



In the Yorkshire & North Derbyshire Region

**Minutes of the Regional Retired Members Association Committee
held at Grove Hall on Tuesday, 6th October 2009
at 10.30am.**

1. PRESENT

George Tutill (Chairman), Bill Hinsliffe, Dick Hazel, Neil Moore, Barry Christopherson, Stan Bradbury, Bernard Barron, Steve Jennings (Regional Political Officer), Rachel Harrison (Secretary) and Graham Benton (Senior Organiser).

2. APOLOGIES

Lita Southam (Secretary) and Marjorie Jones.

3. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Bernard Barron from the Bradford branch was welcomed in place of Ralph Baxter who had been suffering ill health.

4. MINUTES OF 19/3/09 MEETING

Agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING

- a) Barry Christopherson elected to replace Neil Moore on the RMA national committee.
- b) Motions for national conference and delegates forwarded to Monica Smith on 29th June 2009 as was the request for a visitor's ticket for Jacqueline Tutill.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

Previously circulated.

7. REGIONAL RMA LONG SERVICE AWARD

GB reported that the Regional Management Team had endorsed the idea of a LSA subject to costings. Numbers of those over 40 and 50 year's membership was difficult to identify due to the vagaries of the membership system which it was hoped could be resolved. The RMT proposal was that the award be for over 50 year's GMB membership with a certificate and specially commissioned Regional badge. The shortlist of badge designs had been whittled down and agreed subject to a slight change. GB advised he would circulate the final design and order a substantial number. The award could be launched on the regional website and magazine with a mail shot to those that qualified. Depending on demand an awards ceremony could then be arranged, the alternative being to post out the awards.

8. TRIPS

a) The trips from Leeds, Bradford and York were a success with only one minor complaint. It was suggested that next year a separate trip be arranged from the Leeds and Bradford areas which NM was happy to organise. NM and BB to liaise, the proposed date being Wednesday, 1st September 2010.

b) BC reported that the Sheffield trip to Bridlington had also been a success with it being a nice day. The Branch Christmas party had been arranged for 8th December 2009 at the Consort Suite in Thurcroft.

9. REPORTS

a) Steve Jennings, Senior Organiser/Regional Political Officer gave a comprehensive report, (copy attached to minutes for ease of reference), and was invited to attend every future RMA meeting with the political report being a standing agenda item. It was also agreed to invite Colin Burgon MP again which SJ would arrange. SJ also answered many questions put by the committee.

b) Leeds City Council street cleaning dispute about to enter its 6th week of all out strike action and colleagues were asked to support the striking membership. Details of the benefit gig and rally on 18th October 2009 in Leeds were distributed.

10. GMB@WORK

Details of the Branch seminar on 14th and 15th December 2009 were distributed and BC confirmed he would be attending from S99 Branch. August 09 had been a good month for recruitment following a disappointing summer. Any

recruitment and/or organisation opportunities should be passed to the appropriate Officer, through GB if needed.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) For future meetings if the car park at Grove Hall was full alternative parking was available at the nearby Wakefield Rugby Club for £3 which could be claimed on expenses.

b) 2010 GMB wall planners were distributed.

c) BH produced a press cutting regarding a former YCW member, Morgan Pugh, and asked if this could be reproduced in the regional magazine.

d) Retired members seeking financial advice should contact PFP Financial Advisor Steve Dodson on 07802 731287 who will be happy to assist.

12. DATES OF 2010 MEETINGS

Friday, 19th February 2010 (to accommodate Colin Burgon MP)
Tuesday, 15th June 2010 and
Tuesday, 12th October 2010

All meetings at Grove Hall, Wakefield starting at 10.30am.

13. NEXT MEETING

Friday, 19th February 2010 at Grove Hall commencing at 10.30am.

