

34

8

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CIVIC RESTAURANT AUTHORITIES

AT ST. MARY'S HALL, COVENTRY.

Wednesday, June 1st, 1949.

A report of the Proceedings, containing the main points from the speeches.

At the opening of the conference the delegates were welcomed by the Mayor of Coventry, Alderman Hammond, who reminded them that the building in which they were meeting was constructed in 1342. There were delegates present, he said, representing approximately 120 local authorities who operated civic restaurants, representatives of the Ministries of Health, Food, Education and Labour, representatives of catering journals and representatives of the national and local Press. Invitations were originally sent to 304 local authorities to send representatives, and of these approximately 80 had specifically declined, approximately 80 had sent no replies, and approximately 22 stated that they had ceased to operate civic restaurants. Some authorities who were not represented had written expressing general support to the calling of the conference, and explaining that owing to travel and other difficulties they had been unable to attend.

"The calling of this conference," the Mayor continued, "has, in the main, arisen out of a desire for a general exchange of views on one or two matters which vitally affect the operation of civic restaurants. Delegates will see from the agenda that financial problems lie ahead of local authorities in this sphere if the existing machinery for negotiating wages and conditions of service of civic restaurant employees remains unaltered. The existence of the present unsatisfactory machinery is one of the main reasons for calling this conference."

Alderman Hammond pointed out that the agenda was intended merely to indicate the lines along which some of the more important matters would be considered, but he invited delegates to raise any other matters of general concern affecting civic restaurant catering and administration generally. Coventry, as one of the protagonists in the cause of civic catering had had the privilege of calling the conference in the hope that it might be possible, with the wholehearted co-operation and strong support of a large body of civic restaurant authorities, to foster the cause of civic catering throughout the country.

The conference then proceeded to the election of a Chairman and Councillor Callow, Chairman of the Coventry Civic Restaurant Committee was unanimously appointed, his being the only name put forward for nomination.

Having made one or two preliminary announcements concerning arrangements made for the convenience of delegates, the Chairman proceeded to open the discussion on the first item on the agenda -- the consideration of the formation of a National Association of Civic Restaurant Authorities with a view to holding periodic conferences. Remarking that the conference had been described as being to some extent a "rebel" conference, he said they had tried on innumerable occasions to work through the Association of Municipal Corporations, but their experience had been that civic restaurant authorities were not adequately represented on that

body. Committees of the A.M.C. which had negotiated and discussed matters appertaining to civic restaurants had been composed of members who were not necessarily representatives of civic restaurant authorities, and it was essential the A.M.C. should realise that many authorities in the country were not favourable to civic restaurants and in some cases were definitely opposed to them.

Many of them deliberately took the view, when they had the opportunity to take over civic restaurants from British Restaurants that they did not wish to continue the service at all. Those were not the authorities to discuss the affairs of civic restaurants on the A.M.C. He would be in favour of working amicably through the A.M.C. providing the problems and difficulties of civic restaurant authorities were recognised and they were represented on that body by people interested in running civic restaurants. He thought it desirable to attempt at any rate to get the A.M.C. to work in co-operation with them and to work through the existing machinery, but that was entirely up to the delegates. There were other national bodies involved.

Supporting the Chairman's remarks, a Bristol delegate (Alderman Watson-Allen) said they had been concerned for some considerable time because they felt sufficient consideration had not been given to the particular problems of those authorities who had decided that civic restaurants had come to stay. There should be some machinery by which the view of those who continued to run civic restaurants could be effectively put. They did not want to come out of the A.M.C. because at Bristol they did not think it desirable to set up separate organisations if those already existing could be made to function effectively. There was a regrettable tendency in these days towards too many organisations and conferences, and they would prefer an improvement of the A.M.C. machinery if that could be achieved.

A Welwyn Garden City representative (Mr. D. Millard, Treasurer) said that a number of smaller authorities around the 20,000 to 30,000 mark, were extremely interested in this problem and he would plead that in any organisation which was set up they should not be forgotten. They had their particular difficulties and at the same time they might have experiences which would be worthy of consideration by their larger brothers. On the question of negotiating machinery, his authority approached the Provincial Council and put forward what they considered were some constructive suggestions, but unfortunately they were just waved aside. The present wages and conditions struck every civic restaurant worker as being out of sympathy with what was required.

The noise from heavy rain interrupted the remarks of the Newton Abbott delegate (Councillor T.H. Frost), but it was gathered that he too, pleaded the case for consideration of the smaller towns. He desired to know how any organisation which might be set up was going to work and referred to the confusion brought about by having scales of wages laid down both by the Wages Board and the Joint Industrial Council.

Support for the formation of an organisation of representatives who favoured civic restaurants came from a South Shields delegate (Councillor A.E. Ganperry), who said they were not inclined to agree to working within the framework of the A.M.C. which was a very slow moving body. He suggested this was an opportune moment to say they were going to form an association of those who believed that civic restaurants had come to

stay. The conference consisted of representatives of trading authorities, who had a right to meet together to talk over their difficulties, and therefore the conference would not go against the general rate but against the trading concerns.

