

At the International Anarchist Congress of 1907, Malatesta and Vorhyzek made the following statement which was unanimously accepted by the delegates present:

"An Anarchist Federation is an association of groups or individuals in which no one can impose his will or limit the initiative of others. It has for object to change all the moral and economic conditions of present society, ~~and to this end it employs all possible.~~"

Called
The London Anarchist Group has called this Conference because in this country there are two organizations, a situation which is confusing to sympathizers, and necessitates tedious explanations. It is made all the more ~~satisfactory~~ unsatisfactory by the fact that one of these organizations makes continuous attacks on the other. Hitherto these attacks have not been answered, because the Union of Anarchist Groups has not thought it in the interest of the Anarchist movement to draw the attention of people outside the movement to such splits. To judge by letters ~~received~~ from comrades abroad ^{by} the Freedom Press Group the Anarchist Federation Group has not thought it necessary to keep these domestic problems of the Anarchist movement a private matter for the movement alone. Indeed, they have extensively used the columns of a paper ^{called} "The Word" to make libellous attacks on comrades of the Freedom ~~Press~~ Press Group. "The Word" is a paper which has had no opportunities in the past for attacking our movement, and its editor, Guy A. Aldred has made full use of the material gratuitously presented to him by Tom Brown, Ken Hawkes and others associated with the Anarchist Federation Group.

The London Anarchist Group takes this opportunity of stating that it is opposed to factional struggles. They evidently consume the strength of the movement, and thereby reduce its capacity for forwarding the ideas and ideals of Anarchism. The London Anarchist Group does not expect all sections of the movement to agree on every point; nor does it deprecate the free discussion of theoretical differences. But, like Malatesta and Vorhyzek, it does demand that every individual and every group should be allowed complete freedom and complete autonomy, and should not have its work interfered with by any other group. Such interference is not anarchistic, and the hostility betrayed by such actions can only harm the movement as a whole.

The London Anarchist Group would not have called this conference, nor raised this matter, but for two incidents in which members of the Anarchist Federation Group did in fact ~~interfere with the work by use~~ ^{use} personal violence in a way calculated to obstruct the activities of another group. The purpose of this conference is to make certain facts known - not however with a view to perpetuating the split within the movement, but in order to clear away misunderstandings, and to put forward certain proposals which, it is hoped, will facilitate the work of the movement as a whole, and so advance the aims of Anarchism.

The two incidents referred to were as follows:

On Wednesday, January 30th. 1946, four individuals, Tom Brown and Ken Hawkes of the London Group of the Anarchist Federation, and Bill Borland and Tom Reilly of the Glasgow Group, went at 9 a.m. in the morning to the flat where Vernon Richards and Marie Louise Berneri live. ~~When the door was opened to them they~~ They carried arms, and when their door was opened to them, they thrust their way in by force, and proceeded at the point of the gun to demand money. This money, they claimed, was to be used to bring out the paper "Direct Action". The two individuals from Glasgow had evidently been led to believe that Richards lived on the movement, and that the furnishings of the flat had been acquired out of the proceeds of the movement. During the ensuing discussion, they lounged on the divan, and smoked Richards' cigarettes.

After considerable discussion they were given a cheque for £25. This was presented on Friday afternoon, February 1st. 1946, by Bill Borland, who endorsed it. Borland was photographed as he left the bank by comrades who were indignant at the incident of Wednesday morning, and were determined that no denials should be possible. As a matter of fact, there has been no attempt to deny the action we have outlined, the persons involved preferring to seek to justify it.

The second incident followed on Friday, February 8th., when the same four individuals, accompanied by three others - that is to say, seven in all - went down to the Express Printers at about 9.10 a.m. Disregarding the protests of the compositor, an old man of 70, and of the machinist, they proceeded to break up the type for the issue of "Freedom" dated February 9th. 1946, with hammers and chisels which they had brought for the purpose. It seems that they expected to find that the photographs taken at the bank would be published in "Freedom". When they found that no such publication was intended, however, they nevertheless ~~proceeded~~ proceeded to break up the type just the same. Much of the type had to be reset, but some of the hammer blows are visible in the paper as printed. These are to be found on pp. 1 and 4. The delay caused by this action prevented the paper from being available for street selling either in London or Glasgow on the Sunday when the largest sales are expected. It amounted to an attempt to destroy a whole issue of "Freedom".

