit that was destroyed under capitalism every year was only very marginal, both to total production under capitalism and even more to what would be needed in socialism; it could not solve the hunger problem.

12. The Party is often on record as saying that the capitalist class consists of 10% of the population, elsewhere we say 2%. What is the correct figure? (Camden)

S. Parker (Camden): we used to say, and we sometimes still do, as in our current pamphlet "From Capitalism to Socialism", that the capitalist class make up 10 per cent of the population. But if we stick to the definition of a capitalist as someone possessing sufficient wealth so as to be able to live off the unearned income without having to go out to work, then this figure was clearly wrong. If we took £200,000 as the lower limit to be able to live off the income from your capital, then the figure for the capitalist class would be about 1.5 per cent rather than 10 per cent.

A. Buick (EC Member): to get into the top 10 per cent of wealth-holders in Britain you need to own £80,000 or more which was peanuts by capitalist standards. This was a measure of how relatively poor most people were, but to reach this figure you would only need to have finished paying for your house in the SE of England, which 10 per cent of the people at this meeting had perhaps done.

Other delegates accepted that 10 per cent was far too high a figure for the capitalist class.

C. Slapper (Camden), winding up, assumed it could now be taken that the figure for the capitalist class was about 2 per cent and that this should be incorporated into our arguments.

13. The Socialist Party's attitude to the feminist movement (Glasgow)

D. Trainer (Glasgow): the branch had put this item down since a recent circular from East London Branch had drawn attention to a resolution passed by Conference in 1974 "that membership of Women's Liberation

Organisations is incompatible with membership of the Party". When this matter was discussed in Glasgow Branch three main points were made: (1) That we do not make a special case for any particular section of the working class; we were a class-based party with a class view of society and so should avoid the danger of appealing to sectional interests; (2) the Party's position on this was not consistent, and was even contradictory, since we said that it was OK for sections of workers to organise in trade unions to get better conditions, which we did not regard as reformist, whereas it was apparently not in order for women workers to do so; (3) the 1974 Resolution will have to be changed, to distinguish between those women's organisations which had reformist, political aims and those which could be assimilated to trade unions and membership of which was not incompatible with Party membership.

S. Dowsett (Islington): had always felt that there was a contradiction between saying that trade union action wasn't reformist whereas similar activities engaged in by a whole plethora of other organisations were. His branch saw the Socialist Party as a "women's liberation organisation"; we're in the business of emancipation, including that of women; that was why we were opposed to sexism. The 1974 Resolution had to be looked at again. We also had to be clear what we meant by "feminism", which was often used in a derogatory way by some members. Of course you can always debate what words mean but he had always thought that it was OK to say you were a socialist and a feminist. Those who rejected this were in danger of getting out of step with people's attitudes on these issues.

C. Pinel (Manchester): our main objection to anti-sexist and to anti-racist organisations was that they didn't work; that they don't, and can't, achieve their objectives within capitalism.

K. Beveridge (Camden) could not see how men could tell women not to be feminists; it was quite understandable that women should complain about their treatment. Some feminist organisations were reformist. His branch had had a debate with one called "Wages for Housework"; all they were concerned about was getting more money from the government; they couldn't understand what we were on about when we advocated the abolition of the wages system.

S. Coleman (EC Member): any woman who is a socialist and not a feminist was stupid, but if they really wanted to be relegated to making the tea we couldn't do much about it. And what if a women Party member was not being paid equal pay for doing equal work, would we say that she shouldn't organise to put this right? And what about women who wanted to organise to defend themselves against the danger of attacks and rape, would we say they shouldn't? Since the 1974 Resolution implied in both cases that they shouldn't it should be repealed at the next Conference. The Report on Women's Liberation which had preceded it was even worse and could only have been written by men. Self-defence groups, consciousness-raising groups to discuss the family, groups to get equal pay for equal work, these were OK. What was reformist was not self-organisation but organising to appeal to governments to do something for you.

E. Goodman (West London): one of the things wrong with the 1974 Resolution was that it was too wide. There was a difference between the official Party attitude and what members do individually to try to protect their interests; these were two different things. She supported the Samaritans, a Mental Health group and Cancer Research, but didn't ask the Party to do this. The 1974 Resolution was nonsense because it was telling individuals not to act to protect themselves. The Party itself couldn't support women's self-help organisations, but it couldn't tell women not to be active in them.

C. McEwan (Glasgow): despite what Comrade Mohideen had claimed in a circular he had never known any discrimination against women in the

Party. How could there be as Clause 4 of our Declaration of Principles, which spoke of "the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex", committed us to the principle of equality between the sexes? But it should not be thought that the women's movement was concerned exclusively with equal pay and consciousness-raising; there were also characters like Germaine Greer who preached hatred of men.

