WILDCAT inside story No 1

The *Wildcat* 'inside story' is a four-page supplement to the paper. It is produced in consultation with libertarian groups and individuals and available to them at cost price for distribution with their own papers and other material (£3 a 100 from: *Wildcat*, Box 999, 197 Kings Cross Road, London WC1). We are planning supplements on the Election, transport and squatting: please send us suggestions for the future—and your comments on this first supplement.

Give this to a Soldier

1974 has already seen the lowest recruitment figures for the Services since the Army was sent into Northern Ireland in 1969 and speeches by Labour MPs calling for the withdrawal of troops. Public opinion polls demand 'bring our boys home', while the Left continues to say 'end British imperialism in Ireland'. The rhetoric is different, the effect would be the same. The trickle of deserters has continued; there have been reports of disaffection inside the army leading to 'breaches of discipline'; some local authorities have opposed recruitment.

1974 has also seen the Mick McGahey fiasco in which the Communist Vice-President of the miners' union said that, if troops were ordered down the mines, the NUM would appeal to them to disobey their orders—and then, under pressure from the Right (and presumably the Party) said he hadn't meant that at all. But at least the possible use of troops against the British people was discussed as a result. 1974 has seen the display of armed might at Heathrow Airport and army manoeuvres in towns like Hull.

Michael Tobin (left) and Pat Arrowsmith charged under the Incitement to Disaffection Act 1934.

In this situation it is not surprising that radicals have tried to encourage soldiers to desert. Pat Arrowsmith of the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign has been jailed for 18 months under the 1934 Incitement to Disaffection Act, while in 1972 Michael Tobin—with less publicity and more unequivocal support for the Republican cause—got the maximum sentence of two years under the same act. What is slightly surprising is the moderate language of the BWNIC, compared to the stirring appeals to soldiers of the past (a criticism which could not be levelled at Michael Tobin's material). And the language is getting more moderate. Compare these two passages, the first from the leaflet Pat Arrowsmith gave out:

'We are aware that there are British soldiers who are leaving the army, or who want to because of British policy in N. Ireland. We are glad about this and hope many more will do so . . .'

and the second from the BWNIC's new leaflet:

'We are not recommending any particular course of action. There is no easy way out of the Army . . .'

Even the title of the leaflet has changed—from 'Some Information for British Soldiers' to 'Some Information for Discontented Soldiers'. Two years ago Freedom's 'An Appeal to British Soldiers in Ireland'—though it included the dramatic sentence 'We too can be punished for addressing this appeal to you'—wasn't really 'incitement to disaffection'.

Most of this supplement is on disaffecting the troops in the past, in particular the case of the War Commentary editors jailed in 1945. On this page we reproduce some of the factual information contained in the latest BWNIC leaflet. Naturally we associate ourselves with it—as we do with the more explicit and robust appeals to soldiers that others have made before us.

OPEN LETTER TO BRITISH SOLDIERS.

This letter to British soldiers, reprinted from *Sheldrake's Military Gazette* (Aldershot), of March 1, 1912, is the subject of the charge against Crowsley, Guy Bowman, the Buck brothers, and Tom Mann. Read and judge for yourselves. Let the voice of the People be heard!

Men! Comrades! Brothers!

You are in the Army.

So are We. You in the Army of Destruction. We in the Industrial, or Army of Construction.

We work at mine, mill, forge, factory, or dock, producing and transporting all the goods, clothing, stuffs, etc., which make it possible for people to live.

You are Working Men's Sons.

When We go on Strike to better Our lot, which is the lot also of Your Fathers, Mothers, Brothers, and Sisters, YOU are called upon by your officers to MURDER US.

DON'T DO IT!

You know how it happens—always has happened.

We stand out as long as we can. Then one of our (and your) irresponsible Brothers, goaded by the sight and thought of his and his loved ones' misery and hunger, commits a crime on property. Immediately You are ordered to Murder Us, as You did at Mitchelstown, at Featherstone, at Belfast.

Don't You know that when You are out of the colours, and become a "Civy" again, that You, like Us, may be on Strike, and You, like Us, be liable to be Murdered by other soldiers.

Boys, Don't Do It!

"Thou Shalt Not Kill," says the Book.

Don't Forget That!

It does not say, "unless you have a uniform on."

