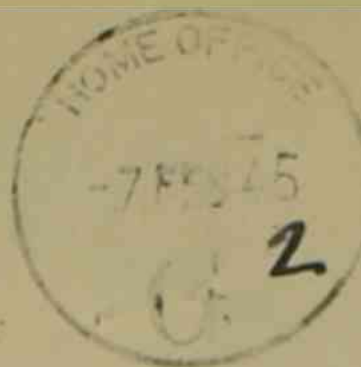


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Feb. 1945

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DISTURBANCES

The Freedom Press Anarchists and
H. M. Forces.

Note

Report.

MINUTES

The note within includes some interesting information about the historical background and political beliefs of the anarchist movement, and about the leading personalities of the Freedom Press group. It shows that during 1944, these people have adopted a "forward policy" towards members of H.M. Forces. Beginning with "historical" articles in "War Commentary" about past mutinies and revolutions, they became gradually bolder. M.I.5 do not think that these people at present constitute a grave menace, but they take the view that they have been undermining systematically the loyalty of H.M. Forces with some degree of success in certain cases, and that their activities might, during the periods of demobilisation and occupation of enemy territory, present a serious problem.

A number of the soldiers mentioned within are in non-combatant units - R.A.M.C., N.C.C., Pioneer Corps, which suggests that they may already be pacifists. [There are various links between the P.P.U. and the anarchists]. Two of them are ex-members of the B.L.F., from which it appears that anarchism may attract people who are disillusioned and opposed to the government but have no very settled political convictions. The anarchists are also said to have had some success in leading normal young men astray, e.g. Corporal Deas.

M. 7. lay by j.m.p. 7.2.45.

SECRET

THE FREEDOM PRESS ANARCHISTS

AND H.M. FORCES.

1) The Freedom Press Anarchists are a group of Anarchists with Headquarters in London and a Branch at Bristol. They are the publishers of the fortnightly paper "War Commentary". They have been carrying on their activities at an office and bookshop in Belsize Road, Swiss Cottage, a studio in Camden Town, and premises in Whitechapel occupied by a firm known as Express Printers, who print the paper.

The following persons have been among those most actively engaged in the management of the Freedom Press in recent times:-

Vernon RICHARDS, who, in August 1940 changed his name by deed poll from Vero Benvenuto Constantino RECCHIONI, the British born son of a well known Italian Anarchist. He is registered under the Business Names Act as the proprietor of Express Printers, and describes himself as the Secretary of the Freedom Press.

Marie-Louise RICHARDS, nee BERNERI, his wife, the Italian born daughter of a well known Italian Anarchist who was expelled from Italy and subsequently assassinated in a political dispute. She is registered under the Ministry of Labour as manageress of Express Printers.

Dr. John HEWETSON, British, a qualified medical practitioner. In 1940 he seceded from the Peace Pledge Union, considering its pacifist policy too tame, and opened an Anarchist bookshop. It was destroyed by enemy action and replaced by the present bookshop in Belsize Road. He is registered under the Business Names Act as the proprietor of the Freedom Press. In 1942 he served a sentence of 'six months' imprisonment for refusing to undergo medical examination for military service, and is now conditionally registered as a Conscientious Objector.

John OLDAG @ OLDAY, whose history is given briefly in para. 9 below.

Dorothy EDSALL, HEWETSON's mistress.

Philip SANSOM, the tenant of the studio at Camden Town, now under arrest for unlawful possession of an item of British Army equipment.

2) The Freedom Press Anarchists derive their beliefs from Michael BAKUNIN (1814-1876) who formed in Paris in 1848 an anarchist party, having as its object a violent social revolution whereby complete liberty for all would be achieved through the utter destruction of all existing political and social institutions. 'A revolutionay' declared BAKUNIN, 'must let nothing stand between him and destruction'. His disciple, Peter KROPOTKIN, thought that all forms of government were, and must be, oppressive; that mankind was essentially good and became bad only when political and other institutions interfered with his personal liberty; and that the goal of free development could be attained only in an anarchic society.

The Freedom Press Anarchists generally accept the teachings of KROPOTKIN, but have hitherto tried to secure their aims, not by violent revolution, but by intellectual propaganda leading eventually to a general strike. As will be seen later, however, the idea of revolution by force has now found a place in their propaganda. It follows from the beliefs of the Freedom Press Anarchists that it is wrong for any person or body of persons to exercise any form of compulsion against another. This is the doctrine which they preach and with it they advocate complete freedom of speech and action and the organisation of society by means of free associations between producers and consumers.

They condemn and would abolish as inconsistent with their doctrine:-

All forms of central and local Government;

All forms of law, and the police by whom law is enforced;

All private ownership of land or property whereby, they say, the 'capitalists' exploit and enslave the 'workers';

All religious bodies, and all social institutions, such as marriage by which liberty of individual action is restricted; and

All frontiers and 'patriotic prejudices'.

/Above all,

Above all, they are most bitterly opposed to warfare in general, and the present war in particular, and to the existence of Armed Forces, and the discipline necessary to maintain them.

3). They are not pro-Nazi any more than they are pro-British or in favour of any particular nation. They regard the British and Allied systems of Government with as much disfavour as the Nazi regime, and accordingly are unwilling to fight for any of them. Their attitude is illustrated in many of their cartoons and writings, in which Allied politicians and generals are portrayed alongside Hitler and the Axis generals, without any distinction, tearing the 'workers' to pieces. An example of such a cartoon, believed to be by John OLDAG, is contained in Appendix 1.

4) Their propaganda in both 'War Commentary' and their other publications is precisely what would be expected in view of their aims as set out above. They habitually deride, criticise and belittle our institutions and way of life, and our political and Service leaders. They give publicity to any injustices or grievances and to any trouble or friction between employers and employees. They openly approve of strikes and condemn the Defence Regulation which has made them illegal. They draw attention prominently to all hardships and sufferings caused by the war, and generally paint the picture of this country in the gloomiest possible colours.