R. Simpson (SW London) said the Party's attitude to feminism was stated in our pamphlet "Women and Socialism" and proceeded to quote from page 25 about our attitude to "liberal feminism" which was criticised as reformist.

P. Bennett (Manchester): Comrade Simpson had misunderstood the passage, which was a criticism not of feminism in general but only of "liberal" feminism which was openly reformist; there were various other types of feminism, eg "radical feminism" and so-called "socialist feminism" whose shortcomings were also dealt with in the pamphlet.

S. Easton (Camden): it was fair comment to quote Germaine Greer since the aims and views of certain feminists were obnoxious and had to be opposed by socialists. But we couldn't be opposed to women, the disabled, etc organising themselves to try to improve their conditions within capitalism. Feminism should not be seen as an aberration. Members had sometimes failed to realise that women workers do have some different problems from men; in making us aware of this the feminist movement had done us a favour.

E. Coffey (non-delegate): comparisons had been made between some women's groups and trade unions, but members should not have a rosy picture of what socialists could do in trade unions. From his own experience he could say that they were more interested in what you could do for them than in helping socialism. He wasn't sure that expressions of sympathy for any group of workers helped either them or us.

14. The attitude of socialists towards homosexuality (Camden)

C. Slapper (Camden): there were two aspects to this question. (1) What were the origins of a person's sexual orientation: did they arise from nature (biological determinism) or nurture (from society or culture)? Our view, he felt, would be to be extremely sceptical of biological determinism, even if this was favoured by some gay groups as securing their position. He felt that as Socialists suspicious of all "human nature" type arguments we would be much more inclined to accept the nurture argument. But in the end it didn't matter because neither explanation would make any difference to the socialist answer to the second point: (2) how do we respond to homosexuality? The capitalist State had for a long time said "no" to homosexual behaviour and had made it illegal; even now it was still illegal for young men of 19 and 20. Why did capitalism do this? Because it wanted to defend the morality of the nuclear family. As Socialists we had to oppose this state-imposed morality and its consequences, discrimination against homosexuals. The branch would like to be sure this was appreciated by all members.

I. Lawler (SW London) said he hesitated to challenge the spokesman of the "do-it-yourself" school of psychiatry in the Party, but what had this issue to do with the Party? Discussing it was a waste of time.

S. Coleman (EC Member) asked Comrade Lawler if, in his capacity as a practitioner of the "do-it-to-others" school of psychiatry, he would give the official psychiatrist's definition of homosexuality.

I. Lawler: it was defined not as a disease but as a "perversion", as falling into the category of sexual behaviour that did not lead to normal sexual intercourse. (Laughter).

R. Headicar (Islington) didn't know what sexual behaviour was natural and what was not; all he knew that as caring human beings we should welcome anybody into the party whatever their sex or sexual orientation.

E. Goodman (West London): she hadn't thought about it before, but she

could see the point about capitalists preferring the nuclear family. She could confirm that in the firm she used to work for there was a deliberate policy of only employing men who were married with children. Clearly, it was thought they would be more docile.

R. Cook (Birmingham): Comrade Lawler had demonstrated how right we are to be critical of "experts". Many of the attitudes of people to homosexuals were non-rational; persecution of homosexuals was going on and, together with that of other minorities, could grow as the slump got worse and people looked around for scapegoats. We had got to take a stand against any oppression of any minority.

S. Easton (Camden): the case for saying that homosexuality was biologically determined could not be dismissed out of hand in the way Comrade Slapper had done, but he agreed that, even if this was proved to be so, this wouldn't alter the attitude socialists should take.

P. Hart (SW London) emphasised that Comrade Lawler had been expressing his own views, not those of the branch. The official definition of homosexuality was insulting and offensive as were references to it as a disease. The problem was not homosexuality but homophobia, the fear of homosexuality, and that's what we should oppose.

C. Pinel (Manchester): the official psychiatrist's definition could not be taken seriously; quite apart from anything else they had tried to settle the matter by a vote but you couldn't settle a scientific matter in this way. Our position had to be that any kind of sexual behaviour between consenting adults was OK, providing some power relation with some person taking advantage of another was not involved.

R. Simpson (SW London) read out the statement he had made at Comrade Pinel's meeting on the subject which he felt had provoked this item for discussion. In his statement, Comrade Simpson stated that homosexuality was not a natural expression of sexuality but a "sexual deviance", and gay groups were deliberately advocating this deviant behaviour.

C. Pinel replied that he had mentioned in his talk that homosexuality was found in animals and in all human societies. In any event, very little human behaviour was entirely natural; we did things for a whole variety of reasons, including because we liked them.