No! MURDER IS MURDER, whether committed in the heat of anger on one who has wronged a loved one, or by pipe clayed Tommies with a rifle.

Boys, Don't Do It!

Act the Man! Act the Brother! Act the Human Being!

Property can be replaced! Human life, never!

The Idle Rich Class, who own and order you about, own and order us about also. They and their friends own the land and means of life of Britain.

You Don't. We Don't.

When We kick, they order You to Murder us.

When You kick, You get court-martialed and cells.

Your fight is Our fight. Instead of fighting Against each other, We should be fighting with each other.

Out of Our loins, Our lives, Our homes, You came.

Don't disgrace Your Parents, Your Class, by being the willing tools any longer of the Master Class.

You, like Us, are of the Slave Class. When We rise, You rise; when We fall, even by your bullets, Ye fall also.

England with its fertile valleys and dells, its mineral resources, its sea harvests, is the heritage of ages to us.

You no doubt joined the Army out of poverty.

We work long hours for small wages at hard work, because of Our poverty. And both Your poverty and Ours arises from the fact that Britain with its resources belongs to only a few people. These few, owning Britain, own Our jobs. Owning Our jobs, they own Our very Lives.

Comrades, have We called in vain? Think things out and refuse any longer to Murder Your Kindred. Help Us to win back Britain for the British, and the World for the Workers.

The leaflet for which Tom Mann was jailed in 1912.

1 **If you are a conscientious objector,** that is, if since joining up you have developed a religious or moral objection to taking part in any war, you have a legal right to be discharged on these grounds. You are advised to contact:

The Central Board for Conscientious Objectors, c/o 6 Endsleigh St, London WC1. Tel: 01-352 7906.

2 **If you have decided to go absent without leave—to Sweden,** you will be pleased to know that special arrangements have been made to welcome British servicemen who go AWOL to Sweden by:

The British Deserters Support Group, c/o Bok-Cafe Morianen, Box 16037, Drattninggatan 19, 103 21 Stockholm 16, Sweden. Tel: Stockholm 106063.

If you go to Sweden, you will need your passport, your military ID card and about £30 cash (you need this to get through passport control as a tourist). You are advised to enter via Stockholm and avoid Malmo and Goteborg, and to enter as a tourist.

You will need to wait three weeks before going to register with the police as an applicant for political asylum. If you contact the British Deserters Support Group, they will put you in touch with a good Swedish lawyer, advise you on registration procedure, offer you accommodation with sympathetic Swedish people during the difficult three-week waiting period, and accompany you when you go to register with the police.

It is important to make it clear to the Swedish police that you were going to have to serve in Northern Ireland, otherwise you will not be considered for asylum. After you have registered, you can then go to the Swedish Social Bureau which will get you a place to stay, give you money to live on and help you to enrol in Swedish language classes.

A British AWOL soldier can apply for the type of asylum that has been granted to American and Portuguese AWOL soldiers. It amounts to the Swedish Government giving a man permission to stay on the basis of special circumstances—a type of humanitarian asylum. However, when you go to the police, you are advised to ask for political asylum so as to make sure that the Aliens Commission and not the police makes the final decision on your case.

3 **If you intend to apply for a discharge on other grounds,** the following organisations may be able to help:

At Ease, c/o Release, 1 Elgin Ave, London W9. Tel: 01-837 9794. Counsellors (who include ex-servicemen) are available at this address **every Thursday evening from 7.30 to 9.30 pm.** The help of sympathetic lawyers and social workers can be obtained if necessary. Advice is confidential. No representations will be made to anyone without your permission. No pressure will be applied, whatever you decide to do. 'At Ease' also deals with enquiries by post. If it is impossible for you to call in person, 'At Ease' can sometimes arrange for preliminary counselling to be given near to where you are based.

The National Council for Civil Liberties, 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1. Tel: 01-278 4574. Open daily—office hours.