5) Their whole teaching is calculated and indeed designed to undermine the determination, loyalty, morale, and discipline of readers in the Forces. They are perpetually preaching against war. They approve those who refuse to register for military or fire-watching duties, and applaud their 'stand for freedom'. They give publicity to letters from Servicemen complaining of Service conditions, holding up their officers to ridicule, and boasting of acts of indiscipline and the dissemination of anarchist propaganda. Above all, their doctrines are calculated to undermine the will to fight, since they teach that the present war is pointless, as it will merely substitute one set of masters for another, and that the real struggle will begin afterwards, when the workers rise and overthrow the capitalists.

6) The Freedom Press Anarchists are not numerous, even in London and Bristol, and they have scattered followers, but no organisation elsewhere. 'War Commentary' is believed never to have had a circulation exceeding 5 thousand copies (the print circulation figure as reported by the Police). In view of this, and the fact that their aims have been so completely unconstructive and unrealistic, it has until recently been considered undesirable to give publicity to their propaganda by taking action against them. Those of their followers who evaded service or disobeyed orders could be and have been dealt with by ordinary police and disciplinary methods.

During 1944, however, there have been clear indications of a more positive policy, an increased boldness in asserting it, and a greater following in the Forces. These matters must be considered in detail.

7) Information received from secret sources during the last year has left no doubt that the Freedom Press supporters in the Armed Forces were increasing both in number and activity in spreading its propaganda. The Anarchists were clearly watching the Forces closely. From time to time they sent out circular letters addressed specifically to sympathisers in the Forces. In that dated 28.1.44 they congratulated friends and comrades in the Forces and claimed that the number of new comrades and sympathisers had nearly doubled, the truth of which there is no reason to doubt. 'War Commentary' usually contained a section devoted to contributions from the Forces. In April 1944 its price was reduced to the obviously uneconomic sum of 1/- per annum to members of the Forces, compared with 6/- to anyone else.

8) Enquiries into individual cases confirmed the impression that a sustained attack was being made on the loyalty of the Forces.

Information from a secret source showed that a small group was being formed in the Royal Armoured Corps, the ring-leaders being No.7957721 Tpr. HEAD and No.7957735 Tpr. William LEAN. It was evident that these soldiers were in possession of a quantity of Anarchist literature, were in frequent touch with the Freedom Press, and were persistently spreading Anarchist propaganda. By September 1944 it was possible to obtain sufficient evidence to put the case of Tpr. HEAD to the D.P.S. in accordance with the usual procedure in Internal Security cases, and his discharge from the Army S.N.L.R. was authorised by the A.G. and duly carried out.

Similar action was not taken against Tpr. LEAN, his Commanding Officer considering that his influence was negligible, and it being hoped that the action taken against HEAD and other circumstances might exercise a salutary influence on him. These hopes, however, have not been justified. It is now known from secret sources that
/LEAN

LEAN is receiving a dozen copies of each issue of 'War Commentary' (obviously for distribution), and that he sends obnoxious contributions to it for publication. The search referred to in para. 19 below revealed that, far from having no influence on his fellow soldiers, LEAN had induced thirty-three of them to sign a letter written by him protesting against the policy of the Government in the liberated parts of Europe.

Tpr. LEAN is one among a number of soldiers who have succeeded in giving their officers the impression of satisfactory service, whilst it is known from other sources that they are spreading subversive propaganda.

9) A feature of 'War Commentary' during the period under review has been the cartoons and writings of John OLDAG (or OLDAY).

John @ Arthur William OLDAG was born in London in 1905, the illegitimate son of a German woman. He is therefore technically a British/German dual national. He was, however, taken to the U.S.A. before he was one year old, and at the age of eight to Germany, where he was educated and lived until 1937 when he was 32. He first came to this country in that year, but left shortly afterwards. He returned to England immediately after the outbreak of war, and then put forward plans for acts of violence against the Nazi leaders. His suggestions, however, were not accepted. In July 1941 he was called up for service in the Pioneer Corps, and in March 1943 he deserted.

In May 1943 the Freedom Press published a booklet entitled 'The March to Death' by OLDAG under the name John OLDAY. It contained scurrilous anti-war cartoons with subversive captions. It is described in the Freedom Press' own advertisement of it as being 'in the estimation of the publishers, the most uncompromising attack made on War, and on the existing political and economic systems since the outbreak of hostilities, and one of the most effective pieces of anti-militarist propaganda yet published'. In 1944 the Freedom Press published a further pamphlet of offensive cartoons by him entitled 'The Life we Live, the Death We Die'. Meanwhile, throughout 1944 'War Commentary' contained a series of subversive cartoons believed to be the work of OLDAG. Finally, he is believed to be the author of the articles in 'War Commentary' referred to later, which appeared over the signature 'Michael PETERSON'.

We therefore find 'War Commentary' having as its principal cartoonist and one of its main contributors an Anarchist of enemy origin who has succeeded in evading arrest as a deserter for over 18 months. He was arrested at the very end of 1944, and is now serving a sentence of 12 months' imprisonment for using false identity papers. It is now known that he was living on the Camden Studio premises under yet another name, Frank ALLEN, and there can be no doubt that those responsible for the Freedom Press knew all along who he was.

10) Reference has been made to the development in the Freedom Press propaganda of a more positive policy. This development was a serious one, for the new theme was Mutiny. It will be shown in the following paragraphs how the Anarchists, starting with cautious 'historical' articles, gradually became bolder until by the end of the year they were publishing bare-faced incitements to disaffection.

