

SOCIALIST ORGANISER ALLIANCE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SUNDAY OCTOBER 30 1983

**

YORK ROAD
CONFERENCE HALL, COUNTY HALL, /LONDON S.E.1.

(5 minutes walk from Waterloo and Westminster underground stations)

**

10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**

Registration: £2 (£1 unwaged)

((or joint £3/£1.50 registration with S.O. Day School))

AGENDA:

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| 10:00-10:20. | AGM Registration. |
| 10:20-12:00. | Standing Orders Report ((see over))
Secretary's Report
Editor's Report
Treasurer's Report |
| 12:00- 1:00. | Resolutions: A. 'Delegate Meetings' (Stockport SO)
B. 'Resignations from SO' (Halifax SO)

Elections for SO Officers and Secretariat ((see over)) |
| 1:00- 1:45. | LUNCH BREAK. |
| 1:45- 4:20. | Resolutions: C. 'General Political Resolution' (Martin Thomas)
D. 'Local Government & The Tories Attack' (Martin Thor)
E. 'Middle East' (Stockport SO)
F. 'Ireland' (Halifax SO) |
| 4:20- 4:30. | Closing Remarks. Announcements. |

IMPORTANT. Please arrive early so that we can complete as much registration as possible before the 10:20 a.m. start. We will have to start promptly at 10:20 a.m. to give adequate time to complete all the scheduled business.

STANDING ORDERS REPORT

1. AGM AGENDA. This will be proposed for acceptance or amendment with the rest of these proposals.
2. VOTING. *With voting cards by paid up supporters only.
*The chairperson shall have a casting vote in the event of a tie.
*2 tellers should be elected at the beginning of the AGM.
3. TIME LIMITS FOR SPEAKERS.
*Main resolutions and Reports - 10 minutes.
*All other speakers - 5 minutes.
4. AMENDMENTS. All amendments must be submitted in writing by 12 noon, Sunday October 30 to the SO Secretary.
5. SECRETARIAT ELECTIONS. All nominations must be submitted in writing by 12 noon, Sunday October 30 to the SO Secretary.

Immediately prior to the elections, the AGM should decide whether it wishes to fix a definite size to the Secretariat. Proposals on this can be taken from the floor of the AGM.

SECRETARIAT ELECTIONS. The relevant section of the Constitution reads:
"There shall be an election at each Annual General Meeting for a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Editor, and such other officers as the AGM (or Special General Meeting) decides." The existing Secretariat consists of the following comrades:

Chairperson:	(vacant)
Secretary:	John Bloxam
Editor:	John O'Mahony
Treasurer:	Jenny Fisher
Other members:	Steve Macarthur
	Martin Thomas
	Alaisdair Jamison
	Alan Clinton
	Les Hearn

NOMINATIONS ARE OPEN TO S.O. SUPPORTERS FOR THE 4 SPECIFIED OFFICER POSITIONS AND AS MANY OTHER OFFICERS AS THE AGM DECIDES.

SOCIALIST-ORGANISER ALLIANCE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1983

RESOLUTIONS

CONTENTS:

- A. 'Delegate Meetings' (Stockport SO)
- B. 'Resignations from SO' (Halifax SO)
- C. 'General Political Resolution' (Martin Thomas)
- E. 'Middle East' (Stockport SO)
- F. 'Ireland' (Halifax SO)

((To Come. D. 'Local Government & The Tories Attack' (Martin Thomas)))

DEADLINE FOR AMENDMENTS: 12 NOON, SUNDAY OCTOBER 30. MUST BE
HANDED TO THE SECRETARY IN WRITING (preferably before the deadline).

A.

DELEGATE MEETINGS

"This S.O. AGM feels that regular S.O. delegate meetings are an important democratic feature of the S.O.A. However we feel that these meetings should be held every 3 months as opposed to the present 6-8 weeks. At present many groups are unable, because of financial/geographical reasons to send comrades to all meetings and that these meetings are therefore unrepresentative.

We believe that groups would be able to participate more fully if delegate meetings were held on a 3-monthly basis.

In order to maintain democracy in the S.O.A. there should be regular meetings of a Steering Committee/Editorial Board of 15 members."

STOCKPORT SOCIALIST ORGANISER

B.

RESIGNATIONS FROM S.O.

"This Conference believes that when a faction or a groups of comrades resign as supporters of 'Socialist Organiser' for political reasons, the rest of 'Socialist Organiser' supporters should be informed of the scale and reasons for the resignations through internal bulletins."

