

The National . . .

QUO VADIS?

—by Alan B. Smith

Following the National A.G.M. at Margate, one feels bound to ask the question "Whither Goest Thou".

At the "National" A.G.M. Allan Smith, Chairman of the Leeds Circle and P.R.O. for the Yorkshire Federation spoke strongly against the National's new constitution and in favour of an orthodox 3-tier organisation as employed by other national movements. In this open letter he sets out his fellow-members' thoughts.

The new Constitution put forward by the Executive Committee, and, regrettably, accepted by a small majority of the assembled Members, albeit by a minority of the total membership of the Association, leaves one in a state of doubt and not a little wonderment.

The avowed aim of increasing the individual membership of the Association, by dangling the bait of discounts against the membership fee, to be given as a result of membership of a circle, group, club, guild or whatever, which may be, or may become itself a member of the National Association, plus a further discount if such be in turn a member of an affiliated Federation, is clumsy, inept, and in the opinion of the writer, pre-doomed to failure. When trying to sell something, in this case the benefits of membership, surely the first thing to do is to make the goods offered

sufficiently attractive as to create a desire to buy. It will need a very enthusiastic follower of the hobby to "buy" the sort of offer before him or her.

Apart from the Annual Show, what does the "National" offer? Very little. Apart from a periodic News-letter (itself the subject of complaint at Margate—though admittedly a rather childish one) of which the writer, although having two paid-up "individual" members in the household, has yet to receive a copy. After this nothing at all which is apparent. As a body representing a pastime second only to angling in growth and numbers, the National Executive Committee fails lamentably to exert an influence of any sort.

The new Constitution, as written, will create such difficulties of administration for those people, referred to by the Chairman as being purely voluntary workers, at all levels, that it will soon be almost impossible to find the volunteers to carry on the work.

This, at best, will be one of the consequences stemming from any attempt to impose the new system on the movement as a whole. At worst, it must be recognised for what it is, a failure on the part of the Executive Committee to grasp the opportunity offered by the recent phenomenal growth of the hobby, to establish a truly national organisation, which could by its actions show itself to be THE leader and a powerful influence for good in all matters pertaining to the growth, improvement and development of the members interests, skills and enjoyment of the pastime.

SUPER CLUB?

To the unprejudiced, impartial observer, the "National" as it has come to be called, is merely a sort of super club, running a super competition, which, it must be admitted, it does rather well. As an administrative body, in other directions it fails dismally, a fact amply illustrated by its own shortcomings in the running of the annual general meeting. Both at Harrogate and at Margate (they are wise not to choose a third "—gate"—it might well be marked "EXIT"!) the Executive Committee showed that, though doubtless having within its ranks individuals of skill and ability, as a body it is lacking in the basic knowledge of how such an important meeting as the Annual General should be run and organised. As a glaring example of the truth of this statement, a new Constitution, published at length after many hours of work (however futile), put as a proposition by a member of the Executive Committee could well have fallen for want of a seconder, the E. Committee having neglected to take the elementary precaution of ensuring that a seconder would be forthcoming. It is well known that, in any well run society, a motion failing to secure a seconder, cannot be debated and falls, no vote being possible. Or could it be that a vote would have been taken without debate? One is left wondering!

In the event the meeting was faced with the "Alice in Wonderland" situation of a member from the floor, having seconded the motion in order to open the way for debate, then proceeding to speak against the proposition.

Despite the fact that each succeeding speaker spoke against some aspect of the

proposed Constituion, it was accepted by a slender majority of those present, BUT ONLY BY A MINORITY OF THE TOTAL MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSOCIATION.

As a consequence of the vote, we, the ordinary members, now need to call on the wisdom of a Solomon, to help answer questions which are almost unanswerable. For example, how will the various clubs which may become involved, arrange to meet and select from amongst their members that person who will represent them on the Executive Committee? One person, mark this, so well known to all the membership, as to command the confidence required to be the sole representative on the E. Committee! An utterly impossible situation!

Similarly, how are the Federations to make the choice open to them?

WHAT'S THE BOGEY?

Looking dispassionately over the whole situation as it has been and now is, one is constrained to ask, what do the original individual members fear? Is it fear of change, are they afraid of losing some standing in the community? Are they afraid that they may become part of a bigger and better Association which will eventually enormously increase their prestige, and benefit them as well as everyone else, or are they afraid that someone may come along and help them with the burden of work which they have placed on themselves? Summing it all up, what *are* they afraid of?

The simple straightforward answer to the problem is to set up an organisation similar in concept to so many already in existence, working happily and efficiently, and in many cases profitably. A system which starts at the base with the circles, clubs, guilds or whatever they choose to call

themselves, which are in turn members of a Federation (or not as they wish), the Federations being in turn members of the National body, should they so elect.

Each stage to be entirely autonomous within the general framework of the whole, and its members being automatically members of the stage above, through to the National body. Far from doing away with individual membership, everyone will become an individual member of the National. Or is it perhaps this that is the bogey which arouses such fear in the minds of some few people—that they may lose their own personal charisma in the flood tide of the vastly increased numbers of members which may be created?

Should such be the case (and what a poor, baseless thing it surely is) by all means alleviate the feelings of these narrow minded folk by creating a special section of vice-presidents, or patrons, call them what you will, who will maintain their individuality in return for a special contribution to the funds. Let them NOT, however, adopt a "dog in the manger" attitude, for as surely as the sun rises and sets they will destroy themselves, for the whole mass of opinion of the thousands enjoying the hobby will rise up against them, and by sheer force of numbers overcome the resistance which seems in the past to have been a drag on progressive action.

In conclusion, it is essential to ask, when does the new Constitution take effect? In most properly run organisations any changes in rules, etc., become effective immediately after the A.G.M. at which they are passed unless otherwise specifically stated. It now seems that the Executive Committee wish to adopt some parts of the new scheme whilst holding back on others. Just exactly what do they intend? Will they enlighten us all—please?