GB 8.10.09

Report on the Labour Party Conference 2009

The atmosphere at the conference on the Sunday was very tense, no one was sure what to expect. The talk was all about Gordon Brown's leadership, many delegates were worried that whatever happened, Labour was on course for defeat at next year's election. The majority feeling was that Labour had no choice but to stick with Gordon. Right from the start, speaker after speaker especially Government Ministers attacked the Tories and their leader, David Cameron. They mocked his failure to group issues around the credit crunch and last year's global banking collapse. Many, including Harriet Harman, Alistair Darling and Ed Balls cited many world and financial leaders who had heaped praise on Gordon Brown and his handling of the economy. Peter Mandelson who (like him or loathe him) gave the best speech to Conference. His attack on David Cameron's flawed decision to state that the recession should run its course and that Cameron would have done nothing was particularly derided and Mandelson twisted the knife stating that all the G20 leaders had backed Brown's fiscal stimulus policy to help small businesses to borrow money and stay trading. Again and again stating that this was the financial decision of the century and that Cameron had made the wrong call. The performance was theatrical in its delivery managing to heap praise on Gordon Brown as a world statesman and deriding Cameron at a disaster waiting to happen.

The Leader's Speech

To put this speech into context, it is definitely the last speech before the next election. It is also possibly the last speech from a Labour Prime Minister for a considerable time should Labour lose the next election. The opinion polls are rather volatile at the moment but one thing is clear, the volatility revolves around the size of the Tory lead, so the pressure on the Prime Minister was enormous. The leader's speech over the last several conferences has become hyped up to fever pitch, the atmosphere is always electric with the enforced queues for security everybody waiting in line, the time then comes for the doors to open, everyone rushes in to their seats. A video then starts with the theme being labour leaders and their achievements in the past to the present leader all adding to the emotion of the occasion. This is followed by a repeating montage of Labour's achievements since 1997 accompanied by loud music.

Eventually the moment arrives as the great leader and his wife are paraded into the conference chamber. We all stand and cheer as the entourage rises to the platform. The event is now up and running, the leader's wife takes to the stage with further cheers and ovations. She will support her man, he loves this country and she loves him. (All too much like an American convention style for me.) Then he begins the speech which is good, well crafted and excellently delivered and contains some new policies, help for teenage single mothers, help for the elderly to stay in their own homes when they have deteriorating

conditions, referendum on a new voting system (single transferable vote) in the next Parliament and more financial help in the recession. With the virtues of the Health Service followed by a constant attack on the Tories.

A good speech, not a great speech but probably enough to keep him in place until the election. The standing ovation lasted 10 minutes then we all filed out to discuss it. Most opinions were similar to my own but many loved it but a significant amount still remained unconvinced..... Only time will tell.

James Stribley gave a fantastic speech on the lack of progress made with the Remploy situation. He stated the Remploy members were ready and willing to work and the Government must procure more contracts for its factories. He delivered the speech from the heart and received the only real spontaneous standing ovation at the conference.

Paul Kenny spoke excellently in an emergency resolution on the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Following the defeat of the Tamil Tigers thousands of civilians had been herded like animals into concentration camps where many had allegedly been slaughtered. Both James' and Paul's resolutions were passed by conference.

Without going on too long, Ed Balls spoke well and so did Alan Johnson in fact most ministers gave a good account of themselves. The conference closed with defence and foreign affairs on the agenda - nothing much new in these areas. Harriet Harmon closed proceedings with a good speech hammering away at many of the same points made all week.

Summing up, the Conference was reasonable; to say it was successful would go too far. There are too many dark clouds on the horizon to worry about but the leadership will be happy and there were no surprises and the media were not too hostile with one exception. The Sun newspaper came up and declared its support for the Tories, this upset many of the Labour hierarchy including Paul Mandleon who was supposed to have had an almighty row with the Sun's political editor (a storm in a tea cup). Tony Woodley, the leader of Unite ripped The Sun up on stage. This was great theatre and I must admit I gave a cheer and waved my fist.... all good fun. The truth is that Murdoch, the Sun's proprietor has always been right wing and there's an old saying "that if you lay down with dogs you will get fleas". Unfortunately in Labour's case with the Murdoch press this is true with too many compromises to the neo-liberal right.