~~When at about~~ But the acts of violence did not end there. When, at about 10 a.m. Vernon Richards went down to the Express Printers, he was assaulted by the seven individuals referred to, and his maskintosh was torn to shreds. When however a policeman, evidently informed of the fray by ~~other~~ passers-by who had witnessed it, arrived on the scene to investigate, it was Richards who interviewed him, and persuaded him that there was no cause for interference.

We mention this episode of the policeman in order to draw attention to certain points. First, nothing could have been easier than for Marie Louise Berneri or Vernon Richards to have frustrated the object of these people when they held them up at their flat, by calling neighbours or the police. Needless to say, such a course was unthinkable for Anarchists, and that is why our comrades did not avail themselves of such protection. ~~But~~ ^{And} it is clear that the perpetrators of

the hold-up expected them to act in this Anarchist way. That they succeeded in their object is thus partly due to the fact that they chose to demand money from Anarchists rather than from members of the general public who are unhampered by scruples about calling the police, or making obvious and public a discreditable episode inside the movement.

At the Express Printers, however, there are men employed who are not Anarchists, and there are also other tenants of the same building unconnected with the Express Printers. It has therefore fallen to the comrades of the Freedom Press Group to dissuade these people from seeking police protection. Despite such precautions, however, the Special Branch of the C.I.D. did get to know about the affair. They claimed to know of a similar attempt to be made at the Express Printers on Friday 22nd. February - that is to say the day on which the (rs next issue of "Freedom" would be printed. Three days before this date, therefore, members of the Freedom Press Group advised members of the Anarchist Federation Group that the Special Branch were aware of the incident, and that if any similar escapade were contemplated, it had better be abandoned. Our comrades were assured that no such further incidents were in preparation, and they accepted these assurances. The C.I.D., therefore drew a blank when they turned up on February 22nd.

We wish to point out therefore, that the comrades of the Freedom Press have ~~be~~ felt themselves to be under the necessity of protecting their assailants from the likely results of their own folly.

It will be observed that these incidents have been described in this statement in language which has been deliberately kept as moderate as possible. Nevertheless, we take a very serious view of the behaviour described. If these incidents were widely known, it would cause great harm to the Anarchist movement. Furthermore, to offer violence to another group in the movement is calculated to cause breaches which will take a long time to heal, ~~it~~ if, in-deed, they can be healed at all. But we have felt it best to use this moderate language because we consider that if any good is to come out of this conference it can only be achieved by taking a reasoned and sober view of these events in relation to the work of the movement as a whole. They have done enough harm already, and we present this statement to-day in order to prevent them from causing any further harm to our movement.

The comrades of the Freedom Press and of the London Anarchist Group have, so far, regarded discussion of these incidents as confidential matters concerning the ~~movement~~ Anarchist movement and its sympathisers alone. We have therefore not, hitherto, discussed them with persons outside the movement, and we do not intend to do so.

We have mentioned certain slanderous attacks which members of the Anarchist Federation have made against the comrades of the Freedom Press. It is therefore necessary to make the position of the Freedom Press clear in order to remove the misconceptions which ~~are~~ exist.

The Freedom Press was founded in 1886. It has always been run by a group, and has been in existence long before the various organizations which have attempted to organize the Anarchist movement in this country. In 1927 ~~the work~~ the old "Freedom" ceased regular publication, and Tom Keell its editor and publisher retired to White-way colony. For over twenty years he had borne the main weight of the work of producing the paper and the Freedom pamphlets. He was responsible for ~~it~~^{the work}, and this responsibility involved him in a prison sentence during the war of 1914.