Referring to the fact that the Chairman had spoken of the conference as a "rebel" conference, the Ashten-under-Lyme delegate (Councillor W. Booth) remarked "Of course it is; it cannot be anything else. Apart from opposition to civic catering by members of the A.M.C. who have not got from members of the Council. I feel we ought to have a body where we can meet regularly and discuss our problems, towards my mind civic catering has come to stay. I feel, too, that the lesser authorities should be given consideration equally with the larger ones in any proposals that may be put forward."

Alderman H.S. Walker (Stourbridge): I think we may spend too much time considering this and I am prepared to move that a national association be formed.

ALDERMAN J.P. GOODE (Oldbury) seconded.

The Newcastle-under-Lyme delegate (Councillor T. Bathill), while pointing out that his own Council had not discussed the question whether a separate organisation should be set up or not, said his own personal opinion was it was absolutely necessary they should hold a conference so that they could learn exactly what they had to do and how to meet their problems. In Newcastle-under-Lyme they were doing the best to make civic restaurants go, but they knew the problems they had to face. There would be opposition from inside and outside and they had got to make sure they knew all the answers. This could only be done by having an exchange of opinions.

A Sheffield delegate (Councillor J. Morris) said he had listened to the Chairman and endorsed every word he had said. He thought there was room for the setting up of some organisation but had any of them, he asked, got a mandate to vote for setting up an organisation outside the A.M.C. He felt his own council would oppose such a step. He thought they ought to endeavour to press the A.M.C. to alter its constitution as far as civic restaurants were concerned. He disagreed with them with respect to the formulation of wages. It was very difficult to foot the bill with the J.I.C. scale because that was arranged for non-trading organisations whereas civic restaurants were organisations of a business character and if they did not make ends meet they would soon be out of business. He thought the smaller authorities had a special claim to consideration but he was wondering what the position would be if he voted for setting up an organisation outside the A.M.C. and then got it turned down in his own council.

Councillor W.R. Robbins, Swindon, said he desired to move an amendment in the following terms: "That this conference appoints a special committee representative of each type of local authority operating civic restaurants with a view to conferring with the local authorities and furthering the most effective means of co-ordinating and furthering the interests of civic restaurants". Mr. Robbins said he agreed with the criticism of the A.M.C. in its attitude towards civic restaurants but he was convinced that if there was justification for some organisation it could be provided more effectively within the A.M.C. and the other local authorities associations

than by setting up an organisation of their own. They had to face the fact that there was still a large amount of opposition within their own local authorities and those who were interested in municipal undertakings of this kind had to demonstrate, in spite of that opposition, that they could be effective in service and in finance. He urged that the best way of tackling what might be described as the indifference of the A.M.C. was by setting up the committee he suggested -- a committee to supply the drive to make sure the A.M.C. looked after their interests.

Supporting the amendment Mr. Mills, Wolverhampton, said he would suggest the appropriate line of action would be for the conference to agree to the establishment of an ad hoc interim executive committee selected by those responsible for the calling of the conference. They would have at their disposal the records of those in attendance and from those they could gather together an interim ad hoc committee to represent the various interests in order that the appropriate approaches could be made to the national organisations. There was not only the A.M.C. but also the County Councils Association, the Association of Education Committees and all sorts of associations which were concerned in this matter and it would be a hopeless job for anyone to attempt to force upon them, as an ad hoc interim executive could, the desire of so many authorities to see that this question of civic restaurants was taken up in a real way.

A Leeds County Borough delegate (Alderman R. Peart) said that if an association had been in existence for the last two years there would have been little need to call the present conference. The danger of the amendment was they would still have the slow moving machinery they had at the present time. It was obvious that something had got to be done. The organisations referred to in the amendment were part and parcel of the A.M.C. and were composed of exactly the same type of people who were not interested in civic catering as a municipal undertaking.

The Town Clerk of Wednesbury (Mr. G.T. Thompson) suggested that it was important the Conference should know, before deciding between the original resolution and the amendment, whether the appropriate Ministries would recognise any new body which was set up as a body to which they could refer on all questions concerning civic restaurants. He invited the views of representatives of the Ministries present on this point. He also added that the representatives of his own local authority, no doubt like many others, had not had an opportunity of putting the points on the agenda before their own councils, and therefore had some difficulty in casting a vote in favour of the original resolution.

A Leicester delegate (Alderman J. Minto) said he was heartily in favour of setting up a national body from the conference. The amendment, if carried, would mean a procedure which would be too slow in its operation, and by the time they came to deal with the important problems that were before them great opportunities would be missed. If they were to put civic restaurants on a proper footing throughout the country it could only be done by speaking with one voice.