11) In 1942 they had published the first translation into English of Anton CILIGA's pamphlet 'The Kronstadt Revolt', in which the author described the mutiny of the Russian sailors in 1921 from the point of view of the mutineers. He explained how and why they failed, and pointed the moral for the future, remarking that 'each new revolution begins not on the basis from which the preceding one started, but from the point at which the revolution before it had undergone a mortal set-back.'

In 1944 'War Commentary' developed this theme with increasing boldness. In February it contained an account of a mutiny and counter-mutiny among German prisoners picked up by an Irish ship. In the two May numbers appeared two articles entitled 'Pages of Revolutionary History - Mutiny in the British Army' by Tom BROWN, describing the disorders in the British Army at the end of the last war.

It may be mentioned in passing that the first number issued after D Day contained a leader entitled 'Invasion - For What?', pouring scorn on the liberation of Europe, and containing the significant sentence 'We have to say to the soldiers at the invasion that the Nazis are not your last enemies, and that after you have defeated them for your masters you will find many enemies to fight at home'.

In July an article entitled 'How Wars End' by 'Michael PETERSON' described mutinies in Armies in the past, and the conditions which brought them about.

/Applying

Applying their lessons to the present he wrote: "Nor can the ruling class any longer rely on their big guns, which so often in the past defeated insurrections, for the weapons which yesterday were exclusively in the hands of professionals tied to the ruling class, and whose mere presentation had a paralysing effect on the unarmed workers, will be at the disposal of workers in uniform, well experienced in their use".

The mid-August number showed that the seed was taking root. It contained a letter from an anonymous soldier, stating that "Fascism is in the making. The Army's attitude in the coming revolutionary situation will be determined by the officers, unless the rank and file, learning from the last war, forms its own soldier councils and unites with the workers in the defence of the Social Revolution".

Meanwhile, in the same month, the Freedom Press published a pamphlet entitled "The Wilhelmshaven Revolt - a Chapter of the Revolutionary Movement in the German Navy, 1918-1919" by an author who concealed his identity under the name 'ICAHUS'. This was a new publication, and the date of its production is significant. Like the Kronstadt pamphlet, it not only describes the mutiny of the German sailors at the end of the last war from their point of view, but it suggests the lesson for the future. 'Here ends a chapter - but a chapter only - of the history of the revolutionary proletariat of the sea' (page 36). The preface by the Freedom Press Anarchist Mat KAVANAGH contains the unforgettable sentence: 'Even the British Navy has had its bright pages, in its mutinies at Spithead and the Nore, and its Invergordon'. KAVANAGH himself reviewed the pamphlet in 'War Commentary', writing: 'It is deeds, not words, that make history, and for that reason all workers and students of social history must read this booklet It is such knowledge we must all have for the coming stormy days that are ahead. For all who are weather-wise can see that the storm clouds are gathering . . .'

12) In October 1944 two important events occurred in Freedom Press propaganda. The first was an article in 'War Commentary' on 'Fraternisation' by 'Michael PETERSON' following a cartoon in the previous number on 'No Fraternisation - by Order' attributed to OLDAG. The writer of the article, after discussing recent instructions given by the military authorities on the subject of fraternisation, concluded with these words:-

'The situation which is developing will induce men to put their class loyalty before their military allegiance. The question before them will be whether they shall risk the penalties attaching to fraternisation or betray their corporate loyalty as members of the international working class, whether they shall support imperialism or class solidarity! The workers in uniform, when they rediscover their common interests with the workers of all nations, cannot accept the conception of being impersonal robots at the service of their rulers against the interest of the ruled. They will tear down the artificial barriers between races, and no orders will prevent their fraternisation".

13) The other important development in October was the issue by the Freedom Press of a circular letter dated 25.10.44 to members of the Forces. A copy of this (numbered by us for ease of reference) is in Appendix II. It will be seen that it contains invitations to sympathisers to introduce new comrades (paras. 1 and 6), to pass on 'War Commentary' to room-mates and then to 'contrive to lose it in some convenient spot'. (para. 4). It urges them to spread Anarchist views in discussions (paras. 5 and 6). Para. 7 reads as follows:-

'Such discussion groups mentioned above may form the basis for future Soldiers' Councils. It is expected that an article will appear shortly in "W.C." on "Soldiers' and Workers' Councils" and we hope to receive many criticisms and suggestions from you. One of the most important questions, in our opinion, is that of the action of Soldiers' Councils in a Revolutionary Situation. Whilst many comrades know the role played by such councils during and after the last war, in Russia and Germany, it would seem that only a few know of their vital function and mission.'

Para. 8 invites them to send in reports and grievances for publication. Para. 9 refers to John OLDAG's cartoons being displayed in units 'often provoking interference from ignorant N.C.O.s and officers'.

14) This circular, a copy of which reached the military authorities from an anonymous source during November, clearly links up both with the previous articles on mutiny and with the three numbers of 'War Commentary' published on the 1st, 11th and 25th November. Each of these contained one of a series of three articles entitled 'All Power to the Soviets', the third of which was signed by 'Michael PETERSON'.

The first of these contains a discussion on 'Soviets' or Soldiers' Councils during the French and Russian revolutions, including the following:-

"While

"While the advocates of political action try to direct the revolutionary impulses of the workers into the forms of parliament and State organization, the workers themselves realize from the outset of every insurrection the necessity of adopting the classical tactics of anarcho-syndicalism; the general strike, the destruction of the hated institutions and symbols of power, the disarmament of reactionary forces and police, fraternization with the soldiers, the arming of the people, the expropriation of land, factories, transport, and governmental stores, and finally, the creation of their own instrument of Social Revolution, the workers' Councils, on the basis of mutual co-operation and control from below".

The second article, in the 11th November number, was less objectionable, but a leader in that number discussing the Resistance Movements in France, Belgium and Greece advised them 'Hold on to your arms', advice which was repeated in the following number.

The third article in the 25th November number deals with Soldiers' Councils in the German mutinies at the end of the last war. Under the heading 'Conclusion' it contains the following:-

"The natural programme of the Social Revolution was carried out by the masses only to a certain extent: the overthrow of the old regime, the break-up of the old army system, the arming of the people and the setting up of soviets - these were all effected. In Russia and Germany we find a few revolutionaries, on the eve of the outbreak of the revolution organizing secret councils in industry, agriculture and the army. Their revolutionary propaganda had one aim: preparation for revolt. In clear and telling slogans, which soldiers, workers and peasants appreciated and related to their own lives, the ideas of Social Revolution were spread. Close contacts were established between army and civilians, thus preparing for the necessary fraternization. Clubs and rest-places were organized; and lively correspondence was cultivated between the revolutionary groups and sympathizers within the army and navy. The existing discontent with conditions of service under the old regime was exploited, by shewing how in a different society such grievances would be minimized and would finally wither away. The revolutionary propaganda made definite attempts to convert the discontent of the forces to social revolutionary ingredients. . . . When the discontent and disillusion had at length culminated in serious disaffection, desertions increased alarmingly. As was pointed out in a recent article 'How Wars End' this was not the result entirely of revolutionary propaganda but also a natural reaction to a long drawn-out war. But revolutionary propaganda doubtless influenced the soldiers not to fire upon their comrades in the streets on being ordered, but to go over to the side of the demonstrators.

Revolutionary propaganda was also responsible for the formation of soviets, the arrest of officers, confiscation of stores and administrative offices, occupation of strategic strongholds, freeing of political prisoners and comrades in detention camps, etc.

The proletariat must reject all compromises and bourgeois policy and carry through the Social Revolution. The soviets, formed at the place of work, controlled from below, are the only social revolutionary weapon by which the revolutionary impulse of the masses can destroy the class society and establish the free anarchist international."

15) 'War Commentary' for the 25th November contained also an article entitled 'Out of Gear - Reflections on the Cairo Parliament' signed by Steve MOYNAN. This is believed to be a nom de plume, but whose we do not know. It concludes with the following remarks on Stay-in Strikes:-

'We strike by staying in and continuing to produce as a syndicate. But the boss stays out.

Don't tell me that the boss has the army on his side. Every gun is made by a worker, every crust of bread the soldier eats is cooked by a baker, every soldier has a trade of some sort - he is also a worker.

Think it out soldier, and then let me know what the hell parliament or the boss has got to do with it'.

16) 'War Commentary' for the 9th December contained two items of special interest.

The first was an article by Ken HAWKES, a known civilian supporter of the Freedom Press, entitled 'Allies Disarm Belgium Workers' discussing and condemning the Allied policy of disarming the Resistance movements. It concludes:-

/"The

"The Allied authorities have made their position clear - to preserve law and order, that is to preserve the capitalist system. The policy applied in N. Africa, Italy and France is to be repeated. Reaction is to be bolstered up by British bayonets.

Our task as workers, whether in uniform or overalls is clear. Our place is at the side of our class comrades; our allies are the workers internationally. Let us make sure that Churchill does not get away with wars of intervention as he was allowed to by our apathy at the end of the last world-war. Hands off social revolution in Europe!"

17) 'War Commentary' for the 9th December also contained an unsigned article entitled 'The reallocation Plan Examined' discussing demobilisation. The whole tenor of this is that it will be necessary for the Forces to demobilise themselves at the end of the War. It contains the following, with the word 'demand' in italics:-

"Standing before the counter cap in hand the individual can do nothing. But one can hardly believe that those who have fought from the snows to the sands are going to be deterred by a few moth-eaten civil servants with one foot in the grave.

To demand demobilization, as the soldiers did after the last war, was the right course. They stormed the centre of London and demanded that they should not continue their war service, scheduled to last till 1921. Even Mr. Churchill - the 'old war-horse', as Mr. Stalin called him - fled".

18) Early in December the case was discussed between the Home Office, the Security Service and the police, and it was decided to arrange for searches by the police of the Belsize Road and Whitechapel premises, and the residences of HEWETSON and RICHARDS, to be followed by kit inspections in certain units where Anarchists were known to be serving. The Admiralty (N.I.D.) and the Air Ministry were informed of these plans in advance and expressed their willingness to co-operate. It was agreed, however, that owing to the circumstances of the ships concerned, action by the Naval Authorities was impracticable.

19) The police searches took place on the 12th December, 1944. A mass of material was seized, including:-

- Only
1940
German
- (a) A card index (with addressograph) of Servicemen containing about a hundred names and a list containing approximately the same number, headed 'Subscribers in the Forces - mid-Nov. sent', meaning that copies of the mid-November issue of War Commentary had been sent.
 - (b) Other lists of names and addresses containing an additional ninety odd Servicemen, and many hundreds of civilians, who between them accounted for over 2,500 copies of each issue of 'War Commentary'.
 - (c) Several complete and incomplete copies of the circular letter of 25.10.44, and also letters from persons in the Services acknowledging receipt of it.
 - (d) Correspondence from members of the Forces, including:-
 - (i) A letter dated 24.11.44 from A.C.2 WIE R.A.E enquiring the cost of printing a thousand and two thousand copies of "The Kronstadt Revolt", (para 11 above). This airman was already known from secret sources to be in touch with the Freedom Press, and was formerly detained under D.R.18B as an official of the British Union of Fascists.
 - (ii) The original letter written by Tpr. LEAN and signed by thirty-three other soldiers (para. 8 above), and another letter from LEAN dated 30.11.44 complaining of his Army duties.
 - (iii) A letter from No. 97001878 Pte. Alan GREENWOOD, N.C.C., describing an alleged mutiny among Canadian troops.
 - (iv) A letter in subversive terms from No. 7405641 Pte. B. BONNER, R.A.M.C., thanking them for their interesting circulars and describing how he has been able to 'increase immeasurably the solidarity and the union of the men in face of their N.C.O.s and officers'. (Copy in Appendix III: see further para. 19(g) below).
 - (v) Letters from No. S/1623060 Cpl. Ivor DEAS, R.E., including an undated letter offering to place Freedom Press literature in local bookshops and /concluding

concluding:

"Your pamphlets and 'W.C.s' are being circulated round the camp here in 'underground channels'. I myself (comically enough) was handed one the other day, by a soldier who little suspected that I had set the whole system in motion! The soldier's pay article-leader is naturally popular. Yours fraternally."

- (vi) A letter dated 20.11.44 from A. HALLAMORE, recently discharged from the Army, describing how he always put forward 'our views' at A.B.C.A. lectures, and pointing out the difficulty of organising soldiers' councils.
- (vii) A number of letters, etc. to and from persons in the Services dealing with subscriptions to 'War Commentary', literature, etc.
- (e) A typewritten copy of the article 'Out of Gear' by 'Steve MOYNAN', referred to in para. 15 above.
- (f) A number of cartoons, presumably by OLDAG.
- (g) A typewritten document headed 'Soldiers' Corner' signed 'L.M.', obviously intended for publication in a future 'War Commentary'. The document consists of two parts. The first part discusses the situation in Belgium and Greece, and concludes: "But you, British Tommy, firing on your Greek comrades, terrorising your Belgian comrades, bombing their towns and subduing them with tanks - do you know what you are doing? Stop - and think. WILL NOT THEIR FATE SOON BE YOURS?" The second part reproduces passages in the letter quoted in (d)(iv) above from Pte. BONNER, concluding with the words: "Good work, Pte. B.B., and good advice which we hope will be followed by many of our comrades in other units". A copy of BONNER's letter is in Appendix III, where we have sidelined the passages reproduced in this document.

In 'War Commentary' for the 30th December the Freedom Press expressed their regret at being unable to publish a number of letters (now in the hands of the police) received during the past two weeks, and giving the opinion of soldiers on the events taking place in Greece.

20) Whilst the search of the Belsize Road premises was proceeding, a man came in and was arrested because he gave an unsatisfactory account of himself. It was subsequently discovered that he was Cpl. Ivor DEAS (19 (a) above), and that he had been living for some days on the premises. His case furnishes a good example of a normal young man led astray by Anarchist propaganda.

George Ivor DEAS was born in 1920 and lives in Lancashire. His father is an officer in the Royal Navy, and the police know nothing to the detriment of any member of the family. Before joining the Army, DEAS took a great interest in politics, and is believed to have been a follower of the Communists. He was called up for the Army in July 1940 and served, apparently satisfactorily, until the summer of 1944, by which time he had attained the rank of Corporal. He came, however, under the influence of a civilian Anarchist whose name and address were found among the papers in the search, and in July 1944 it was learned from a secret source that DEAS was in touch with the Freedom Press and sympathising with their views. His C.O. was informed through normal Internal Security channels, and reported that DEAS held peculiar ideas, but did not advertise them. Secret sources suggested otherwise, and DEAS was still the subject of enquiry in October 1944 when he absented himself from his unit without leave. Shortly afterwards, ten volumes of Freedom Press publications were found in the unit library, and there is no doubt that DEAS put them there. They included the highly subversive 'The Issues in the Present War' by the American Anarchist agitator Marcus GRAHAM, published by the Freedom Press in November 1943. Its theme is that the war is an imperialist war, and the workers should have nothing to do with it.

DEAS' kit was found to contain more Anarchist literature, including 'the Kronstadt Revolt', a letter from the Freedom Press dated 27.8.44 welcoming him 'as one of us', and a letter from Pte. SCHWARTZBERG of the same Unit indicating that he also was an Anarchist sympathiser.

DEAS' kit also contained pieces of paper with words in his own handwriting, including the following:-

/"The

"The soldiers must keep, or be easily able to lay hold again, of their weapons. i.e. rifles, field artillery and A.A. Guns, grenades, etc. As soon as the G. seems likely to collapse, appeals must be broadcast. (For this reason, no G. can be overthrown unless the insurgents first secure Broadcasting Stations - this is perhaps the most important step and should be done as a preliminary to the Revolution!) All officers, cadets and W.O.s should be made captive at once - the army being called upon to mutiny. At the same time, demonstrations will occur in all the large towns".

After DEAS had been arrested at Belsize Road, identified and returned to his unit, and whilst he was still in close arrest, SCHWARTZBERG was caught trying to convey to him a letter, obviously from the Freedom Press, offering to do for DEAS 'anything you may request' and thanking SCHWARTZBERG for 'your part in facilitating this correspondence'. A further examination of DEAS' property revealed another paper commenting on the search of the Freedom Press and the war in subversive terms.

DEAS is to be dealt with under military law for desertion and for using a false identity card.

21) Snap kit inspections were held on 13th December and the following days in a number of Army units containing Anarchist suspects. Inspections were later held in some R.A.F. units.

Owing to operational requirements, it was not possible to arrange for kit inspections in all the units where the most prominent known Anarchists were serving. Moreover, they were not held until six weeks after the publication of the circular of 25.10.44 which is small enough to go in a man's pocket. Even so, they revealed that five soldiers were in possession of the circular (one soldier had two copies). Other Anarchist literature, including 'War Commentary', OLDAG's cartoons, and Freedom Press publications, in some instances in large quantities, was found in the kits of more than 40% of the suspects.