C. Slapper (Camden), winding up, said he was glad to note that the vast majority of members agreed with the position his branch had put forward. Comrade Simpson seemed to be suggesting that sex for pleasure was evil, but he couldn't think many members would go along with that. Nor would many outside the Party. As a revolutionary party we couldn't have conservative attitudes on this sort of matter.

Sunday Afternoon

15. Radio advertising: how has the Party gone about this? (Camden)

C. Slapper (Camden): This year's Conference had voted for a series of radio ads. The EC had passed it to the Publicity Committee who had made some preliminary enquiries and then passed it back to the EC who had appointed Comrade Coleman to draw up a scheme. What was the position now?

S. Coleman (EC Member): He had approached LBC and Spectrum Radio (a community station). He had been told that we could definitely advertise the Socialist Standard on Spectrum and expected a similar ruling from LBC after they had consulted their legal department. One restriction would remain however: we could not mention current political events, so we could only mention the name of the journal not its contents but we could still say where it could be obtained, offer a free trial subscription, etc. As to costs, for under £3000 we could get 20 ads on LBC and 20 on Spectrum; this included the cost of hiring a studio to make the advertisement. He expected to have a definite proposal soon for a series of ads to be put on sometime next year.

16. The need to appreciate the distinction between the use of the words "support" and "sympathise" in our propaganda (East London)

P. Deutz (East London): "sympathy" was concerned with feelings, "support" with actions. The question was what can we as workers do about the sufferings of fellow workers in this country and other parts of the world. All members were agreed on two things. That only socialism was the answer, and that the Party should not campaign for reforms. Since we couldn't do anything concrete to influence events till we had a minority of MPs, the issue of "support" needn't come up until then, and there the Party's position had been set out in 1911: a minority of Socialist MPs or councillors might vote for some reform if this was judged to best advance the emancipation of the working class. Before then all we could do was to express our feelings of solidarity and sympathy with the sufferings and efforts of our fellow workers. This had come up again in the Party with regard to the movements for constitutional reform in Eastern Europe and South Africa. Obviously we applauded the efforts of workers there to get political democracy and even cheered them on but, to avoid giving the misleading impression that we supported various political movements there, we should avoid the use of the word "support".

R. Cook (Birmingham) this discussion had gone on for years and was essentially about the meaning of words; it was semantics. The trouble with Comrade Deutz's conclusion was that she wanted to use the word "support" in one particular way, but attempts to do this with any word were doomed to failure. In the end, it was the context that counted and had to count. Democracy was about consciousness, about individuals being willing and able to exercise power and the machinery for them to exercise it, not about particular constitutional forms.

A. Kerr (SW London): were there really any comrades who said there was no difference between democracy and dictatorship? Obviously democracy was better than dictatorship for achieving our objective.

P. Lawrence (SW London): the position adopted by the Party in 1911 was that a minority of Socialist MPs or councillors should be instructed to vote for specific reform measures if this was judged to be "in the interests of the working class", which was not quite the same as "what advances the emancipation of the working class". He felt that the word "sympathy" was too detached. We said we supported sound trade union action and a 1990 Conference resolution said we supported workers struggling to get political democracy. This was the right word.

S. Easton (Camden) mentioned other possibilities: "welcome", "in favour of" and "be on the side of".

M. Judd (Central): the day of Mandela's release was a day of rejoicing, and rightly so, as he had come to symbolise political prisoners everywhere. But recently he was in Iran praising Khomeini, that arch-anti-democrat. This was why we must be careful not to give the impression that we support this sort of thing. The best way to do this was not to use the word "support" at all in this context.

R. Headicar (Islington) didn't see the dilemma. We fully support the release of Mandela and all other political prisoners, but we have no sympathy with the crap they come out with after their release.

N. Snell (Lancaster): what was needed was a new word somewhere in between "sympathy" and "support". Perhaps, "be on the side of".

P. Deutz (East London), winding up, said that democracy was a tool, a means to an end, not a level of consciousness. Movements for democracy will go on whether or not we expressed "support" for them. We should beware of the politics of the street, even if we felt sympathy for those involved.

17. Is the use of the word "propaganda" sometimes doing the Party more harm than good? (Camden)

S. Parker (Camden): the meaning of the word "propaganda" had changed this century. It no longer meant simply putting over a case, but had come to be associated with manipulation and with totalitarian regimes. We should therefore abandon it and find some other term. The Propaganda Committee, for instance, could become the Meetings Committee.

Other delegates felt that this was unnecessary as we mainly used the word only internally and that we were in danger of becoming too pedantic over words; after all, "socialism" was more misunderstood than "propaganda" but nobody was suggesting banning it.

18. How best can we take advantage of the current widespread disillusion amongst Labour Party members? (Camden)

K. Beveridge (Camden): there was great disillusion amongst Labour Party members. In Scotland, for instance, Labour had lost one-third of its members in six months. We had to think of ways of contacting them.

C. Finel (Manchester): there were various reasons why they might be disillusioned; if it was only because they lost the election, or wanted a new Leader, that was not much use to us.

A. Buick (EC Member): the preliminary results of the Socialist Standard Readers Survey showed that 22 percent of those who replied voted Labour at the last election. This suggested that our potential constituency was Labour voters, if not necessarily members. But even there a recent survey had showed that 60 percent of Labour Party members thought that there was a conflict in society between Capital and Labour, which was nearer to what we said than official Labour policy. We couldn't treat Labour voters like Tory voters.

C. Slapper (Camden): if we had a strategy, which Conference had repeatedly called for, we could consciously target Labour voters and ex-members.

S. Coleman (EC Member) suggested a press advertising campaign in papers traditionally read by people on the Left urging them to leave Labour and seriously consider the Socialist alternative.

The delegates then considered the report of the **Print Committee**. Some delegates had been surprised by the list of "equipment required by the Print Committee" on page 14 of the EC Report to ADM, costing over £135,000, which was £100,000 more than the Party had. S. Dowsett and E. Morgan, of the Print Committee, explained that this was a list of the equipment the committee would need to do the best job; some items on the list were, however, urgently needed. The present press was too slow, especially where complicated front covers were involved; in addition new equipment was needed to do reversed out (ie white) lettering on the cover. H. McLaughlin (Bolton) thought we should think in terms of buying good second-hand equipment at bankruptcy auctions rather than brand new equipment.

P. Lawrence (SW London) and R. Cook (Birmingham) moved a floor resolution: "This ADM recommends that the EC views with great urgency the requirements of the Print Committee". This was carried 19-0.

S. Coleman (EC Member) asked what precisely the resolution meant. What were the urgent requirements?

E. Goodman (West London): the EC should sit down with the Print Committee to see what they wanted.

19. As reforms make up most of the propaganda of other political parties, could the Socialist Party produce a pamphlet on why we are opposed to reformism, between now and the next General Election? (Camden)

C. Slapper (Camden): we haven't got a pamphlet or even a leaflet dealing specifically with reformism and the argument that society could be gradually reformed into socialism. Our position on reforms was often a major stumbling block to people joining us, so there was a need for us to argue this in detail.

E. Goodman (West London) was not so sure about a pamphlet, but a leaflet, yes.

P. Lawrence (SW London) was in favour of a pamphlet, but didn't think it would need to deal with the gradualist argument that reforms could gradually lead to socialism. Nobody believed that any more, did they? Reformists today only believed that reforms could gradually make life better under capitalism. That was the argument we should deal with.

N. Snell (Lancaster) confirmed from personal experience that our case against campaigning for reforms was a very difficult one.

S. Coleman (EC Member) suggested that one way to bring out our case against reformism would be to reprint in the Standard the 1911 material referred to in the previous debate on support/sympathy. This made it absolutely clear that we were not opposed to all reforms as such even though we were opposed to advocating or campaigning for them. That contrasted with the straight anti-reform position taken up by those who left in 1911 and by some members no longer in the Party since. It was others thinking we held this position that made our case on reforms difficult to get over.

C. Slapper (Camden), winding up, accepted Comrade Lawrence's point that gradualism was not now an issue, so any pamphlet would have to concentrate on the futility of reforming capitalism.

20. The design of the front cover of the Socialist Standard (Enfield & Haringey)

J. Lee (Enfield & Haringey): A recent Conference had decided that we should refer to ourselves as "part of the World Socialist Movement". This should appear on the front cover. This year's Conference had called for the positive aspects of our case to be emphasised; this should be reflected on the front cover. Also, could not the contents be mentioned on the front?

C. Slapper (SSPC Design Member) said that, because of the printing difficulties discussed previously, the design of the front cover would be less complex over the coming months: colour print on white, or maybe coloured paper.

21 Lessons to be learned from the Readers Survey (Glasgow)

D. Irainer (Glasgow): the branch simply wanted a discussion on the results and purpose of the Survey. We should beware of just taking into account what present readers said since they would tend to be the satisfied ones. What was also required was a non-readers survey.

A. Euick (SSPC) said that a short report on the bare figures was available. 245 readers had replied, which was quite a high proportion for such surveys. Only 17 came from women, which was surely a cause for concern. A detailed report, analysing the answers to each question and breaking down some of the answers by age, Party membership, etc, was being prepared and should be ready for Conference, or even for the special strategy meeting in Birmingham in January.

The report of the EC to ADM was adopted.

A vote of thanks was carried to the comrades who had prepared the food.