"This is not a rebel meeting but a pioneer meeting" said a Wirksworth Urban District Council representative (Councillor G.B. Gretton) who urged that they should be pioneers of a new movement. He, too, inquired if the various Ministries concerned would accept suggestions from any new body which might be set up.

of the position in order that civic restaurants might be placed in exactly the same position as other restaurants. He did not fear from the standpoint of a Rochdale or of a lay preacher the extension of facilities which this move in favour of licensed restaurants was supposed to give to the development of iniquity. He was convinced that it was far better that these facilities should be granted to local authorities, who were fully aware of their responsibilities. It seemed ridiculous to make provisions for catering for a wedding party or for a dinner run by a cricket club and then say "we are not likely to get an occasional licence but if you as promoters of the event apply to the Bench you may be successful". That had happened in Swindon. Promoters had applied for an occasional licence and got it. He would rather the whole matter were under the control of the civic restaurant authority. He thought perhaps non-county boroughs were in a better position in this matter than county boroughs in so far as they were not town planning authorities. It might be one of the few advantages of being a non-county borough.

The Chairman said he felt the only value of the discussion was to let other delegates know the difficulties some of them had experienced. It must be left to the local authorities, as they saw fit in their particular locality, to do what they thought best.

Alderman Crowder, Rochdale, said that having listened to one or two speakers it seemed to him a suggestion had been put forward that a local authority should get some favoured conditions from a Licensing Bench. He wanted to say as a Magistrate that no one had a prior right over anyone else in front of a local magistrate and a local authority should not be afraid of any decision. If someone else were making a claim in front of the Magistrates and the local authority thought well they would put forward the strongest opposition it was possible to put forward and leave it to the good sense of the Magistrates.

Alderman Hodgkinson, Coventry, said that they had rather big ideas in Coventry about civic restaurants of the future. They were a blitzed town with all the problems and difficulties they had a Licensing Committee, of which he was a member, and incidentally he was Chairman of the Planning and Redevelopment Committee. The problem of licensed premises was the most dangerous ground they had had to traverse and it needed a lot of consideration. At the same time they felt their civic restaurants should have a fair field and no favours. It was rather surprising to him to learn that there were brewers associations or people running licensed premises who were having difficulty in paying their rates. It was totally foreign to his conception of the ability of brewers to pay under the basis of rating in this country, because the licensed trade had been very well favoured. They only paid on the basis of the business they did -- not on the basis of the hypothetical tenant or superficial area -- and if their business was bad they paid accordingly. There were plenty of working men who would like to be in that position. To him it seemed there were some crocodile tears being shed on this particular point.

Every local authority would have to face this problem in its own way, said Alderman Hodgkinson. They had to look at the matter not from the point of view of religious sentiment but from a business interest point of view, because if civic restaurants were going to get a place in the sun in the new City of Coventry they would have to compete on equal terms.

Agreeing with Alderman Hodgkinson, Councillor J. Morris, Preston C.B., said that since they opened their new restaurant they had had great demands for a licence and they were anticipating making application at the next Sessions.

A delegate from Scotland (Mr. G. Lawson, Hon. Treasurer, Motherwell and Wishaw) said that whenever a function had been held in their restaurant they had had no trouble whatever in getting a special licence to meet the occasion.

Councillor Miss A.L. Harrison, Malvern, told the conference of a licence which had been granted to the Winter Gardens at Malvern in the face of a great deal of opposition. They applied for it, she said, because a year ago they decided to do their own catering in the Winter Gardens, attached to which there was a large dance hall. Before that the catering was given out to a catering establishment away from the town. That establishment had a licence so that they could always go before the justices and ask for an occasional licence for a dance or conference.

Three rules had been imposed by the Justices when they granted the new licence. Drinks could not be served at what were called the popular dances-dances held twice a week by the local authority and costing in the region of 2/6d.-- nor on Sunday evenings when concerts were held. Otherwise they had a full licence.

The discussion then terminated.

The conference next turned to the consideration of the use of civic restaurants as communal meeting places, for the formation of Youth Clubs and for large scale catering of the cheaper type.

Mr. W.C. Foster, Catering Manager, Rickmansworth U.D.C. said he had always felt that civic restaurants could be used for more than just the serving of cheap meals. In his district they served lunch and closed down at 2 p.m. and many other districts probably did the same. On Saturday afternoons they gave the place over to the W.V.S. for a Darby and Joan Club, which now had nearly 200 members who looked forward to their Saturday afternoon's entertainment. What they had done for the old folk he thought they could do for the young folk. There was no doubt that since the war the spirit of comradeship had been lost and the Englishman had again retired into his proverbial shell. He thought they ought to open community centres and form their own youth clubs. There was no reason why they should not have their own outdoor sports, with cricket and football teams. In this way they could get some of the youngsters off the streets in the winter time. A lot of them had been running round rather loosely without fathers during the war and if youth clubs could be started in places like civic restaurants parents would know they were under good supervision.

With regard to the cheaper type of catering, Mr. Foster said he had had several applications to do weddings for couples who said quite frankly they could not afford the prices the bigger establishments charged. There was a lot of scope for the large scale cheaper catering not only for weddings but for 21st anniversaries and many things like that, where people could settle down to having a nice time if they realised they were not going to have to pay through the nose for it. He was not suggesting they should start undercutting or taking trade away from legitimate ratepayers. They were entitled to a fair crack of the whip but there were always people who would pay the price and there were traders willing to quote them.