No. 13024515 Pte. F.J. DILLON, P.C. was found to be in possession of the circular letter of 25.10.44, and fifteen Freedom Press booklets, including those on Kronstadt and Wilhelmshaven. He also had Pacifist leaflets by the Duke of Bedford, and a notebook expressing Fascist views, which would be surprising, were it not known that down to the summer of 1940 he was an active member of the Birmingham Branch of the British Union, and has a conviction arising out of his propaganda activities on their behalf that summer. In his kit were also a number of letters from the Freedom Press, in which they wrote expressing their pleasure at his having at last found the truth of Anarchism, welcoming him as 'one of us' and urging the necessity for spreading Anarchist thoughts everywhere, 'no matter what happens to us', (7.8.44), hoping for increased activities soon, and remarking 'perhaps things will develop (sic) quicker and better than we all think. . . . we are encouraged by knowing that you and many others like you are with us' (27.8.44), 'as you say, the crisis is drawing near, and the time may not be so far off when we can all join in the real fight for Freedom' (24.9.44).

No Anarchist literature was found in the kit of Tpr. LEAN (para. 8), but immediately after the kit inspection he absented himself from his unit without leave, whereupon a further search revealed a mass of Anarchist and other extremist literature amongst his possessions in the unit. He returned to his unit after a short absence and was dealt with. He has since claimed the literature in question as his property.

22) After the kit inspections, statements were taken by the Civil Police from some of the soldiers who had been found in possession of Anarchist literature. It is clear from these that at least some of them understood that they were being invited to form Soliders' Councils in their units, but there is no evidence that any of them actually attempted to do so.

23) On the 30th December the police searched the premises at Camden Studios occupied by Philip SANSOM, the key of which had been found at Belsize Road during that search.

The search of the Studios revealed a quantity of Anarchist literature, including:-

- (a) A number of cartoons and anti-war writings by OLDAG (para. 9 above), together with evidence that he had been living on the premises whilst he was

a deserter.

(b) 19 complete copies of the circular letter of 25.10.44 and a number of envelopes addressed to Servicemen, apparently in the handwriting of Mrs. RICHARDS.

(c) An article (copy in Appendix IV) written in pencil in the handwriting of Cpl. DEAS (paras. 19 and 20). Reference was made in para. 19(g) to a ~~type-~~ written document headed 'Soldiers' Corner'. The article in DEAS' handwriting is the draft of the first part of this.

24) In addition to DILLON and WISE, several soldiers who have come to notice as supporters of the Freedom Press Anarchists are known to have been previously connected with the British Union, the Trotskyists and the Communists. This suggests a tendency on the part of persons of not very deep political convictions who are opposed to the war and the government to rally round the Anarchist banner.

25) Since the kit inspections two numbers of 'War Commentary' have been published. In them the Freedom Press have shown no signs of modifying their policy. They continue to make mischief out of the Greek situation. They protest at the searches and kit inspections with such comments as: "When it suits the convenience of the ruling class they will attempt to trample on abl liberties" - (article: 'War Commentary' of 30.12.44).

"I feel that a completely unjustifiable assault upon my liberties has been made and I keenly resent it. . . . Yours fraternally, sgd. A.C.W." (letter in 'War Commentary' of 13.1.45 protesting against the kit inspection; the writer is despatchless No. 13058870 Cpl. A.C. WRIGHT, P.C.).

". Am I down-hearted? No! I look towards the future with great hope for the emancipation of mankind from their own bondage. 1944 has seen the struggle manifesting itself again in a positive form in Greece and other countries. The coming year will see it develop and spread. The future is ours, comrades.

Anarchist Greetings for the New Year. sgd. B.L."

(Letter from a soldier in detention. 'War Commentary' of 13.1.45; the writer is Tpr. LEAN).

26) It is not suggested that the Freedom Press Anarchists are a large body, or that at present they constitute a grave menace to the Armed Forces. The above examples of their activities, however, show that they have been systematically attempting to undermine loyalty, morale and discipline, that they have achieved some degree of success in a number of cases, and that their influence in the Forces is increasing. If permitted to continue their activities, they will undoubtedly constitute an even more serious problem during the periods of demobilisation and occupation of enemy territory.

APPENDIX I. CARTOON.
(see paragraph 3).

APPENDIX II. CIRCULAR.
(letter to Comrades in the Forces).
(see paragraph 13).

Freedom Press,
27, Belsize Road,
London, N.W.6.
25th October, 1944.

Dear Comrades,

1. It is a long time since our last circular letter was sent out, and since then many comrades have been sent abroad. On this account we naturally receive fewer letters than before, but we notice, on the other hand, an increased seriousness in all of them. Reflecting these present days and the future struggles ahead, your letters show a more thoughtful and anxious trend; and this we are pleased to see. We earnestly ask comrades remaining in this country to do their best to fill our depleted ranks by the introduction of new comrades.

2. Once again we ask you for more communications. A few of you, it is seen, write very regularly and often. Others (perhaps through increased duties) do not write so frequently. But always remember that anything of interest to the Movement or to the General Public will be gratefully received. Also, Comrades who find time for serious reading should try to combine this with Research Work for the Movement, and send us quotations of all items of interest. Reports of meetings, strikes etc., that are often to be found only in local newspapers, and are consequently overlooked, would be welcome, too.

3. Many questions have been sent in by younger comrades and new-comers, who want to know how they can be helpful. We ask those who write, to write and keep on writing; and to learn as much about the Movement as possible. We will gladly supply comrades with pamphlets and back numbers of "WAR COMMENTARY" on application.