The Conference Fringe

There were many fringe meetings at Brighton this year, my highlights were all South American causes. Firstly, I attended a meeting of the Justice for Columbia campaign which was very enlightening. Columbia is one of the most dangerous places for trade unionists in the world. A moving speech in Spanish

was given by women trade union official from Columbia whose father, brother and two cousins had been murdered by anti trade union forces working within the Columbian Government. Their crime, trying to organise working people to fight the disgraceful terms and conditions they are forced to work for the US backed rich land owners.

On a similar theme the CUBA Solidarity Campaign held a fringe meeting to publicise the Miami Five, Cubans held in prison by the Americans on trumped up charges of anti American activities. This meeting was absolutely packed to the rafters. They have been in jail for over 10 years and their plight is made worse by a conspiracy from the US and UK media not to report there incarceration in Florida jails. The attendance proves their plight is not forgotten. There were two wives and a daughter of the Miami Five. The daughter spoke passionately and of the pain of not been able to see her father. I honestly don't see why the most powerful country in the world has such a hang up about CUBA.

Finally, the third South American fringe I attended was the Venezuela Support Group. This is another South American country sick of the US interference and its neo liberal policies.

Colin Burgon, MP and GMB ultra loyalist gave a brilliant speech with the main points being that the South American countries had been for several decades controlled by rightist governments with virtually no regulation of the market place this had led to massive inequality and exploitation of the working classes. This neo-liberal policy had been adopted in Europe after the fall of Communism. So far in Europe many regard this policy as an advantage especially in Eastern Europe however; there is massive evidence that inequality and exploitation are taking route in many of these former Communist countries. This model in Eastern Europe as been tested by the banking crisis with many working people either loosing their jobs or having their pay slashed to maintain the profits of their new capitalist controllers. The UK has not been immune from the phenomenon with an increase in unemployment and pay cuts in the private sector.

The lessons learned through Venezuela are clear; this neo-liberal model is fundamentally flawed as it is based on exploitation and greed of the unregulated capitalist market place. That is why leaders like Hugo Chavez were elected. The people had had enough of this economic system; Chavez believes that a country's resources should be used for the good of the many and not the few..... Thanks for a very informative speech Colin!

The South American fringe meetings really made me think, isn't this why we became involved with the trade union movement to fight inequality, exploitation and the greed of an unregulated capitalist system?

Conclusions and Comments

I think the conference was reasonably successful, whether it is enough to help Labour rise in the opinion polls is another question entirely. Policies adopted by Labour in the next six months will be crucial to the outcome of the election. We must concentrate on our key areas of popular support. We must hammer at the consequences for the Health Service if the Tories were elected. We must never forget the state of the Public Services under the last Tory Government. Remember in what state our schools were when Thatcher and her henchmen were in power.

Brown must return to the core socialist values of the Labour movement. This Government's flirtation with big business, deregulation of the banks and neo liberalist policies have lead us up a dead end. We can no longer tolerate a society where social mobility has become stagnant when we claim to have a policy of opportunities for all, we must really mean this. We are the party of opportunity and a person's postcode must not dictate their future.

We as trade unionists cannot walk blindly through the Tory veil of death. The poor and working class of Britain would never forgive us. We must fight to ensure David Cameron and his gang do not destroy all that has been built. This is a battle for the heart and soul of the working people of this country, defeat is not an option. The alternative, as in the TV drama 'Life on Mars', would return us all to the 1980's and the Thatcher era only this time there would be no chance to return to the present, this is the stuff of nightmares. We must get behind the Labour leadership and fight the Tories to the bitter end.

Should you wish to contact me or join the Labour Party email me at steve.jennings@gmb.org.uk or phone 0845 337 7777.

Steve Jennings

Steve Jennings MCIPD
Senior Organiser/Political Officer