Councillor E.A.C. Roberts, Coventry, suggested that large scale catering had given rise to the very serious problem of

A Ministry of Food representative (Mr. T.J. Heath) pointed out that he and his colleagues were present at the conference only as observers. Though he agreed it was desirable there should be some indication of the attitude which the various departments of the Government would take on this rather delicate question he could not give the answer. They were not aware of the precise difficulties involved as between the A.M.C. and any possible association arising out of the conference. He need hardly remind them that the Ministry of Food was very keenly interested in the work of civic restaurants though they were not now so closely connected with them.

"If", the speaker added, "you cannot arrive at any satisfactory method of consultation and negotiation through such a body as the A.M.C., then I think, personally, there can be no doubt we should be very willing to do all we can to help any other association which is prepared to further the excellent service that civic restaurants have provided and, we hope, will continue to be provided in the future. That is as far as I can go"

Voting then took place and the amendment was carried by 38 votes to 37. Moved as the substantive resolution it was carried by 45 votes to 20.

Following a break for morning coffee the conference proceeded to discuss the constitution of the Committee provided for by the amendment. A Dagenham delegate, (Mr. Keith Lauder, Town Clerk) suggested it should consist of three representatives of county boroughs, three of non-county boroughs, two of urban districts, one of Scottish burghs and one of rural districts. He was not sure, he said, what other authorities ought to be represented, but if there were any he suggested they should have one each. It was desirable that every type of authority should be represented.

The Chairman said he felt the Dagenham suggestion would cover the initial stage at any rate. The Committee would be only an exploratory body to see if they could get proper working through the A.M.C.

The Borough Treasurer of Weston-super-Mare (Mr. A.G. Milton) said the seaside authorities had much bigger problems in many ways and should have representation as such. In some ways their problems were totally different and if they were not represented the committee would be quite useless to them.

On the suggestion of the Chairman it was agreed that the claims of the seaside authorities should be noted.

It was further decided that those who had convened the conference, namely the representatives of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Plymouth and Dagenham, should select the Committee of ten to give proportional representation.

The Town Clerk of Dagenham moved the following resolution: "That this conference, which is representative of Civic Restaurant Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, considers that the existing machinery for negotiating wages and conditions of service of civic restaurant employees is unsatisfactory and recommends that a small committee of this conference be set up to inquire into the establishment of more satisfactory alternative machinery to consider all aspects of the question and to make recommendations thereon".

He said that his Council, after nearly three years of argument with trade unions, provincial councils and ministers, were very glad to be able to put forward the resolution to a meeting representative of catering authorities throughout the country. Dagenham was a non-county borough and had four civic restaurants of which they were very proud. They had an annual turnover of close on £50,000 and it was the policy of his council not only to maintain the service but to extend it, yet in existing circumstances they could not have anything but apprehension as to the future. The National Joint Industrial Council Non-Trading Services had asserted the right to determine the rates of pay of catering employees. That was first put forward in 1946 when the restaurants were British Restaurants. Nevertheless his council had protested against that assertion. He was a lawyer but it scarcely needed legal training to reach the conclusion that a council formed to deal with non-trading services had no jurisdiction over trading services, or that civic restaurants were a trading service.

The Civic Restaurants Act, the speaker continued, laid it down that a local authority would lose its powers if it failed to balance its accounts in three consecutive years, and it was on real financial grounds that his council objected to the jurisdiction of the National Council as well as on local points. They had to balance their accounts in competition with private enterprise and they looked to this conference to originate some new method of settling this question which would take into account the responsibility of the local authorities under the Act as well as the right of the employee to be paid the proper rates for the job. They did not want to see the wages of catering employees reduced, but they felt that if present methods continued there would be no civic restaurants, there would be no increases and no jobs. They felt that this was the underlying reason for the absence of extension in the civic restaurant service throughout the country. In Greater London nearly one hundred local authorities managed British Restaurants during the war; now they would find barely half a dozen had more than one civic restaurant. Many had reduced the number to one in order to provide for civic functions. Dagenham deplored that situation.

Nevertheless there seemed to be some controversy as to the solution of the problem. Some said it should be dealt with by the Catering Wages Board; others said a new Whitley Council should be formed. It was hoped that as a result of the resolution he had proposed the various alternatives would be thrashed out and that a solution would be evolved which would be acceptable to all.

A Birmingham delegate (Mr. J.M. Newbury) said that in September last, when the National Joint Council issued their circulars, the cost to Birmingham of the increases was £30,000 a year. At the present time they were paying £20,000 a year over and above the rates laid down by the Catering Wages Board, and the effect on their finances had been disastrous. They felt the National J.I.C. was not the appropriate body to lay down rates of pay and conditions of service for civic restaurants. They were in competition with the catering trade and their rates of pay should be on all fours with those laid down nationally by the catering trade, and not only rates of pay but conditions of service generally. Therefore Birmingham supported the resolution.