4. One comrade writes : "My brother in Oxford sends me "WAR COMMENTARY" regularly, which I distribute to support those views I have always held." As can be seen from letters quoted in the Soldiers' Page of the Mid-October number, many comrades visit political meetings and exchange there our literature for the literature of the party holding the meeting. We, of course, do not favour dogmatism or narrow-mindedness, and think that all comrades ought to read our opponents' publications and compare or contrast the



'Just like old times again'

Reproduced from

WAR COMMENTARY

THE

ANARCHIST FORTNIGHTLY

Published by

FREEDOM PRESS

27, Belsize Road, London, N.W.6

16 Pages

2d.

Printed by Express Printers, 84a Whitechapel High St., London, E.1

APPENDIX II (contd).

contrast the opinions and theories propagated there, with our own. By the way, don't keep "W.C." in your pocket or under your mattress when you have read it. First, let your room-mates see it, and then contrive to lose it in some convenient spot!

5. We suggest that Comrades be more active in visiting discussion groups and lectures. These are often run in the army by the C.P. nowa-days, or under Army "Education" schemes. Soldiers generally do not think much of these groups and lectures, and we sympathetically agree. Distrust and dislike of them is often justified, for many have experienced what amounts to a kind of persecution after having spoken up at such meetings. On the other hand, some comrades already know the great value of well-timed and apt questions which can frequently throw speakers into confusion and (though often remaining unanswered) can set long trains of thought in motion in the minds of the audience.

6. Besides these legal discussion groups and compulsory lecture periods, another form of discussion is always developing, in Barrack-rooms, Tents and Nysen Huts, especially now that winter is approaching. These unofficial discussions amongst soldiers are frequently of vital importance and play a far greater part in "educating" the politically and socially "unaware" than any A.B.C.A. lecture could ever hope to accomplish. Our comrades should, when ever possible, attend and take part in these discussions. In many cases, we find comrades uniting with I.L.P. men and Trotskyists, to exchange thoughts and literature, during and after such meetings. Many other soldiers openly express views which are unconsciously Anarchist. It is the task of our comrades to help and develop these potential comrades. Experience will have taught comrades that these discussions bring a sympathy and unity of feeling to barrack-rooms which Authority is always trying to split, by every means, such as promotions or postings. For Solidarity frightens Authority. You should therefore do everything possible to establish closer contacts, and comrades who leave a unit should immediately send us names and addresses of all sympathisers in that unit, so that we can send them our publication list.

7. Such discussion groups mentioned above may form the basis for future Soldiers' Councils. It is expected that an article will appear shortly in "W.C." on "Soldiers' and Workers' Councils" and we hope to receive many criticisms and suggestions from you. One of the most important questions, in our opinion, is that of the action of Soldiers' Councils in a Revolutionary Situation. Whilst many comrades know the role played by such councils during and after the last war, in Russia and Germany, it would seem that only a few know of their vital function and mission.

8. In connection with Discussion Groups, comrades should undertake to send us reports of all meetings. This would help us to gain fuller knowledge of the views and criticisms of the soldiers who take part. Grievances reflected in discussions would, when possible, be made public. Comrades, by the way, who have problems to solve or are in difficulty over the practical matters, should send us short, to-the-point questions, which we should answer as speedily as possible.

9. John Olday's cartoons, according to letters received from comrades, are being used instead of "pin-up girls" on barrack room and hut walls, and have proved most effective media for arousing discussions, although often provoking interference from ignorant N.C.Os and Officers, the freedoms of speech and thought not being part of the army structure. In three units, at least, the showing of these cartoons has developed into a regular wall newspaper, which comrades also fill with cuttings from "W.C.'s" "Through the Press" feature, and with their own cuttings.

10. We have received many poems which we shall keep and make use of, sooner or later. Especially does the Movement need marching songs and "hymns". When writing these, and other poems, comrades should be careful of rhythm and metre, unless the modernist "free verse" (unsuitable for singing, of course) is adopted. In any case, carry on writing, poets : there may be an Erich Muehsam or a Lorca in your midst.

(Note: paragraphs have been numbered by us for ease of reference).

APPENDIX III
(letter from Private BONNER)
(See paragraph 19)

(Postmark 11.11.44.)

Dear Friends,

Many thanks for the interesting circulars you have sent me during my five months with the B.L.A. in Europe. I believe I last wrote you in mid-June from "A.P.O. England" - that address is obsolete at present.

While on Active Service in France I organized a Unit Wall Magazine, after expressing heterodox opinions on Religion, Sex, Politics and the War, - I included a recent W.C. Cartoon "Just like old times" with an explanation of its message and of Syndicalist aims. One of our men had 14 days pay stopped for refusing to be a Batman. I sponsored the organisation of a "strike relief Fund" collection for him and we almost completely made up his loss of pay.

By specialising in local topical Unit Rumour (e.g. Mock Orders) and supporting an apparently fictitious organisation among the men, called the "Gate Club", I was able to immeasurably increase the solidarity and the Unity of the men in face of their N.C.O.s and officers. On occasion a few of us demonstrated mildly by remaining seated during "God Save the King". As a result of his independence one of my colleagues was posted away and unfortunately now the whole unit has been split up. But the effects of the carefully directed WALL magazine - passed as Unit Education - were most encouraging and I would press all "journalistic friends to build up solidarity in the ranks by launching such independent magazines in their own Units.

best wishes,
(signed) B. BONNER B.Sc.

P.S. Please send me a copy of : "Workers in Stalin's Russia" by M.L. Beneri, for which I enclose P.O. 1/- + 2¹/₂d stamp. I will let you know my new military address when I can. Please send the book to the civilian address mentioned at the Head of my letter.

(signed) B. BONNER.

(The second and third paragraphs of the above letter have been marked in pencil "Published")
(On the left hand side "Soldiers page or Circ?" is written in pencil).

APPENDIX IV.
(Pencilled article by Corporal DEAS)
(See paragraphs 19g and 23c)

Many events have taken place in the last few weeks that will make the less enlightened Tommies scratch their heads, and cause the more class-conscious of our soldiers-

~~Since-the-last~~ comrades to burn with shame.