HALIFAX SOCIALIST ORGANISER

GENERAL POLITICAL RESOLUTION

(Introduction. This resolution is not, and cannot be, an encyclopaedia of all important areas of work. It confines itself to giving an overview of the general political situation and the tasks of SO. Specific areas of work like the women's movement; youth work; CND; work in black communities; Labour Party workplace branches; TU Broad Lefts; and unemployed work, need separate specific discussions. So do some major forthcoming political events like the EEC elections. Many of these will be covered in the day school on Saturday 29th. M.T.)

1. AN OVERVIEW

"We are in a bad period. The labour movement is depressed by the slump and the Tory election victory. On the basis of that depression, centre-right leaderships have consolidated their grip in the TUC and the Labour Party. Their grip in turn becomes a factor in perpetuating the depression.

A large part of the Left has accelerated the retreat that it began in 1981, around the time of the Bishops Stortford talks between the top Labour and trade union leaders.

But all this should neither surprise nor dishearten us. Many layers of reformist hopes and delusions, of political prejudices, confusions, and ingrained nationalist wrong-headedness, have to be worked through by a vast movement of women and men who have no political unifying centre and who move all the time under the hostile fire of our class enemies and their agents, supporters and allies within the labour movement. Is it any wonder that we experience setbacks and backslidings?

There are plenty of causes for hope and avenues for fruitful work, even short of a fundamental change in the situation. And a fundamental change in the situation will come, sooner or later: the vengeance of the working class on the Tories will be the more terrible the longer it is delayed. How soon it will be, we can't tell: present indications are that it will not be very soon, but there is no iron certainty in such matters. In any case, we must prepare.

Despite the depression, the will to fight is far from extinguished in the working class. The Financial Times has already commented on an upturn in struggle in manufacturing industry generated by the limited industrial revival. The last few months have seen some important victories: Michelin, Greenings, Haringey NALGO.

There has not been a general swing to the right in the unions. On the contrary: though left-wing trade unionists have generally found their position in the workplace weaker, quite often they have strengthened their position within the union.

The emergence of new Broad Lefts, and the developments in the NUR, UCW, and POEU are examples of this. They should not be exaggerated: at this very moment the POEU Broad Left seems set on going the same way to a serious setback as the CPSA Broad Left did. But they gave us a basis to work on. And the forces behind the recent left moves in the unions will not be abolished by the capitulation of a small group of leaders.

Inside the Labour Left, it is not one-way traffic. Whole chunks of the Left - or what was previously considered the Left - have swung to the centre. A new neo-Left Eurocommunist current is forming behind Kinnock.

But others on the Left are moving in the opposite direction -- towards us, or potentially towards us.

Particularly because of the collapse of the previous 'left' anti-EEC position, greater numbers on the Left are open to serious discussion about internationalist, socialist alternatives to the nationalist, statist, bureaucratic politics of the 'Alternative Economic Strategy'.

2. THE JUNE 1983 ELECTION RESULT.

The June 1983 general election marked the end of a chapter in British politics.

Since 1945-50 the political stock-in-trade of the labour movement has essentially been a promise to complete the work of the Labour government of that period. What has passed for socialism has been state-capitalist nationalisation plus welfare state services.

The 1945-50 government did the essential groundwork of that programme: since then the labour movement has been promising to bring that programme up to the ideal form in which it was originally envisaged, in contrast to its grubby, humdrum reality. The inadequacies of such politics have now been starkly exposed.

'1945 socialism' has been a decaying force in the working class for many, many years. Cynicism and disillusionment about Labour's promises has increased. Repeatedly pundits have interpreted this trend as 'the decline of working class politics'. In truth it is more a matter of the increasing irrelevance of the avowedly non-class, 'national interest' politics offered to the working class by official Labour leaders.

The big industrial struggles of the early 1970s, and the tremendous class solidarity for the health workers just last year, show that working class struggle, at least in its basic economic form, is far from a declining force in society. And for all the SDP's talk about new politics, the real force in British politics recently has been not the Alliance's rehash of right wing Labourism but the growing new Labour left.

But at this election, two factors turned longstanding cynicism and disillusionment into a substantial swing away from Labour. Firstly, the depth of Britain's economic and social crisis led working class voters to look for new answers. Vague talk from Labour leaders about 'tried and tested' methods of Keynesian reflation was not good enough. Labour came across as having good intentions, but only waffle and pious promises at the centre of its policy.

To win support for a socialist programme of common ownership and workers' control in the decisive sectors of industry and finance would not have been easy. Radical new ideas need strong enthusiastic argument to blaze the trail for them, and momentous experiences to shake people's prejudices.