In 1936, Vernon Richards started to bring out "Spain and the World". Tom Keell was the nominal publisher from Whiteway, but the responsibility fell on Richards as editor. When Tom Keell died in 1938, Richards and Marie Louise Berneri undertook the work of issuing new pamphlets as well as an Anarchist paper. Many comrades have assisted, and still assist in the work of distributing Freedom Press literature, but the nature of the work of producing it necessitates this work being undertaken by a group of limited size. At the beginning of the war, Vernon Richards and M.L. Berneri were assisted in this work by Tom Brown and Albert Meltzer. Brown has since ceased to work for Freedom Press, for reasons which will be described. Albert Meltzer has also ceased to do active work for the Freedom Press ~~work~~, but for reasons of call-up difficulties. He remains, however, actively in sympathy with the present Freedom Press Group, but is unable to help because he is serving a sentence in a Military Detention Barracks.

Of the present members of the Freedom Press Group, apart from Vernon Richards and Marie Louise Berneri who have been ~~working~~ actively and continuously concerned in ~~the work~~ its work since the Spanish Revolution of 1936, and Lilian Wolfe, who has been working for Freedom Press since before the war of 1914, the others have joined in the work since ~~1939~~ 1939. Two of the comrades have been active since 1940 (Peta Edsall and John Hewetson), two since 1941 (George Woodcock and John Olday), one since 1943 (Philip Sansom), and one since 1945 (Inge Roskelly). This work has been regular and continuous except when it has been interrupted by prison sentences.

At the present time there are eight comrades in the group working, (Vernon Richards, Marie Louise Berneri, Lilian Wolfe, Peta Edsall, John Hewetson, George Woodcock, Philip Sansom and Inge Roskelly) and one (John Olday) who is in a Military Detention Barracks - nine in all. Of these nine, five have served prison sentences on charges directly or indirectly arising out of their work for Freedom Press.

None of these comrades is paid by the movement, or has ever received any money for work done for Freedom Press. On the contrary it is ~~well~~ well known that they have put money into the movement. All moneys received by Freedom Press is used to defray the costs and to finance the production of further literature.

Now a few words on the position of Express Printers. This ~~is~~ is a printing establishment which employs paid printing operatives. Though it does work for the Anarchist movement, it has to pay its way and takes on commercial work in order to ensure this. Its nominal owner, Vernon Richards, however, never has, and does not now receive any income whatsoever from it. In order to make clear who is responsible for the Express Printers, it is necessary to know something of its history.

In April 1942, V.R. was advised by a printer acquaintance that a printing business was for sale. This was the Express Printers. V.R., M.L.B. and J.H. looked over the ~~pkx~~ premises and consulted two independent acquaintances in the printing trade (R.P. and J.B.) about its suitability. Assured that it was a feasible proposition, the problem of raising the purchase price remained. Our comrades therefore raised the matter with the comrades of the then-existing Anarchist Federation (London and Kingston Groups) who agreed to help to raise the necessary sum. In actual fact they raised less than one seventh of the sum required.

F.P. Members of the present Freedom Press Group raised 26% *Comrades not in AF or AF groups raised 4%*
 V.R. by means of ~~a private loan~~ ^{from the anarchists} raised 55%

*Jim Barker
Frank Soden
Tom Brown*
 The comrades of the Anarchist Federation raised 15%
 In January 1945, J.W.B., F.S., and T.B. demanded their money back. They had attached no conditions three years before when they gave it. Nevertheless the money was refunded to them in full. These persons had never taken any responsibility for solving the many problems involved in running an organization like the Express Printers. By demanding their money back they deprived themselves of any right whatsoever to control it.

It is important to emphasize that the movement as a whole was not consulted when the three comrades took the initiative regarding the Express Printers. Only the London and Kingston Groups were consulted. The Glasgow comrades were only informed later. Needless to say, the Glasgow comrades, having no responsibilities in the matter, have not presumed to claim any "right" to control it.