~~many-events-of-internation-and-historical-importance-have-taken-place--events which-must-cause-much-perplexity-to-the-Allied-Armies.~~

In Belgium and in Greece, the workers are up in arms against those Governments which fled at the beginning of the war, leaving the people to their fate; but now return to enjoy the fruits of the workers' long ~~and-new~~ struggle. And behind these ~~Governments~~ treacherous fascist governments stands the power of the Allied Armies. Soldiers who were recently fighting side by side with their brave resistance comrades are now asked to patrol the streets and shoot them, if necessary. The ~~men~~ Forces of the Resistance movement - continuing the struggle against the Nazism of their own government - are being bombed by British planes! Strange liberation!

APPENDIX IV (contd).

Mr. Churchill says that the Allies are only acting to maintain "law and order". But we know whose law and order he will want to maintain; the rule of his good friends, the fascist-capitalists.

In Belgium, too, the same thing is happening. The desires of the workers are being thwarted, and their reactionary governments are being well established by British force. The Armies of Liberation are no more - they must be renamed, Armies of Oppression and violence. Everywhere, all over Europe, if these fascist tactics of Churchill continue, ~~unimpeded-and~~ aided by the British army and air force, the trapdoors of slavery will be clamped down on the workers and bolted. Churchill, the greatest enemy of Europe's workers, knows what he is doing. He knows in what state of subjection workers must be kept, for ~~order~~ the ruling class ~~to-gain~~ to reign secure and gain its huge profits. He knows that a servile Europe founded on British forces, with ruling classes dependant on Britain, will bring him and his capitalist friends endless power and wealth. He, the Arch-Counter-Revolutionary knows what he is doing. But ~~de~~ you, British soldier, firing on your Greek comrades, bombing their towns, subduing them with tanks, do you know what you are doing? Stop - and think. Will not their fate soon be yours?

S.B. file No. 320/IND/847.

Ethel MANNIN

Mrs. Ethel Edith REYNOLDS, formerly PORTEOUS, known as Ethel MANNIN, novelist, born 11.10.1900 in London, N.R.I.No. PQ.1369, British passport No. 288988 issued in London on 20.7.39, resides at 27 Burghley Road, Wimbledon, S.W.19, with her husband, Reginald Arthur REYNOLDS.

She first came under the notice of Special Branch in 1933 when she was on the national committee of the "Workers Relief for Victims of German Fascism." In 1934 she was a member of the British section of the "Women's World Committee against War and Fascism;" in 1935 she was a supporter of "Congress & Friendship with the U.S.S.R." and also wrote an article in the "New Leader" entitled "1,200 innocent persons arrested," and articles in the "Daily Worker."

In 1936 and 1937 Mrs. REYNOLDS spoke at I.L.P. meetings in London; and each subsequent year she came under notice as being either chairman or speaker at extremist meetings including those held by the "Confederation Nationale de Trabago & Federation Anarquista Ibinia," the "Spanish Medical Aid Society," the "No-Conscription League," the Forward Movement," the "Peace Pledge Union," the "Freedom Press Group" and the "War Resisters International."

Since 1940 she has been known to associate with Vernon RICHARDS and others connected with "War Commentary" and its production. In 1941 she was suspected of assisting in the hiding of persons liable for military service.

In 1944 Mrs. REYNOLDS befriended Resi WELTLINGER, German, an associate of members of the "Leninist League," who was convicted of larceny and forgery, and subsequently interned: Mrs. REYNOLDS was behind the scenes in agitating for this woman's release from internment; and she has written many articles in "War Commentary" on the recent anarchist prosecution.

Like her husband, she is an active supporter of the "Indian Freedom Campaign" and the "Committee of Indian Congressmen in Great Britain."

She has travelled extensively in Europe and has visited the U.S.S.R.

Her husband has been known to Special Branch as an extremist - particularly in Indian matters - since 1930: both are directors of the Socialist Book Centre Ltd.

H. READ

S.B. file 347/44/29

Herbert READ

Herbert READ, National Registration Identity Card No. DWAD/1/1, resides at 'Broom House,' Seer Green, Beaconsfield, Bucks.

He is a keen anarchist thinker and writer and, since the beginning of 1940, has frequently come to notice in connection with anarchist activities. He frequently addresses meetings and writes pamphlets on anarchism and similar subjects which are published by Freedom Press, 27, Red Lion Street, W.C.1.

Among the pamphlets written by READ are 'The Education of Free Men,' 'Freedom, is it a Crime?' and 'The Philosophy of Anarchism.' The latter publication was the subject of a complaint to Home Office by H.E. HUNT, 20, Woodstock Road, Bedford Park, W. (H.O. 833412/10 refers).

During the trial of Vernon RICHARDS and other anarchists at the Central Criminal Court on 23-26/4/1945, READ attended Court and gave evidence of character on behalf of Dr. J.C. HEWESTON, one of the accused. Several days before the trial, READ addressed a public meeting in London in support of the accused. His speech was published in 'War Commentary' dated 21/4/1945 and concludes as follows:-

"We will fight: fight the Defence Regulations and that foul un-English institution, the political police. We will fight tyranny and oppression in every shape and form, everywhere in the world, until freedom is finally a reality, and justice a natural right."

He also takes an interest in Indian affairs and on 16/6/1944 was vice president of an Indian art Exhibition at the Alpine Club which was organized by the Indian Famine Committee.

Herbert Read is a distinguished author & critic. He served in the 1914-18 war winning the D.S.O. & M.C., became an Assistant Principal in the Treasury & subsequently Assistant Keeper at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Has been Professor of Fine Arts at Edinburgh & lecturer in Art at Liverpool universities. He is now a director of George Routledge & Co., the publishers.

PH