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International Institute of Social History

Cruquiusweg 31

1019 AT Amsterdam

The Netherlands

(Copy.)

Social Democratic Federation.

Palace Chambers.

9 Bridge St.

Westminster.

London, S. W.

(Dated.)

9th January, 1885.

Comrades,

It is our unpleasant duty to have to inform you that owing to a serious difference of opinion having arisen on the Council of the S. D. F., the majority, whose names are appended to the enclosed notice of withdrawal, including the Treasurer, William Morris, have resigned their seats on the Council.

We the minority of the Council are therefore left to carry on the business of the Federation until such time as another Executive Council can be properly elected by an Extraordinary Conference or some other decision is come to. We now lay before you a plain statement of the events which have taken place since the Conference on August the 1st. This we do entirely without prejudice, and we shall be glad to hear from you our views on the matter by letter if you are unable to send a delegate

to the public meeting of members of the S. D. F. which will be held in Barton Hall, Burton St, Burton Crescent, London, W. C. at 8 p. m. on January 22nd. We would suggest that you should appoint some one, in the meantime, in whom you have confidence to examine the minutes of the Council, since the Conference, on your behalf, so that you may be thoroughly advised in all respects.

Since the Conference we regret to say, there has been want of harmony in the Executive Council, which has certainly been injurious to the cause of Socialism. The first difference of opinion arose out of the question of the permanent chairman.

It was decided at the Conference that there should be no regular Chairman of the Executive, but one elected at each meeting. A discussion arose on this question at the Executive, and it was finally arranged that each member should take the chair in turn in alphabetical rotation.

This rule has since been adhered to. Shortly afterwards the question was brought up of the manner in which D. G. Aveling had left the Secularist party and the imputations which had been made upon him. This disagreeable matter was kept open for several weeks and was eventually passed

over by the publication of a letter from Dr. Covel in Justice.

Later, an untidy difference in the Tottenham Branch of the Labor Emancipation League, a majority of whose members had voted that the Branch become identified with the L. E. F. led to much heated discussion, and this difference, which was brought up before the Executive again & again, remains still unsettled.

During the whole of this period unpleasant remarks were being made by one member of the Council at the expense of his fellow-members. On November 18th this member (W. J. Clark) was accused of injuring the Federation by speaking against the sincerity of some of the most active members of the Federation. On December 9th Clark would neither repudiate the charges made, admit that he had spoken as alleged, deny that he had so spoken or withdraw anything that might be injurious, though begged to do one or other by Morris, Covel and Hyndman, the first named being in the chair. Hours were wasted in petty talk. On December 16th a motion calling upon Clark to resign in consequence of this refusal was moved by R. V. B. Frost

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& seconded by J. Burns.

Clark read a written defence violently accusing Burns, Champion, Frost & Hyndman of forming a faction with the object of ~~controlling~~ controlling the Federation, getting himself & others imprisoned or selling them to their enemies.

This defence Clark has not handed in for record, though he promised to do so & though it has been repeatedly demanded.

Morris then supported Clark & accused Hyndman of absolutism, but could give no instance of this when challenged to do so: and after stating that Hyndman had written to the ^{new} Glasgow Branch expressing distrust of Andreas Scheu, gave notice for December 23rd.

"That the Executive Council has full confidence in Andreas Scheu, considers that the charges made against him by H. M. Hyndman are untrue, and that therefore the Council has no confidence in H. M. Hyndman". The motion for Clark's enforced resignation was lost, seven voting for and eight against. A distinct faction was now formed in the Council meetings being held & concerted action arranged at the private residence of D. L. Aveling.

Morris' notice was therefore brought forward on

Tuesday Dec 23rd & then the said Hyndman was determined to remove all members dangerous to his political designs also without proof. Hyndman produced a copy of his letter about Scheu which had been written in answer to a letter from Glasgow which shewed Scheu had wilfully misrepresented Hyndman. J. L. Mahon, the youngest & last elected member of the Council who had only left Edinburgh a few weeks before, and knew nothing of Hyndman, seconded the motion. He produced no proofs of this allegation, & declared that he had come from Edinburgh expressly to watch, expose & denounce Hyndman. Scheu, who came from Edinburgh expressly for this meeting, declared that his connection with Johann Most (the anarchist) had ceased & that he, Scheu, was trusted by all his Austrian comrades. The discussion was continued & adjourned to a special open meeting of the Council on Saturday Dec 24th, nearly all the Council speaking. Fitzgerald who had been insolently attacked by Mahon, briefly answered & finally, Hyndman replied at length to all the malignant, irrelevant & unsupported charges brought against him, among which were a variety of letters marked private and confidential conversations, and maintained his

mistrust of Scheu's judgement to be justified by Scheu's career abroad and his intemperate behavior in that room & elsewhere.

At the end of his speech he said, amidst vehement applause from a large number of members not on the Council who were present, that no vote of that Executive would force him out of the Council without appeal to the whole body of members, and he challenged any one to repeat any charges not fully met by him or make any fresh ones, pausing for a reply which was not forthcoming. The motion was put and carried by 10 votes to 8, Lyndman not voting. Morris then handed in a notice of resignation, written before the meeting and signed by the 10 members who had just carried his motion.

This was published on page 5. No 51 of Justice, with a counter-statement by the minority, who now alone form your ~~Executive Committee~~ Council. They are unwilling to carry on their work without the consent & support of the members, and will therefore meet the whole body on Jan'y 22nd (see Justice of Jan'y 3rd) You will observe that the majority who accuse us did not take the course of calling such a meeting though challenged to do so by the

minority as well as by every member outside the Council who spoke on Dec. 24th. To that meeting on June 22nd you are requested to send some one to report to you his impressions. If this is impossible the Council leave it to you to decide whether you will endorse the opinion of the members resident in London as it may be then expressed, and ask you to send a letter to be read at the meeting.

On behalf of the Executive Council.

Signed, John Burns
" Annie Hicks
" James. F. Murray.
" H. H. Champion,
Secretary.

The following statement was handed in* to the Chairman at the close of a meeting of the Executive Council of the I. S. F. held on Saturday. Dec. 24th 1884. - "Since discord has arisen in this Council owing to the attempt to substitute arbitrary rule therein for Fraternal co-operation, contrary to the principles of Socialism, and since it seems impossible now to heal this discord, we the undersigned think it better in the interests of the cause

of Socialism to cease to belong to this Council (accordingly, hand in our resignation).
Signed. William Morris, Edward Aveling, Robert Banner, J. James & Eleanor
Mark Aveling, Co. Bedford Road, John F. Claborn, J. C. Mainwaring,
W. J. C. Park, J. Cooper.

9th January 1885

Copy of Social-
Democratic Federation
letter to its Branches
on the Split

9 January 1885

Copy of S.D.F.

Letter to Branches
on Split