Much capital has been made by those who wish to disparage the comrades of the Freedom Press out of the question of "legal ownership" of the Freedom Press and of the Express Printers. We would remind you here that both concerns are non-profit making, and that the so-called "legal owners" have never derived a penny from them. How then did the legal responsibilities for the Express Printers come to be assumed by V.R. and for the Freedom Press by J.H.?

In November 1943, Detective-Sergeant Jones and Inspector Kane of the Special Branch of the C.I.D. called at Freedom Press offices in Belsize Road, and asked for Cliff Holden's whereabouts. In the course of the interview Det.-Sgt. Jones mentioned that the Freedom Press was not registered under the Registry of Business Names Act 1916, and that severe penalties could be imposed for non-registration. The matter was discussed at the earliest possible opportunity by V.R., M.L.B., J.H. and T.B., and it was decided immediately to register the Freedom Press in J.H.'s name, and the Express Printers in V.R.'s name. T.B. agreed to this decision. It was clearly understood at the time that if any prosecutions against the publishers or the printers followed, these comrades would, in law, be deemed responsible.

A few days later Det.-Sgt. Jones called at the Express Printers and enquired about its registration. The date of registration was Dec. 3rd. 1943. At no time before this were either the Freedom Press or the Express Printers registered. The members of the then-existing Anarchist Federation were informed of this decision, and the Registration Certificate for Freedom Press was actually displayed on the office wall for

several days. No objections of any kind were raised at the time.

Subsequently in 1945, when V.R., M.L.B., J.H., and P.S. were arrested and charged under Defence Regulation 39a, the records regarding the registration of the publishers and the printers of "War Commentary" were brought forward as evidence for the prosecution against V.R. and J.H. Legal ownership has therefore brought no profit to these comrades; but it has brought nine months imprisonment.

Until the summer of 1944, decisions were taken after discussion in the Anarchist Federation when there was unanimous agreement. A Until that time no decision was taken as a result of a majority vote. Voting has always been opposed by Anarchist movements all over the world. The International Anarchist Congress at Amsterdam in 1907 repudiated voting; The French and Italian movements reject it; and the Union of Anarchist Groups, at their conference in Glasgow in December 1945 explicitly excluded voting as a means of reaching decisions.

Hence, when T.B. and K.H. proposed in the summer of 1944 that all decisions in the future should be reached by majority vote they were strenuously opposed, particularly by the comrades with most experience in the movement. Nevertheless they persisted and the issue split the movement in London. In an effort to maintain unity and harmony both M.L.B. and J.H. wrote letters to the Group urging the necessity for mutual respect and mutual trust in the movement. Nevertheless, T.B. and K.H. secured a majority, at a meeting at which V.R., P.E., J.H., A.M., and J.O. abstained from voting, and later left the meeting in protest against this un-Anarchist procedure.

T.B. and K.H. then proceeded to disregard the three-part programme which had until then been regarded as the basis of the movement in the London area, and introduced considerable numbers of new members who would not have qualified for membership under the old programme. The members of the Freedom Press Group could not therefore regard the decisions of this new Anarchist Federation as binding in any way. They nevertheless sought to reach a solution.

We would like to stress here that under the three part programme of the old A.F., the Freedom Press was in no way committed to accept any control by the Anarchist Federation. The position of the Freedom Press was to be submitted to a general congress, but this never took place. Since during that time the FP accounts were checked by the London

On December 12th. 1944, the offices of Freedom Press, the Express Printers, and the flats of V.R. and J.H. were raided and searched by the CID. The comrades of the Freedom Press Group had hoped that these attacks by the authorities would bring unity to the movement; but instead the Anarchist Federation Group renewed their attacks with even greater bitterness. The Freedom Press comrades therefore realized that a split was inevitable, and attempted to ensure that the work of the movement should be hampered as little as possible. They therefore addressed certain proposals to the Anarchist Federation Group in a letter which will now be read out:

Kingston groups of the AF, who also elected the EP. At no time did the side of the Anarchist movt claim to control it.

V. Richard
P. Edsall
J. Havelton
A. Miller
John O'Way