

Chapter 10. THE RESOLUTION 83-8 SAGA

In 1993 Leicester Rotary Club once again faced something of a constitutional crisis. Rotary International put forward proposed Enactment, known popularly (or infamously) as Resolution 83-3 at the Council of Legislation at Monaco, making it compulsory for all pre-1992 Clubs, such as Leicester's, to adopt the Standard Rotary Constitution. The Leicester Club resisted such an overture back in 1950, as mentioned earlier in this history, but this time the matter took a rather serious turn.

The constitution of the Leicester Club is something the members cherish, and any threat to their independence would then, as now be totally unacceptable to the Leicester Club Council. The irony of this situation was that this Constitution was written in 1916 and was actually used as a model by Rotary International when they were formed 1992! Orders from above were not always welcome and the Leicester Club felt alone, until the minor miracle occurred. Contacting other Clubs formed in the early days, Leicester found that they were in the eminent company of clubs in a similar situation in New York, Paris and London. Talking to the President of the New York Club, Leicester Secretary M.J Kennedy (from whose 1982/3 report this information is derived) discovered that New York were filing a lawsuit asking for an injunction to restrain dramatic sequence of court hearings followed. RI's general although he had already left for Monaco conference on the second occasion. RI was subsequently forced to withdraw the proposed Enactment and to substitute a much watered-down version "urging clubs to adopt the Standard Constitution by January 1, 1985." The cost of victory was high- the New York Club face a legal bill for 30,000 dollars and Leicester Rotarians sent a contribution towards defraying New York's expenses. A letter of gratitude returned from New York, plus a standing invitation to lunch!

The Leicester Club's Constitution sets out duties for its Club Service Committee which are different from the Standard RI Constitution. Club's with Standard Constitutions look to Club Service for total running of the Club, whereas Leicester has the given responsibility to the Secretary and several other Committees, such as Membership and Classification. This allows Club Service free to "promote fraternal feeling in the Club," fostering its social life and encouraging a spirit of fellowship and goodwill among members.

Leicester had felt more than annoyed at events as the trouble had originally begun when the Rotary Club of Birmingham, Alabama, USA, had made a ruling that only white members would be accepted at meetings. However,

the matter did not end at Manaco. As only one of the five Rotary Clubs in the entire movement acting on its own constitution, Leicester faced continual sniping from RI for some time to come. In 1984 RI again requested Leicester (and presumably other mavericks) to adopt the Standard Rotary Constitution. Rotary International said that without necessary amendments there would be a loss of standing for the Club in the community, a suggestion ridiculed by Leicester members.

A further broadside was delivered by RI in December 1998 when RI (founded, as stated earlier, in Chicago in 1905 and named 'rotary' because members took turns for meetings in their homes and workplaces) introduced a resolution proposing the abolition of Rotary International in Britain and Ireland (RIBI). As the only territorial group in RI, this proposal was regarded by both RIBI and Leicester Membership as "scandalous" and every effort was made to preserve RIBI's status.

Then in October 1995 it was learned that RI had amended Standard Constitution by-laws so that instead of potential member, not knowing initially that he was being considered for membership, he would in future actually help in the completion of initial forms. This form would include a disclaimer which would avoid legal action should he not be accepted as a member. The Leicester Club membership decided that the current electoral procedure worked well enough and that the Club would keep its time honoured ways.

Rotary International's last tilt at the Leicester windmill came in May 1996 with a letter from David Morehen, general secretary Adrian Keene, concerning the matter of Rules and Standard Club Constitution laid down by RI at Caracas in 1995. Morehen said that RI acknowledge that the Leicester Club has done its best to incorporate certain amendments to the SSC, but the RI committee agreed that the result was less satisfactory marriage of the new provisions with the old. For example, there were no provisions in the Leicester constitution for the election of former Rotaractors (young people who help with activities other than various committee functions, such as appeals and preparations of Christmas luncheons) to additional active membership, a decision that was brought into effect at the 1992 Council of Legislation and updated at the 1995 Council.

Nevertheless, said the letter, the General Council would be asked at their July 12 meeting to approve Leicester suggested amendments as far they went, since not to do so would leave the Club without constitution which did not accept former Retractors. Or retired persons as members, "and this

was not in keeping with the spirit and provision of the changes made throughout the rest of the world..” Morehen then asked for specific identification of the rules, which Leicester took issue, which would perhaps make it possible to make substantial progress towards uniformity, “even if we cannot go all the way”. Leicester agreed. The letter, in almost the form of a olive branch, represented the last of the RI’s attempts this century to regularise Leicester’s near unique position in Rotary and, in spite of the (to the uninitiated) arcane arguments surrounding an equally arcane series of differences between RI and Leicester, the whole needs recording as a tribute to the steadfastness of the Leicester membership in preserving its rightful and distinct place in Rotary.