

To the Comrades of the Anarchist
Federation in Glasgow

Dear Frank,

From our conversations with Jimmy Raeside, it seems that there is some misunderstanding regarding the affair of Desmond Fenwick; so we are sending you the full facts of the case so that the matter can be cleared up once and for all.

D.F. was a trusted comrade formerly, and was one of four comrades who used to open and deal with the mail received at our office. At the time when suspicions concerning him began to be aroused in us, he had just returned from Oxford where he had been working, and before finding himself a room, he had been staying with Peter and me. Just because he was on this kind of intimate footing with us, we were extremely unwilling to accept the evidence which aroused our suspicions. And before we had conclusive evidence, we had asked him frankly whether he was taking the money or not; in this we hoped that the matter could be cleared up amicably and without the need for it to go any further in the movement than the group of comrades immediately concerned with the office work. D.F. however met our frankness with a tissue of contradictions and transparent lies. Meanwhile he suggested that certain other comrades should be regarded with suspicion. When it became evident that D.F. was the guilty one, these attempts to pass off the blame on to other comrades was regarded by all of us down here in the most serious possible light.

Now the matter might have ended there. By continuing to work hard for the movement, D.F. could at length have recouped himself. Instead he has endeavoured by all possible means to stir up discontent inside the movement. This he did by means of Bill Gape, with whom he was in contact (without our knowledge). They tried to detach the Kingston comrades by insinuating that the comrades at the office were a bureaucratic clique aiming at dictatorship over the movement. Since the office comrades have to take a number of practical decisions without it being possible to consult with all the other comrades, it was not difficult to give this insinuation a certain ~~skanexkran~~ appearance of support. As the Kingston comrades say in the letter from them which we enclose, relations between all our groups down here have never been better than they are now that D.F. and B.G. are out of the movement. These two also tried to stir up trouble in the same way between us and Mat.K. and were assiduous in putting round the story that Fredrick L. had been "expelled". This in spite of the fact that they knew that F.L. had resigned after a full and entirely amicable discussion of his points of difference with the other comrades. A note of that meeting (on March 3rd., 1942) states that "the resignation of F.L. was accepted, but his support was accepted so far as it does not conflict with his differing principles". Our relationship with F.L. has been more friendly since he left the A.F., than it was when he was a member.

(In this connection, M.K. tells me that George Plume has been putting round the same story in Glasgow regarding F.L., only he adds as well that M.K. was "expelled" at the same time. If you have an opportunity

to expose this tale we should be grateful. M.K. is an old and active supporter of the A.F., and the position of F.L. is as described.)

To return to D.F.. Not content with attempting to stir up strife inside the movement (that he was partly successful in this is shown in the enclosed letter from the Kingston comrades), he has formed a movement of his own. Now, some months before D.F. was expelled from our movement, he had proposed the setting up of a Youth section of our movement. After full discussion, this suggestion was turned down by the comrades on the grounds - among others - that there was too much work already for the available comrades, and the suggested "Libertarian Youth" would divert energies from more needed work. D.F. accepted this decision. Yet the first thing he did when he had left the movement, was to start a "Libertarian Youth". Had he been innocent and misunderstood, as he claimed, he ought still to have owed a loyalty to the needs of the movement. Yet he has throughout used the Libertarian Youth to try and make covert attacks on our movement, by means of the kind of lies I have already indicated.

D.F. was all this time living on the proceeds of book stealing. (He has since been arrested on that charge, convicted, and put on probation) He therefore had plenty of time and a fair amount of money and since he is an extremely resourceful and energetic person, we were not disposed to dismiss his activities, much as we would have liked to have done so. We thought the L.Y. a potential source of harm to our movement; nevertheless we took no action at all for six months.

Bill Gape, meanwhile, when he was still associated with us, had tried to form a "Proletarian Youth" movement. Since he has always been looked upon as an irresponsible element, we made no protest ~~as~~ though the arguments against forming a youth ~~as~~ section inside the movement applied with equal force to the "Proletarian Youth". Soon however, it became apparent that G. was working in collaboration with D.F.. I therefore asked him quite frankly and openly whether this was so, but he strenuously denied it. But a few weeks later, at a social which he had organized, he committed the movement to support for a meeting of D.F.'s group at the Conway Hall - without, of course any authority for doing so.

At the next meeting of the A.F., without waiting to be attacked, he accused "certain Comrades" of being saboteurs intent on wrecking the movement, and preventing its expansion. When the comrades insisted that he employ direct speech instead of insinuation, he admitted that the "certain comrades" were MLB, VR, JH, and ?TB. These suggestions were not taken very seriously by the comrades, and B.G. therefore resigned. Since then he has been as active as D.F. in attempting to defame the movement.

Among the methods employed in this way, D.F. and B.G. have got printing done by a former printer of ours, giving him to understand that the order came from us, and therefore presumably secured credit. Fortunately the printer happened to mention it when ringing

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us up about another matter, so we were able to indicate that the order did not, in fact, come from the F.P.. More important, however, than this, they booked a hall in the name of the Freedom Press. Subsequently they cancelled the meeting without cancelling the hall, so that we were let in for the hiring fee. We explained that we had not actually done the hiring, and so far have heard nothing more about it. We have therefore taken steps to see that none of our regular business contacts can be imposed upon in this way, but these two instances indicate the kind of thing we have had to guard against.