Saying that he desired to support the resolution on the ground of simple equity and justice, a Bristol delegate, (Alderman G.H. Watson-Allen) said that Civic Restaurants, whether they liked it or not, were in competition with private enterprise, and in order that they might compete fairly they should have the

same rates and conditions as applied in outside catering establishments. They wanted a committee set up to go thoroughly into the whole question so that they could find a solution fair to the civic restaurants from a financial point of view and fair to the employees as a matter of justice between them and those employed in outside undertakings. They did not want reductions in wages but they did want equality as between the people employed in civic restaurants and those employed by outside private undertakings.

A Newcastle-under-Lyme delegate (Councillor T. Bethill) expressed his inability to accept the Catering Wages Board rates because, he said, they were not trade union rates. At the same time he agreed there was need for some machinery outside existing machinery because they had the anomaly in civic restaurants whereby any Saturday afternoon work had to be paid for at overtime rates. That was very unfair.

Another speaker, (Alderman R. Peart, Leeds) supporting the resolution, said he had never known a more topsy turvy way of dealing with one particular industry than the present machinery. They found first that the Catering Wages Board laid down a rate of 1/3¹/₂d. per hour, one weeks holiday with pay and no sickness pay made up except that the employee drew insurance. Secondly there was the Industrial Canteen Wages Board, whose rates were 1d. per hour more than the Catering Wages Board. They had the Non-Trading Joint Industrial Council, which dealt with civic restaurants. Their rate was 1/8¹/₂d. per hour--5d. more than the Catering Wages Board and 4d. more than the Industrial Canteen rates. Outside that they had all the other conditions attached to the agreement, which said they must pay the employee 13 weeks sickness pay, less insurance, and it was laid down in the last agreement that the employees should have their meals free--a thing which did not obtain in the previous agreement which left it to the authority to please itself. These were the three rates laid down for one particular industry, all varying in wages and the conditions of labour.

"Do not let us malign the A.M.C. too greatly", the speaker continued, "but take some of the responsibility ourselves. Two years ago, when the A.M.C. considered this matter, when the Civic Restaurants Act was passed, a circular was sent out to the various local authorities asking them if they wanted a separate Whitley Council to be formed for negotiating wages and conditions of civic restaurant employees. What was the result? An overwhelming majority of local authorities said they did not feel it necessary for a separate Whitley Council to be set up. Therefore the responsibility for the present machinery is entirely due to the fact that local authorities themselves are to blame".

One of the biggest snags they had to get out of, said the speaker, was to find some machinery by which they could separate the trading department of the civic restaurants accounts from the non-trading department of school feeding. The fact remained that civic restaurants were trading undertakings and the Act laid it down specifically that they had to pay their way. If they were going to be compelled to continue to operate under the Non-Trading Joint Industrial Council it meant that authorities who were not mindful so much of how the money was going to be found would vote increases without regard to whether the trading department could stand the increases.

The Deputy Chairman of Leeds Civic Catering Authority (Councillor J. Hiley) urged the conference to get down to brass tacks. It was all very well, he said, passing pious resolutions and saying they did not want to get wages down but he suggested

that ultimately that was the only effect of the resolution. He wondered if he dare say it, but he did not think the civic restaurants had come to stay. Once they had succeeded in restoring something like normal food conditions he believed and hoped there would be no further need for civic restaurants, and the people whose job it was to look after this side of industry would get on better than "we amateurs". The Catering Wages Board had established a rate of wages and conditions which was already presenting insuperable difficulties. At the hotel at which he stayed the previous night he was told that if they wanted to employ a chef on Sunday they had to pay £6 for that particular day. What hope was there, particularly when they were exhorted to resist further wage increases, of bringing outside bodies up to the level of local authorities?

Speaking as a newly elected member of a Civic Restaurant Committee, Councillor Dixon, Coventry, said that having listened carefully to the discussion he could not help thinking that behind the minds of those who had spoken was the idea that wages of employees must be reduced; in other words there could be no other answer. He wanted to say he would never be a party to that kind of business.

The Chairman pointed out they did not wish, and they could not even if they did so wish under existing agreements, worsen the conditions of their employees. That was not the practical way out. They had to find some other way but they must call a halt to the existing way of going on.

Asked how economies could be effected if it was not intended to worsen conditions the Chairman replied that that was a question which must be settled by the Committee during negotiations. He did not think it could be settled at this stage. He agreed it was very difficult but there were such things as national agreements which could make people they were competing against observe something akin to the conditions they (local authorities) had to meet. That was one practical answer to it, in spite of the consequences to those people. If it were impossible for the experts when what a handicap it must be for "we amateurs" to have to work under such conditions as those imposed by the Joint Industrial Council. It was not for the conference, however, to go into ways and means but to give guidance to the committee they were setting up to get over it.

In reply to points raised by other speakers the Chairman said that Coventry refused to endorse the last award of the J.I.C. They said they could not afford it as they were already paying far above the rates paid by their competitors who were paying Catering Wages Board scales. Even local authorities had a right to second thoughts and when they realised the financial position and the implications of the competition they had got now and could expect in the future they had a perfect right to change their minds. If the conference was any indication of the degree to which local authorities were changing their minds it was a good augury for the future. It was a very difficult problem but if the Committee to be appointed could devise machinery for negotiation which was compatible with all the different kinds of undertakings represented at the conference it would have done a real good job of work.

The resolution was then put to the meeting and carried.

South Shields (Councillor A.G. Ganperty) next put forward a motion that the period of "three consecutive financial years" mentioned in Section 3 (2) of the Civic Restaurant Act, 1947,

should be extended to a period of five consecutive financial years. The speaker said that when the Government insisted at the commencement of the war that the British Restaurants should be established or that they themselves would provide them most local authorities felt that they should do the job themselves rather than allow Government departments to come in. The advantages of British Restaurants became so apparent to most citizens and most municipalities that they decided to carry on the service after British Restaurants ceased to exist. Those who carried on in industrial areas had their civic restaurants in areas catering mainly for the industrial population. They were providing this service to the community because they felt it was helping the community to get a good meal at a reasonable price, but the restaurants generally were not in the best of positions for the average citizens to use them. Nevertheless they decided to carry on certain restaurants and they had done so unfortunately at a loss. They sold out one of the restaurants to private enterprise which, because it had not the heavy responsibilities of the local authority in the matters previously discussed by the conference, was making profits. That was part of the argument that private enterprise could do the job better but it was not true because they were not observing the conditions that local authorities were.

The speaker went on to say that South Shields were now attempting to go out and open restaurants in areas where they would serve all the citizens of their borough and where they felt they would make substantial profits. They could not do that, however, within the three year limit. They felt the Minister should be generous and allow them to carry on for a further two years. He thought no undertaking should be judged on such a limited period as three years. Those who operated municipal transport undertakings would find the citizens very indignant if they cut out the services which were not profitable and gave only the services that paid. They felt the same about municipal restaurant undertakings and that they should continue to give the services the people desired.

Leicester (Alderman J. Minto) seconded the resolution, the delegate remarking that when they took over civic restaurants from British Restaurants they inherited rather a bad legacy. They were down side streets and they laboured under severe difficulties so far as charges were concerned. In presenting the accounts for the last period they had to include charges for two years, which meant that instead of showing a profit they actually showed a loss. It was clear that the repayment period was far too short. He hoped the conference would petition the Minister to extend the period so that local authorities might have time to look around and supply what must be a continued public need on behalf of one particular class of the population. Many of them would regret it very much if civic restaurants went out of business.

The Chairman said it was the general consensus of opinion amongst local authorities that the time limit imposed was largely discretionary with the Minister but it was the very vagueness of the Act which made it such a precarious thing. If they could get the assistance of the Minister on the matter and some definite ruling it would allay the fears of local authorities who wished to branch out into schemes of building restaurants. If the capital outlay was taken into consideration it would give them some confidence. They felt the Act was largely vague in its application and was too much dependent on the discretion of the Minister, whoever he might be. He thought it was vital the resolution should go through because if there was a change of Government next year there would be a change of Minister, and if he carried out the opinions of some

speakers he would be very loath to give the extra two years. They were not in business to make big profits. Any business that did that was doing one of two things -- paying its workers less than it ought or selling its commodities higher than it should.

The resolution was carried and the conference then adjourned for lunch.

At the commencement of the afternoon session Dr. Marshall City Treasurer of Coventry, moved the following resolution "that the attention of the Minister of Food be drawn to the necessity for a Reserve Fund in Civic Restaurant undertakings and that the Ministry be requested to amend the prescribed form of account under Section 3 (1) to allow of the establishment of a Reserve Fund and to provide that any deficiencies which an authority meets from the Reserve Fund shall not be regarded as deficits for the purpose of Section 3 (2) of the Act".

Dr. Marshall said local authorities had had very considerable experience of trading undertakings and they had all found it desirable that there should be a reserve fund. They had never had a trading undertaking so hamstrung financially as the one with which they were dealing. With their other trading undertakings they had always been able to charge unlimited losses to the Rate Fund. That was not so with civic restaurants so it seemed very desirable that they should have a Reserve Fund upon which they could draw to meet any unexpected deficit. It seemed a little anomalous that in the year of grace 1947 Parliament should have passed an Act which precluded a local authority from doing what other prudent business men would do, that was to set aside some of the profits to meet contingencies and an unexpected deficit. It was not much use passing resolutions which would require amendment of the Act of 1947 and the suggestion was that the Minister should alter the prescribed form of account to allow them to set up a Reserve Fund and provide that any deficit they met from the Reserve Fund should not be regarded as a deficit for the purposes of Section 3 (2) of the Act; that was to say so long as they could meet any unexpected deficit by drawing on the Reserve Fund they should not be regarded as making deficits and the three years would not begin to run against them.

Birmingham (Councillor Pagett) seconded the resolution, the delegate saying that it called attention to a very serious defect in the Civic Restaurants Act.

The resolution was carried.

Mr. A.A. Hitching, Catering Manager, Bristol, submitted a motion that the Minister of Food be asked to reconsider his decision with regard to the manufacturing allowances of rationed commodities in respect of bakeries operated by local authorities in connection with their civic restaurants.

