

TO THE COMRADES OF THE A.F.  
.....

THE EVENTS of the last few weeks and especially of the last two days have scarcely left my thoughts since Sunday morning. I do not remember when I have lost myself in my daily work with such relief.

During these weeks I have heard accusations of the most serious kind levelled not only at myself but at those comrades whose devotion to and work for the movement ought to cherish more, perhaps, than any other comrades. These accusations came in the first instance from outside the English movement; though serious, they were not a fraction so humiliating as when the same accusations were upheld and even repeated by comrades in the A.F. itself. It is this latter fact which makes me write this letter.

The accusations principally implied bad faith in myself and ML and V. But the epithet "Stalinism" was also applied, and the suggestion made that our conduct constituted a dereliction of anarchist principles. I do not think the comrades can honestly maintain that to resent such accusations is to show merely "personal ~~hosti-~~ ~~ility?~~ dislike", or to display "egocentricity". Nor do I think the comrades have the right to ask anyone to try and "rise above" the resentment they occasion. These accusations were made in writing and have gone into the ~~archives~~ records of the A.F? to the shame of the movement (in my opinion) no attempt has been made to refute these slurs against the revolutionary character of the comrades in question.

In my own life, I do not tolerate anyone calumniating in my hearing either my friends, or my colleagues at work, or - least of all- my comrades in the movement. To omit to challenge such calumnies is a breach of loyalty of which I should be ashamed to be guilty. When Wilhelm Liebknecht, after Bakunin's death, defamed

his character, he was immediately challenged by Malatesta. When Johann Most denigrated Berkman he was immediately attacked by Emma Goldman. Whatever one may think of the methods employed to make them retract their words, one can only admire the loyalty of those who rushed forward to defend a comrade's good name. I have had defamatory lies aimed at me before - by Gape, by Peter Bindley (at the meeting with the LAM), people for whom I have no respect and to whose calumnies I am indifferent. When Guy Aldred attacked me, I was imprisoned and was grateful to be defended by KH in War Commentary. But Aldred I hold in contempt because of his petty attacks on Emma ~~Goldman~~ Goldman, and because he defended the Bolsheviki when they imprisoned and assassinated the Russian Anarchists. He merits contempt also for his trivial attack on Tom Brown.

Attacks coming from Spanish comrades are much more distasteful, though they are not nearly so humiliating as when they are echoed within our movement itself. Despite everything, however, because above all I ~~have~~ prize the unity and good comradeship in our movement, I was prepared to swallow these insults, hoping that the comrade's tolerance of them (levelled as they were at members of the AF) was but the expression of momentary heat and <sup>s</sup>passing antagonisms within the movement. I think the agreement to collaborate between the AF and the CNT group is sufficient to show ~~that~~ that I was ready to do my part in attempting to suppress what I regard as legitimate <sup>and necessary</sup> self-respect.

Nevertheless, I did not allow the insults from comrades in the AF to pass by in private. I faced TB with his assertion that I was acting with an ulterior ~~no~~ motive, i.e. in bad faith, on the following Tuesday night. So far from withdrawing his assertion, he repeated it. With regard to KH, a comrade in the movement had attempted to heal these wounds by speaking to each of us privately. In the hope that KH was animated by the same desire for <sup>solidarity</sup> as I am, I <sup>the</sup>

the hope that KH was animated by the same desire for good relations as I am, I therefore approached him, and suggested that we should talk things over. In the face of these overtures, what am I to think when, on Sunday, a man who has specifically and publically charged me and my most valued comrades with Stalinist behaviour and the wish to sabotage relations between our movements: and that at a general meeting of all the comrades of the CNT group <sup>is proposed for membership of the AF?</sup> What am I to think when my own comrades, far from indignantly ~~replying~~ rebutting these calumnies, offer to honour the calumniators with membership of the AF?

I do not think I, still less comrades ML and V, have deserved such treatment of the movement. If the comrades believe the CNT insults to be true (and they were virtually repeated by TB, and were specifically approved by KH at an earlier meeting of the AF, when Lilian asked him if he approved the letter from the Commission), if they do not feel they can deny these charges, they ought to expel me from the movement. For my part, I cannot work with those who do not trust me, nor can I regard them as my comrades. I am sure the comrades have not thought these things out, but I appeal to them honestly to ask themselves whether, if they were in the position I find myself in, they would feel other than I do? I assure them that I have never felt so unhappy in my relations with the movement as I have done in these last days. I do not see how I can continue in the movement while the comrades continue to accept these insults levelled at the movement as a whole, and at certain comrades in particular.

A final point. I have tried in this letter to speak for myself alone. But the accusations themselves as well as the anger I feel at those who defame them, has sometimes compelled me to identify myself with certain comrades. That cannot be helped. Yet they are not committed by anything I say, nor do they know that I am  
 r  
 w t h g

writing this letter. And now I want to say certain things which they perhaps would not care to say. It has repeatedly been charged that the movement has failed to extend solidarity to the comrades of the Spanish movement and have even made them feel unwelcome. Comrades in the AF have uncritically repeated the charge, alleging "hostility" between the English and Spanish comrades in the past. In my opinion, the comrades ought to be made aware of the fact that when our movement consisted almost solely of ML and V, these two comrades, then barely twenty years old, arranged for the board and lodging of about thirty Spanish comrades for some months, and for some ten of them - Pradas amongst them - for a year. Comrade V lost time in his examinations because he devoted his entire day to extending solidarity to the Spaniards. Although the comrades did not agree with the policy contained in it, out of loyalty to the Spaniards they printed and distributed the pamphlet "Three Years of Struggle in Spain". I have been in contact with the movement since a year after the Spanish war ended, and I know how many times and in the teeth of how many disappointments ML and V have asked the Spanish comrades to help in the work of assisting our movement. Perhaps the comrades will realize how I felt when I heard our movement taxed with failing to welcome Spaniards as comrades; perhaps they ~~will~~ can guess my feelings when I saw my own comrades accepting such charges at their face value, and themselves accusing the "comrades who ~~xx~~ have been in the movement longest" with evincing "hostility" towards the Spaniards.

These matters have not been raised before because to tell the truth about them baldly would have been openly to impugn the sincerity ( to say nothing of ordinary gratitude) of the Spanish comrades who originated the charges. It would have put obstacles in the way of collaborating with the Spaniards <sup>as a group</sup> if the issue of their attitude to the war were satisfactorily cleared up. Comrades who have joined the movement since the Spanish War ought to honour comrades ML and V for not defending themselves by revealing the above ~~charges~~ facts; they ought to recognize that their silence on this matter indicates their willingness not to raise matters of the past as further bones of contention. Let the comrades ask LGW if what I have said is not the truth. Let them ask TB, whose silence on the matter does him no credit.

\* \* \*

In conclusion, I can only reiterate what I said on Sunday: for a comradely feeling to be maintained in the movement, it is of fundamental importance that comrades should respect each other; and that the comrades have no right, and should not have the desire, to trample rough-shod on the feelings of other comrades. If I did not feel that I have never been guilty of such trampling myself, I should not feel able to appeal to comrades now. But it is humiliating to have to make such an appeal at all.

Your fraternally,

JH

KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY  
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE