

The Anarchist Federation is not a federation at present, but an unwieldy group, some of whose members are joined together by common aims and beliefs.

From the comments that were made when our group letter was read to the last meeting, it would appear that many members either chose to ignore or are ignorant of the contents of the third part of the programme. S.P. suggested that "if we did not accept the form accepted by the A.F. we should resign or be kicked out. He further suggested that we claimed representation in and allegiance to the A.F. only on certain points. This can't be" (Minutes p.81). The foregoing plus our group statement to the A.F. plus the comments on the proposals of R.A. and C.H. form the basis of our contribution to the discussion on "reorganization".

1. Contrary to what S.P. says, we accept not part of, but the whole of the A.F. programme contained in parts 1 and 3. This cannot be said of him or of his colleagues who have been admitting new members as if the A.F. were a social club. The "constitution" of the A.F. is a very carefully thought out document on which many members present spent months of discussion and consideration before the final draft was produced. And reference back to the minute book of that time shows that the question of a probationary period - as T.W.B. called it - was essential. This is a sample of the minutes for Dec 3rd 1941:

T.B. Favourable to coming into the open. Conditions for membership are necessary. 1. agreement, 2. work, 3. dues.

T.W.B. Probationary period necessary.

V.R.

E.F.P. will be probationary period.

T.B. A.F. necessary as a backbone for F&F.P.

At a later meeting a statement of the Kingston group 13/1/42 (Minutes p.16).

"with the unanimous approval of all Kingston comrades". "That we should openly declare the A.F. and its objects wherever there is a group. Should be a militant organization. A subsidiary organization is desirable for a probationary period, e.g. F.F.P. members". The minutes add that "T.B. approves".

It is clear that all agreed that work and a probationary period in a sympathizers were necessary. This is contained in Part 3 of the programme. Of how many members present can it be said that the above conditions have been observed. If not, why not?

T.B. has recently told one active sympathizer that "the third part is out of date, and was adopted at a moment when invasion was feared and the movement was preparing to go underground". This statement is typical of the kind of backstage misrepresentation which has characterised the activity of certain members. The invasion scare was during the summer months of 1940. The third part of the programme was fully discussed at a meeting of the A.F. on Jan. 13th 1942. T.B. and K.H. were present. Each point in the programme was numbered and discussed separately. Except for one small point which is not in issue today and was settled later, every paragraph received unanimous approval and agreement (old minute book p.18). One point was singled out for special emphasis (General Tasks, para. 3):

"The avoidance of all internal dissension on minor squabbling, especially of a non-essential nature such as characterises many radical parties. Not to undermine the organization by disputes of no great concern."

2. The A.F. according to its constitution is "a Federation of groups and individuals". We are still in agreement with that part of the "constitution" so far there have been only three groups in the A.F. & two official groups, Kingston and ourselves, and one unofficial group which operates behind the scenes. Objection has so far been raised against our group only, though it is composed of A.F. members all of whom have passed through the "probationary" period and who have worked for the movement.

3. Difference of opinion is not a justification for "resigning or being kicked out" as S.P. suggests. Part 3 says "A member cannot be expelled simply because on some points he adopts a different attitude from the majority but only for dishonesty, disloyalty etc." Our opinion is that the A.F. as envisaged does not require reorganization. "A reorganization of groups and individuals" was the intention. The A.F. was generally motivated by a strong desire to propagate the ideas of Anarchism and to build up a movement on solid foundations. Unfortunately a certain section of the group now thinks that the foundations do not matter so long as the building work is proceeded with. Compare the mentality of someone who says "We cannot consider our personal feelings but only the welfare of the movement which demands strict revolutionary morality" with someone who calls himself an Anarchist seconding a motion that "All decisions be made by a majority vote" and then with others, ignoring Part 3 open the doors of the A.F. to all and sundry. We regret to say that it was T.B. who both penned the noble statement on "revolutionary morality" and seconded the reformist motion of decisions by the counting of noses.

We remain faithful to the ideas and ideals which resulted in the A.F. "programme". All we can say to the newcomers, some of whom we know to be motivated by a strong desire to work for the movement, is "don't be 'used' in a factional dispute, and don't think that because we have not approached you that we do not wish to work with you. There is work for all. There is work for those who want to propagate pure Anarchism: for those who can make their approach in the factories or on the land. That is the way to build up a solid movement. Each according to his ability. But the results will always be in direct ratio to the amount of work put into the effort. And this is where the difficulty comes in. There are some who work for the movement to the best of their abilities. There are others who talk but who would like to direct the activities of the workers. It is a kind of attempted exploitation of the enthusiasm and energies of some of the others. If you take the trouble to read our statement and verify the facts for yourself by meeting and working with our Group, you will understand what we mean. But we will not indulge in a campaign of vote catching since as Anarchists we believe voting to be harmful."

At the time of writing the only proposals received for reorganization are the joint proposals of R.A. and C.H. In spite of disagreements on a few important points we think we think it is a document which gives some ground for hope.

(a) We agree with the proposals of decentralisation of groups.

(b) We agree with the "voluntary associations of individuals willing to develop areas...is necessary". We would not however limit groups to a geographical basis. Groups might in some cases be functional. We would add however that mutual trust, friendship and frankness are essentials for a militant group to function effectively.

(c) We do not agree that "membership to be determined by broad acceptance of anarchist principles... instead of three part statement now advanced." This would be to advocate that a movement of sympathisers should discuss the confidential business of the movement. Acceptance and implementing of the 3rd part are essentials. This would not exclude groups from working with non-members who are anxious to work for the movement. Done fide workers could later be proposed as members of the A.F.

(d) "Periodic meetings". In favour that monthly meeting should be held, but that it should be a delegate meeting. More ground can be covered.

(e) "rota of comrades... and movement". The comrade proposers clearly do not understand the nature of the general office work when they suggest a rota. This should not however prevent comrades from undertaking certain office work such as dispatching the paper and dealing with certain correspondence (e.g. contacts, enquiries).

(f) "Provinces: correspondence to be handled... in particular areas". This is a most important proposal and has been operating in the past but through no fault of ours, in most cases only in theory.

(g) We do not understand what is meant by the "editorial composition of the Freedom Press". Freedom Press is obviously not the name of either an Anarchist Federation or of a "revolutionary labour movement". Freedom Press's role is adequately dealt with in our Statement to which we would refer comrades.

(h) Syndicalist propaganda groups. Agree on principle. Before this can be translated into fact our position to the 100 and 1 problems in industry etc. have to be made clear in our own minds. Few members are clear on the questions. We would also make it quite clear that the members of a Syndicalist organization are not necessarily Anarchists (e.g. I.W.W. and C.N.T.).

For the Freedom Press Group,
F.A., P.E., J.H., V.R.,
P.S., G.W.
It was not possible to arrange a meeting with L.G.W.

London, 22.10.44.

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