

## **Committed (or should be!)**

Norm Inval (for it is he) casts aspersions at Committees.

I remember in the good old days when Notocactus was Notocactus and I had a full head of hair, I was new to Cactus Committees and felt honoured as a young member to host a Branch Committee meeting in my house. So I made heaps of sandwiches and provided lots of cake, you know what most Committee members' teeth are like. In those days we had a Secretary who did not believe in agendas or minutes, so we did not know what we were going to be discussing, or, indeed, if we had been asleep at the previous meeting (you know what most Committee members are like) we did not know what had been decided or, indeed, discussed. Anyway, the discussion in my house was entirely focused on a charming television weather girl called Charlie Neil, whose cheerful demeanour and provocative manipulation of her remote control lead used to excite the more elderly among her male admirers. The burning question was: to judge from her accent, where did she come from? Was it Berkshire, or Herefordshire, or even Shropshire, maybe Wem, Homer or Wigwig? When members had eaten all my sandwiches and cake (you know what they are like), they got up and left. Each in turn asked me, as I said my goodbyes at the gate: "Why did we come here at all?"

At least that was a reasonably civilised and good-humoured meeting. There was once a meeting at a Midlands Branch (identity withheld to protect the guilty) which broke out in such violent argument that the neighbours called the police!

A friend of mine worked in Moscow for some years during the Soviet regime. He told me that the Russians liked dictatorship because nobody would accept any responsibility for anything, and admired one strong man who would take responsibility for everything. You know what I am going to say! Branches have become extinct because nobody would lend a hand at running them. Whose job is it to ensure that there is at least one member willing to stand for each post at the next A.G.M.? Why, the Committee! So how often does it happen that members attending their A.G.M. learn that an important officer has resigned or emigrated or disappeared? And are then pressurised at the A.G.M. into accepting a job that they have never contemplated? I remember a Branch (that shall remain nameless for the next 75 years) where they appointed a Secretary in this manner and then spent the rest of the year undermining him.

One well-known Branch (and, I may say, one of the more successful ones) used to operate on the Stalinist principle of Democratic Centralism. The Secretary let it be known that if anybody challenged any of his decisions he would resign from the Society and take up lace doily making. He said to me one day: "You know, our Committee is absolutely useless". "Why," I asked, "How often does it meet?" "It hasn't met for six years!" he declared. After a pause for thought, I ventured to ask: "And whose responsibility would it be in your Branch to convene a Committee meeting?" An even longer pause. "Er... mine."