He said that at the present time, where a bakery was operated, it was necessary to operate it with rationed commodities which were taken from the ordinary catering allowance for the numbers of meals served. If a private firm or municipal undertaking for that matter, was operating a bakery before the war it would be in receipt of a manufacturing allowance of rationed commodities, and the amount of that was based on the percentage of the amounts used in the bakery before the war. By virtue of the fact that civic restaurants had only come into operation since the war they were unable to share in that. It was quite possible for some private

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restaurant services to take advantage of the manufacturing allowance in order to provide a certain amount of the cakes and fancies, pies and so forth to be served in the restaurant in addition to those served in the shop over the counter. Local authorities operating civic restaurants were in the reverse position. They had to divert part of their urgent and badly needed rationed commodities to their own bakeries in order to produce the cakes and confectionery required.

Councillor Pagett, Birmingham, expressed the view that they were treading on dangerous ground. Manufacturers, he said, were still limited in their quotas and if it was proposed to make any more manufacturing centres it would be necessary to reduce existing allocations. There was a large school of thought which felt that if, when and where there was a further allocation of sugar and things of that kind available the public were entitled to them as an addition to their rations before they were allocated to any manufacturing purposes.

The resolution was carried by 42 votes to 29.

The Chairman initiated a discussion on the licensing of civic restaurants for the sale of intoxicating liquors. He said that while he was not going to move a resolution he thought it would be of some interest to the delegates if he outlined the experience of Coventry in this matter. There was a certain procedure and formality to be adhered to but so far as civic restaurants were concerned there was a peculiar difficulty which was not applicable to other outside bodies. The Act allowed local authorities to choose whether they should have licensed premises or not. That was a matter purely for the local authorities themselves. Assuming a local authority determined that it was desirable then the first part of the procedure must be gone through. That was an application to the Licensing Planning Authority. Coventry decided as a matter of policy that they would apply for a licence for the one particular restaurant at which delegates to the conference had had lunch. They put into operation the necessary machinery under which the Restaurant Superintendent had to make application first of all to the Licensing Planning Authority for their approval. The Licensing Justices would not consider an application unless the Licensing Planning Authority had first approved.

It was true, the Chairman continued, that the brewers were there to oppose the application and they were quite united with the Good Templars, but a much worse snag arose when Judge Hamilton, who presided, pointed out that the Licensing Planning Committee was composed of a majority of members of the local authority that was making the application. They would become judges in their own case and his words were 'Not only was this wrong in law but their was an axiom of British Law which stated that not only must justice be done but justice must appear to have been done and that could not be so in this particular case'.

"If that rules is correct", said the Chairman, "and we must accept it from the learned judge as an axiom of law, then surely it means that civic restaurant authorities are completely ruled out. You cannot get a licence anywhere. There is one way to get over it and that way is we can apply -- I am advised by our legal authority-- for a writ of mandamus, which could compel that particular Planning Committee to adjudicate and make a decision in this particular case. The point is you might lose and if you lost there would be considerable costs to be met either from the rates or from the civic restaurant authority concerned".

Councillor T. Bethill, Newcastle-under-Lyme, described his experiences in making application for a licence for the civic

restaurants in his town. Unlike Coventry, he said, they did have to appear before two sets of licensing people. They had only to appear before the Licensing Justices, but that was no joke. They would find an unholy trinity in which there appeared in opposition members of the Mothers' Union, Boys' Brigade, Girl Guides and other religious organisations, and alongside them the brewers representatives.

"Make no mistake about it", said Councillor Bethill, "that when the brewers representative has had his say you will feel like signing the form of the Good Templars, because they can put a better case than the Mothers' Union and the religious bodies. Nevertheless, we have got to face this fact, that if civic restaurants are going to make application there has got to be an amendment of the law. How you are going to do it I don't know. In my opinion civic restaurants should have the right to sell intoxicating liquors with meals without making application to those bodies who are prejudiced against civic restaurants supplying intoxicating liquors. You can take steps and it will cost you money. It cost our civic restaurants just over £200. You have got to have a K.C. to fight your case and I don't know how we are going to get over this obstacle. It is going to be very difficult for any civic restaurant to put that section of the Act into operation under present circumstances".

Cr. G.B. Gretton, Wirksworth U.D. said he knew that inn-keepers in his district were having a pretty thin time. They were expected to pay their rates each half year and they paid them, but there were some who had difficulty in paying. In his district he did not think any of the religious bodies were against civic restaurants at all. They had been definitely of great help to the civic restaurant and he thought there was something to be said from the religious standpoint. He thought there was enough sale of intoxicants throughout the country by people who had to pay rates and taxes who were doing a good job of work in catering for the public. They were not worried about civic restaurants and not prejudiced against them.

A Bristol delegate (Alderman Watson-Allen) said he hoped the conference would support an effort to secure some clear understanding of how and when local authorities wanting a licence could get it. He said that not because he was particularly interested in the sale of intoxicants by civic restaurants but because he believed that civic restaurants had come to stay and they should be on precisely the same footing as their outside competitors. It should be just as easy and possible for citizens of Bristol who wished to be served in a civic restaurant to get the full service they could get in a private restaurant which happened to have a licence.