The principle plank in these people's insinuations, however, is that they are accepted by the whole movement except the "bureaucratic dictatorship within the movement" - I.E. the office comrades. It was to show how untrue this statement is that the Kingston comrades decided to write to you separately, and it was in order to warn you against these people that we rang you up a few months ago when it ~~was~~ seemed likely that B.G. was going to Glasgow.

Hence we were very surprised and shocked to hear that D.F. had spoken from your platform. We knew that he would come back to London and be able to say that he was accepted by the Glasgow comrades, and had even spoken for them, again insinuating that it was only us who refused to have anything to do with him. And of course this is exactly what has happened. His Glasgow visit has been a great feather in his cap.

Although we did not know the precise circumstances of your ~~quarrel~~ quarrel with the Marxist Study Group, we have always refrained from ~~it~~ direct connexion with them, because we accepted your position on the matter without question, and left it at that. When we are asked why we are not in touch with Willie McDougal or Aldred, we always reply that we leave all such matters in the hands of our Glasgow comrades. After we had phoned about B.G. and D.F. we assumed that you would adopt the same attitude, and were accordingly astounded to learn that the latter had spoken at your meetings. We therefore decided to lay the evidence for the whole matter before you so that you can judge for yourselves.

It may seem that we have attached an altogether disproportionate amount of weight to this matter. We can only say that we have at no time taken any action in this regard without full and careful discussion, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of taking action or letting it go in the light of its likely effect on the movement. From the first we have felt that the whole question brings up the matter of revolutionary morality, and that we should not allow ourselves to take a lax attitude. In the light of what D.F. has done to our movement both inside and outside it, we do not consider that we can afford to have our movement associated with such people. All the left wing groups have had this sort of thing happen to them, and they have always tried to shirk the issue and cover up the facts, because they are scared of being accused of taking a "bourgeois moralist" attitude. Needless to say, this accusation has been directed at us

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also; but we believe in a revolutionary morality and are well able to show wherein it differs from bourgeois morality.

We hope that you will read the enclosed documents, in spite of the labour involved, and its distasteful nature; because if the matter is not quickly cleared up, it may be that D.F. has succeeded in planting seeds of distrust between ~~xxxx~~ the Glasgow comrades and ourselves. Jimmy Raeside certainly seemed ready to take a very critical attitude towards our actions in this matter, and we should be very sorry indeed if this sordid business in addition to the anxiety and revulsion which it has occasioned in us, should also be the source of friction between our two groups.

With fraternal greetings,

J.A.

(for A.F. London)

Kingston Group, A.F.
January 31st. 1943

Frank Leech,
Glasgow.

Dear Comrade,

The Kingston Group wish to place before you facts relating to D. Fenwick. We hold ourselves responsible for the action taken in conjunction with the North London Group.

We had been primed on the situation before it came up for discussion at the AF. We were convinced from the evidence submitted that a "frame-up" was being engineered by the N.L. group. Consequently we decided to resist the N.L. Group and defend Fenwick. After a full and frank discussion when Fenwick was present, we were compelled to support the N.L. Group, without even any consultation with each other at the meeting. We even manoeuvred Bill Gape in the chair so we should not ~~have to~~ be restricted in any way in trying to ascertain the facts. You will appreciate that the evidence must have been very convincing for us to change our attitude.

The most deplorable situation was one in which Fenwick availed himself of the hospitality of one of the comrades, and on leaving expropriated the keys of his flat and the office. We could have overlooked any other act which had been committed against his comrades, but when keys are taken and the blame for lost money is "planted" on some other persons entirely unconnected with the AF, we submit the situation became very serious. We did not consider this from a moralist viewpoint, but from the fact that anarchists must protect themselves from the enemies within. An injury done to a comrade is reflected on the whole. If this had happened outside the movement we should not have taken any action. At the same time we should have condemned that action as bringing discredit on other comrades. We have explained this to Comrade Raeside and no doubt he will be able to give the doubters some satisfaction.

Since this incident the AF has been involved in needless expense from commitments made in the name of the FP. Now we hear that F. is out on bail for book stealing and even F.L. refused to stand surety. In the light of these events, how could we recommend him to Glasgow as a reliable comrade.

Bill Gape's position is somewhat different in as much as he tendered his resignation, and this was accepted moved by the Kingston Group to end a difficult situation. Here again we were assured that a hall booked for FP was manoeuvred by a comrade from N.L. Group, as a matter of spite. Gape stated he booked the hall, had cancelled it, and had a receipt for the money deposited. After six weeks of earnest endeavour to induce him to produce the receipt, we finally have the affair opened again, have an assurance he will attend the meeting and produce the documents, he phones through to say he will not put in an appearance. From ~~the point of view~~ this point we concluded we had been led by the nose, and were being "used" to discredit a comrade. Our position was that if you have reason to question a comrade's conduct, you should be prepared to state your case openly.

We agree they were unfortunate incidents, the Kingston Group

however felt they could do no other that protect comrades who were being attacked in a systematic unscrupulous manner.

Since these transactions have been taken no friction of any kind has arisen; before it was continuous, and Kingston was being "used" as we suggest that an attempt has been made in Glasgow.

This letter to endorse the action of the N.L. Group was made by the Kingston Group, as we felt that the N.L. Group was not entitled to be pilloried for a position of which we were partly responsible.

Hope this now satisfies the position,

Greetings from the comrades,

signed

J.B.

T.W.B.

F.S.