But the fact that Labour centred its programme on borrowing from the capitalists and the claim that such a policy could heal the economic crisis without struggle or trouble, made Labour's promises just not credible.

Secondly, the existence of the Alliance as an apparently viable, apparently new, anti-Tory option meant that Labour did not automatically get the anti-Tory vote.

A whole string of factors can be cited as contributing to the election result: the impression of disarray that Labour gave because of the witch-hunt and the open, unrepudiated attacks on Labour policy by our own party leaders, and the embarrassed, unimaginative, timid and incompetent way in which the campaign was run centrally. But for the left the main job must be to focus on what we can and must do.

The right wing was able to retain control of Labour in the whole period up to the election essentially thanks to the support of the trade union bureaucracies. The fight for accountability and democracy has to be taken into the unions. At the same time the policy debates have to be reopened.

3. BREAK COLLABORATION WITH THE TORIES! FIGHT THE HEALTH CUTS!

Perhaps the most serious setback industrially over the last year has been the virtual collapse of the Left leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Through a combination of bureaucratic bungling and phrasemongering; loss of nerve at crucial moments; and downright treachery over struggles like Kinneil, this leadership has dissipated the miners' considerable will to fight against closures, and now lacks any coherent strategy.

Pits are now being closed at a gallop.

This is a serious setback for the whole working class. But it should be kept in perspective.

The image of the miners as the samurai of the working class often played a reactionary role ('wait for the big battalions'). And it has long been out of date. The last big miners' strike, in 1974, is nearly ten years ago. Since then the position of the miners has been considerably weakened, especially by bonus schemes. They still have tremendous power - as they showed by beating the government back in February 1981 - but they are not, and never have been, the only or the main fighting force of the working class.

At the same time, sections of workers not previously considered as militant are coming forward. The NHS pay struggle last year was an example of that. Health cuts are now shaping up as one of the major areas of a working class fight back against the Tory government.

We should give time and effort to discussing detailed policy for this fight, and organising for it.

Up until very recently, the Tory anti-union laws had been little used. Where they had been used, generally the mere threat of legal action had been sufficient to push union officials into getting struggles toned down. The Stockport Messenger dispute; British Telecom management's resort to the law; and the plans for new, even more draconian laws, change this situation.

Our leading political demand must be for the labour movement to break collaboration with the Tories and instead fight them through direct action. We should take steps to revive the Mobilising Committee for the Defence of Trade Union Rights - experimentally at first.

4. AGAINST KINNOCK: CONSOLIDATE AND EDUCATE THE SERIOUS LEFT.

At the Brighton conference a new centre-right coalition took control of the Labour Party.

The reason why this happened, essentially, is the inadequacies of the Labour Left.

In 1979-81 the Labour Party began to transform itself - away from old practices of talking left and then doing just whatever seems realistic within capitalism, and towards accountability and clear commitment. But the transformation stalled because the Left left key areas like economic policy almost untouched, and didn't spread the fight for democracy into the trade unions enough. The half-way transformation meant Labour was not such a convincing alternative to the Tories - but, just when determination was most needed, the Left started unravelling. Many became alarmed at the implications of what the Left had achieved, or the prospect of further clashes with the Right. The political weaknesses of the Labour left - the dominance within it of semi-bureaucratic, nationalist trends - took their toll.

What is the situation now?

We have to have a clear uncompromising attitude to the centre/right leadership established in the Labour Party under Kinnoek. It is no more progressive than the Foot leadership, and more dangerous.

All evidence indicates that illusions in Kinnoek are widespread among Labour Party activists, even more widespread among Trade Union activists, and even more widespread again among the Labour-voting or floating voter working class in general.

We therefore have to apply the same attitude as in general we apply to the Labour Party leadership when we cannot immediately propose its replacement by the left, i.e. combine denunciation with placing demands. This is what we did with the Foot leadership. For example, we should demand that Kinnoek puts his words about campaigning against NHS cuts into action.

We should recognise the strength of the Kinnoek/Hattersley leadership: but we should not be cowed.

People have talked about '1963 all over again' - referring to the year when Harold Wilson, a 1950s Bevanite leftist, succeeded Hugh Gaitskell and finally, by faking and bluffing, put an end to a long period of left-right disputes.

The comparison sheds some light. But this is 1983. The British capitalist system is in ruins. The Tory offensive is intense, and speeding up. The sharpness of the crisis will quickly and brutally strip away credibility for any reformist tinkering that Kinnoek and his team dream up.

If capitalism were now expanding, and Britain could look forward to relative prosperity, then it is most likely that Kinnoek and Hattersley could consolidate their control. A new equilibrium would be established in the Party, co-opting and neutering the new constitutional rules. The serious Left could be marginalised, as for decades it was. But that is not the situation.

There will be a honeymoon period, perhaps of some length. But major resistance to Kinnoek's inevitable drive to the Right is a certainty.

Again, the new close alliance between the Parliamentary leaders and the trade union bosses has been identified as a recreation of the ancien regime

of the '30s, '40s and '50s. This is not entirely true, either.

The big unions are not monolithically right wing. Moss Evans is not Deakin, and Arthur Scargill is not Will Lawther. There is still something of a leftward movement in certain unions, the POEU, for example.

The indications are that the new leadership will balance, fudge and fake. It will probably try salami tactics, slicing at the Left a piece at a time, doing what it has done in Manchester in other areas. But if it tries to move move forthrightly against the Left, it will undermine its stability.

Once again, the future hinges on what the Left, and the various currents within the Left, will do.

We must refuse to run scared before Thatcher, or let the pressure of the Tory offensive redraw the parameters within which social policy is discussed in the labour movement. We must continue the fight to remake the labour movement, so that we have an alternative to the Tories, and also to everything that the Tories stand for.

We must refuse to accept that there is a choice between turning outwards to fight the Tories, and continuing to discuss and clarify the Party.

The Tories need to be fought now - by class struggle, not by pronouncements of what Kinnoch will do on election day four years from now.

We must reject the 'historic compromise' which Kinnoch may be contemplating with social Toryism, represented by the SDP and the Liberals. We must not 'take socialism off the agenda' - whether for a deal with the SDP/Liberal Alliance or in the vain hope of bringing back Labour's successful reformist yesterdays. Socialism is the answer and the guideline for a fightback against the Tories now, and must be the goal of the labour movement.

On that basis we can turn the Labour Party outwards, build the membership, draw it into the class struggle at every level, and develop workplace branches. These workplace branches should be a central activity for us, enabling us to expand our political activity in the workplaces and to draw new people into the political struggle in the labour movement.

We must fight the witch-hunt. Kinnoch and Hattersley do not yet feel that they have the strength to confront the Left head-on. They can be beaten back.

We should get both individual SO supporters, and TU/LP branches where we have influence, to affiliate to Labour Against the Witch-hunt.

We need to stress once again the centrality of the fight within the unions. The top union officials, wielding their block votes, were the decisive force behind Kinnoch's triumph. But they are not the sum total of the unions. The newly triumphant centre-right can be challenged by a flanking attack, through the rank and file of the trade unions. Demands for democratic reform must be taken into the unions. Labour Party workplace branches can help to assemble the left-wing forces for this fight.

To the extent that the direct industrial class struggle revives, and the working class succeeds in shaking off the stunning first impact of the slump since 1979, new forces will be brought into this struggle in the unions.

At the same time we must take up the ideological fight within the Left. The Left probably faces a period of regroupment and realignment. Why have organisations like the Labour Coordinating Committee gone over to the centre-right? The lessons must be discussed and analysed.

We must take up the arguments against nationalism, educate the movement about Stalinism (in all its varieties and phases), and build a Marxist, class-struggle, internationalist left wing of the Labour Party around the Socialist Organiser Alliance.

4. TURNING OUTWARDS.

These perspectives demand more intensive attention to specifically SO work: internal organisation, education, ls, paper sales, political discussion with individual contacts.

But a look at the state of our own organisation indicates that we also need a turn towards more outward-going work: in the workplaces, on the picket lines, on the streets, in the estates, on the YTS schemes.....

Does this mean going in two opposite directions at the same time? In a sense, yes, but the combination is necessary, and the two aspects fit together and reinforce each other rather than contradicting.

Intervening in local strikes, for example, demands good organisation of the local SO group, so that it can mobilise its resources rather than being stuck in a routinist rut. And if such intervention is to be more than sub-political 'servicing' activity, it has to include paper sales, contact work, etc.

Conversely, the intensive one-to-one propaganda work demands a flow of new contacts, which can only be got by reaching outwards.

We do not need to speculate about future big industrial struggles to see the scope for reaching outwards. Organising in YTS; building Youth CND; and fighting the health cuts are prime areas.

All this means taking resources (where necessary) away from the 'going-to-meetings' form of political activity, which gets too near to being the sum total of political life in many SO groups.

Of course we still have to go to meetings. It is those LP, TU, YS, Trades Council, meetings that will provide the springboard and base for much of the outward-directed work we must do. We carry on our struggle within and through the labour movement, not by trying to go round it in the fashion of the SWP. But we have to redress the balance and get away from routinism.

MARTIN THOMAS.