

39, Sinclair Mansions, Shepherd's Bush
London, January 17th, 1944 W.12

Dear Comrade,

We have been hoping to see you in London during the last few weeks. From all accounts it does not seem to have been possible. We regret this very much, the more so since developments within the A.F. and relationship between the A.F. and a group which has assumed control of the publications have been strained for some time and have now come to a crisis.

1. As you know friction at first arose ostensibly over the admission of the Spanish comrades and other petty personal issues which have been consistently used by the so-called Freedom Press Group to camouflage their real intention of maintaining control of the means of publication and exercise a dictatorship over the movement. Fortunately some of us foresaw the trend of events and made an attempt, with a small degree of success, to reorganise the movement. If such reorganisation had been successful all the assets of the movement and its offices would have reverted to the control of the movement as a whole. In this way all officers would have been elected at a National Congress and would have been subject to immediate recall and rotation of office.

2. As you will know in the past the Editorial Board for example has been determined by the London Group. Frequently, however, decisions arrived at by the Editorial Board which were a direct reflection of the opinions expressed by the London Group and by comrades in the provinces were later sabotaged by those actually controlling the printing of the paper and other propaganda material.

3. While this divergency of outlook existed those members of the A.F. in actual control of our publications together with a chosen few formed themselves into an autonomous group, the so-called Freedom Press Group (members: J.H. V.R. P.E. F.A. P.S. G.W. L.W.) This group became more and more removed from the organic control of the movement and frustrated every attempt at organisational discipline within the A.F. Two things brought the situation to a head: the CID raid on the Belsize Rd. premises and the termination of the lease and eviction order of those same premises.

4. The CID raid necessitated the coming of a delegation from Glasgow to discuss the problem. At a joint meeting ostensibly held for that purpose the A.F. were politely told that both the raid and the eviction order - which only transpired at that meeting though notice of the fact had been given to the so-called F.P.G. and withheld from the movement several weeks previously - "were none of the A.F.'s business and would be handled exclusively by the F.P.G.". The A.F. London Group was naturally unable to accept this high-handed dictatorial attitude, and though a conciliation meeting was held later in the day, with the Glasgow comrades again present, no solution to the problem was possible in view of the "F.P.G.'s irresponsible attitude.

Their position was further clarified by the presentation of an ultimatum contained in a letter to the A.F. of January 6th in which

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they stated that they had the legal control of the assest of the movement but were prepared to collaborate with the A.F. on certain terms. These terms virtually reduced the A.F. to a form of tutelage and could not be accepted.

Consequently the A.F. at its next meeting on January 7th decided that "the suggestion of F.P.G. that it was for the A.F. to collaborate with it on these or any other terms is unacceptable. It is for individuals and small groups to collaborate with the movement".

Two members of the A.F. London Group were delegated to go to Glasgow and present the position to the Glasgow Group. This was done at a meeting held in Glasgow on Thursday January 11th. At this meeting the Glasgow A.F. passed the following resolution: "that F.P.G. as a gesture of good faith hand over the publication of "War Commentary" to the A.F. of Gt. Britain; that a National Congress be held as soon as possible to reconsider the entire basis of organisation."

Two delegates from Glasgow presented this resolution to the so-called F.P.G. on January 13th and were informed: that the resolution was in conformity with the intentions of the F.P.G. but they refused to commit themselves to a definite answer on the question of War Commentary. Instead many side issues which had already been fully discussed were raked up again to obfuscate the issue. Finally F.P.G. stated that they would present their answer to the Glasgow comrades through a delegate of their own.

The matter was considered at the meeting of the A.F. held the day after in the presence of the Glasgow delegates and the unanimous opinion of the group was "that the Anarchist Organisation cannot discuss or negotiate its publications or any other business of the Federation with individuals or groups who chose to place themselves outside it."

It was also agreed to keep in close touch with Glasgow through a periodical exchange of delegates until such time as a National Congress could be convened (tentative date fixed for Easter), to reorganise and expand the London Group on a sound basis and to redouble our propaganda efforts by all means at our disposal.

This is the story as at present and you will see from it that we are determined to build up a strong organised movement, free from personal issues and parochial theoreticians who are unable to put their Anarchism into practice even inside the movement. We confidently count upon you to help in creating a strong group in Bristol. To this end we should very much welcome a visit from you to become conversant with the London Group as at present constituted and to discuss organisational problems. Alternatively please let us know whether a London delegate should come to Bristol.

Please reply at the earliest possible date.

With fraternal greetings,

Cliff Houlden pp.
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