Councillor T.H. Frost, Newton Abbott U.D. pointed out that the licensing laws were very complicated and claimed that there was a lot to be said against civic restaurants having licences. If a licence were granted it meant a new licence and that meant the payment of monopoly value. They also had to consider the complications that might arise from the various Children's Acts.

Remarking that he thought he was the only Free Church person present at the conference, Councillor A.T. Sharpe, Stroud U.D., said the Free Churches up and down the country were much opposed to alcoholic drink being brought into civic restaurants. He felt it would create tremendous controversy which was quite unnecessary at this stage.

A Swindon delegate (Councillor W.R. Robbins) said that as a member of the Independent Order of Rechabites and as a Methodist local preacher he supported the move for clarification

food poisoning. Five thousand people died every year from it; the increase in the number of cases of food poisoning was 600 per cent as compared with 1939; 13 people woke up every day quite healthy and did not live to see the following day. There was death in the kitchen and it was necessary to see that catering was done under the best possible conditions. He proposed to move that the Committee which would be selected as a result of the conference should consider the question of the hygienic handling of food so that they could show the public that civic restaurants at least were aware of the danger and were prepared to do something about it. The meal members of the conference had had was a very good one, served in excellent surroundings and in a palatable sort of way. There was no reason why the workers should not always eat like that. That should be the aim of civic restaurants. If it was not they were wasting their time. He would like to see them aiming at a higher standard of catering. He was far from satisfied with the standard in civic restaurants. There was no reason why private enterprise should be better than civic restaurants.

Councillor Roberts added that civic restaurants had the advantage of not having to work for profit. It was true that reserves were necessary for providing a better service but the people would get it back. The danger to civic restaurants came not from the attacks of their opponents or from those who believed in private enterprise but rather from the fact that they did not provide a good enough service for the people, and that the people themselves would refuse to use them. It was far better to give a good service and then they were bound to expand.

Remarking that she ought to give a note of warning, Councillor Mrs. Wilkinson, Urmston U.D., said she felt the Education Authorities were the ones to look after youth. They had all the experience behind them and they also had the money to spend. There was a committee in being in her district and they thought it would be a good idea to use one of the British Restaurants to cater for the youth of the district. They found that all the youth who were worth while belonged to one of the 28 organisations which already existed under the aegis of the Education Authority. The remainder were just the stragglers, who did not want to be incorporated in anything where there was any authority to be used. They were allowed the use of the British Restaurant but it was discovered that staff had to be paid to look after the room which was used and it was used very badly indeed -- so much so that in the end it had to be refused. Damage to the extent of £210 was done and the place was nearly set on fire.

"So I would say 'be careful', "Councillor Mrs. Wilkinson added. "If it is voluntary service it is very difficult because at the beginning everyone is very enthusiastic but later on, when difficulties arise, the voluntary service is apt to fall off. I am not speaking against voluntary service but they find it difficult because they have no authority behind them".

A hope that civic restaurants would be used in future as places where people could meet together was expressed by Alderman Mrs. Simmons, of Birmingham. With regard to co-operation with youth clubs she said that in Birmingham they had a very unhappy experience. She always had great sympathy with the youth of the city but through letting their restaurants to be used by youth clubs they lost their staff. The staff lost interest because having left the place orderly they found on returning next day there were breakages and things out of place. This was due not to badness on the part of youth but to exuberance, and she felt they needed proper places where they could give vent to their animal spirits and where there was nothing

they could knock about.

Alderman Mrs. Simmons went on to say she was one of those who did not think people were going to cease eating out with the end of food rationing. She thought it was good for a woman who had had to keep house all week to be able to go out occasionally and eat a meal she had not got for herself.

The old type of restaurant, with no cloth on the table, rough crockery and that kind of thing, must go and if they were going to continue their existence they must improve the standard. One of the joys she had had in going round the restaurants was to see families sitting down, and that had been because the prices were right. They had done quite a lot of outside catering in Birmingham and people for whom it would not otherwise have been possible had been able to enjoy a wedding or a birthday celebration. They had provided a reasonable meal for 3/6d. which was as much as a good many people could afford to pay. She did not see why the ordinary workers should not be able to have a little binge occasionally.

Mr. J. Benson, Catering Manager, Chelmsford, described the widespread activities of his undertaking in catering for weddings, horse shows, point to point races, flower shows, cricket and bowling matches and other sports events. They had to push the job and keep on their toes all the time, he said, for that was the only way they would make a success of the job. They should not fear outside catering. With regard to letting, he said he would not let to any youth club unless there was supervision and people responsible for any damage.

Complaining of difficulty in getting the licences they required for their undertaking, Councillor Mrs. W. Chappell, Doncaster C.B., said it was her opinion that local Food Control Committees did not give unbiased decisions so far as municipal undertakings were concerned.

The discussion then terminated and the conference concluded with a vote of thanks to Coventry for having made the arrangements in such a satisfactory way.

It was announced that the following authorities were represented at the conference: County Boroughs 40; Boroughs 32; Urban District Councils 31; Rural District Councils nil; Scottish Burghs 5.
