Informal Secretary’s Report 29/03/2019

Dear all,

The good news is that since 1/1/2019 we have added a further 46 new members. Many of these members have queries both into our policies and how the SHA works, particularly concerning our ties with the Labour Party, and arrangements for affiliations in both directions, and for delegates. This augurs well for their active and productive involvement with the SHA.

A number of issues continue to be worked through. I enjoy working with Ken as he can alert me both to problems and opportunities. As an example of opportunities, he highlighted a truly unique and potentially useful new member who I was able to bring to the attention of the Branch. Of course, by far the majority of new members have a great deal to offer, and the details given to Admin are really good in enabling us to support Branches who may not be aware of that person previously, and how they might best fit in with our work and be enabled to contribute to it.

I don’t really understand Ken’s technical issues and advice, though they are crucial of course, but you need both the training and expertise – not to mention the mindset. Which brings me to the database:

The issue with our databases is not the amount of information contained, which cannot be “disappeared” due to GDPR anyway. Much of it, if not all, is potentially information I use. The problem is, in layman’s terms, it has been “broken”. Because of this Ken is currently having to manually insert information over several platforms, and that information can still be corrupted, so it needs double checking. This is time wasting, and I feel could be best addressed by a working group of techie members, real “geeks”, who could present a report to Central Council. Ken could certainly sort out at least a good proportion of the issues, but for full accountability and transparency would prefer this option. This is also partly to try to avoid/minimise the costs of a professional, likely to be hefty, and to ensure the people working this information and administrating it, get what they actually need to do the job.

As a follow up to this, members who have effectively lapsed still have rights for up to 9 months. This is excessive, even given we have several procedures to follow, which are right and proper.

Finance: Some background:

A large portion of our income is now via PayPal. This is the preferred method for by far of most new members, and the only way most of our income streams will use. This is in part due to newish Banking requirements which mean that online signatures are not acceptable. New members joining by standing order must print off our paperwork, sign it and send to Admin, who take the details and record and number it, then pass to the bank by post. It is good for people who join up at a meeting, as Branch Secretaries do the work of posting, but quite cumbersome for individuals. On the plus side, we can better keep track of memberships and due dates.

Other issues:

The recording of payments nationally prior to our taking over has been of poor quality. Ken has been following up with queries on incorrect dating, duplicate (and more) payments which need reimbursed, payments the member didn’t want to make, and unrecorded payments, leading to unrecorded but valid members, to name but a few issues. Of course such things will happen, but these issues were left uncorrected and not followed up with the person concerned. To sum up this has required an almost unbelievable amount of person hours, and a reasonably detailed knowledge of both the inner workings of the SHA and of the Labour Party more widely. Our members rightly expect this level of support and information as we encourage them to be active in support of our ideas and policies. This aspect has been ticking over, but we could do so much better, and I have spent some of the last few months thinking of next steps, so hopefully will have something to report at the next meeting.

Disability Issues: Due to the unusual pressures we have been subjected to, and health issues this has gone into abeyance somewhat. I am hopeful that pressures will ease with time, and we can look at this as a matter of some urgency.

Women’s issues: SHA had a very successful Women’s Conference. Coral and Alison can fill you in on details. We have the most amazing bunch of women members and our successes are down to their joint efforts and ideas.

Wishing you all a friendly, supportive and most of all productive meeting tomorrow,

Love and best wishes as always,

Jean