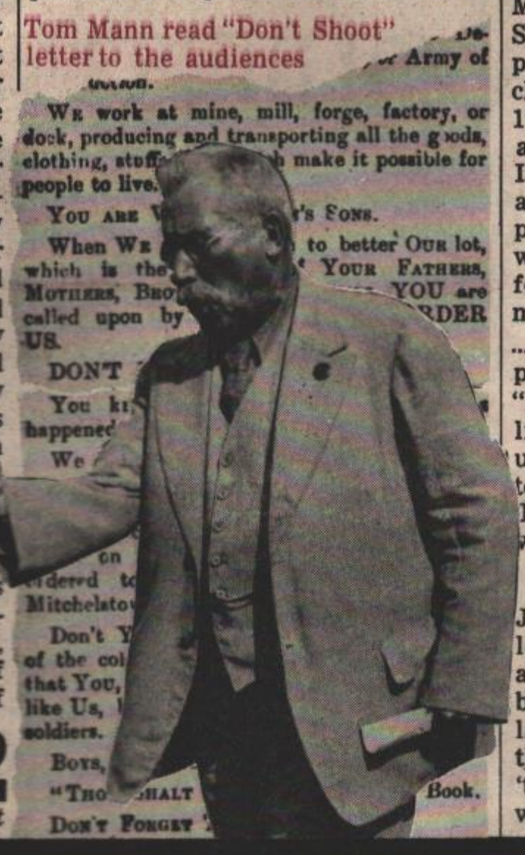
This organisation has considerable experience in giving legal advice to servicemen and representing them to military authorities.

1797

Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore caused by poor pay and appalling conditions (eg death by beating for drunkenness). But mutineers did not threaten to desert: 'We are not actuated by any spirit of sedition or disaffection whatsoever: on the contrary, it is indigence and extreme penury alone that is the cause of our complaint.' At the Nore they demanded democratisation of the navy and threatened London. Their leader, Parker, was hanged. This led to: Incitement to Mutiny Act, passed opposed by Whig minority: 'Any person who shall maliciously and advisedly endeavour to seduce any person or persons serving in His Majesty's Forces by sea or land from his duty and allegiance to His Majesty, or to incite or stir up any such person or persons to commit any act of mutiny, or to make or endeavour to make any mutinous assembly, or to commit any traitorous or mutinous practice whatsoever, shall, on being legally convicted of such offence, be adjudged guilty of felony.'

1912

The first issue of *The Syndicalist* reprinted a 'Don't Shoot' letter originally published in *The Irish Worker* and written by a Liverpool building worker. Then a railway worker, Fred Crowsley, had it reprinted and personally distributed



copies to soldiers at Aldershot. He was arrested, tried and sentenced to four months. The editor of *The Syndicalist*, Guy Bowman, was given nine months and the printers, the Becks, of Walthamstow, got six. Tom Mann, chairman of the Industrial Syndicalist Education League which published *The Syndicalist*, was charged, like the others, under the 1797 Act.He wrote: February 1912, all of the miners had downed tools. In Manchester, where I then was, the authorities were having premises prepared as temporary barracks, and were concentrating military forces a few miles out of the city. At public meetings, I drew attention to this, ...I also directed attention to the imprisonment of my comrades, read the "Don't Shoot" letter and declared I believed in every sentence of it. Thereupon, I was arrested and sentenced to six months.'

Tom Mann was released after seven weeks of public pressure.

1915

John Maclean, the Glasgow socialist leader, had begun open-air meetings against the war in 1914. In September 1915 he was arrested for using language likely to cause a breach of the peace, by describing the war as 'this murder business'. The charge was dropped but in the following month he was summoned under the Defence of the Realm Act for saying: 'I have been enlisted in the Socialist Army for fifteen years, the only army worth fighting for—God damn all other armies!' He was fined £5, refused to pay and went to prison for five days.

1916

In January, following the introduction of conscription, Maclean's paper *Vanguard* was banned for opposing it. In February he was arrested as a prisoner of war and held in Edinburgh Castle. He was tried in Edinburgh High Court, found guilty and sentenced to three years' penal servitude. In June 1917 he was released in response to public pressure.

Alexander Shapiro, the Russian immigrant editor of the Jewish anarchist paper *Arbeter Fraint*, was arrested in 1916, together with the publisher and printer of the paper, for opposing conscription: they were imprisoned and the paper closed.

An anarchist Anti-Conscription League had been formed in 1915 to organise militant opposition: when conscription came in the campaign was increased. In April 1916 the anarcho-syndicalist paper, *Voice of Labour*, printed an article about militants who had evaded the call-up by taking refuge in the Highlands. A leaflet reprinting the article was produced by Thomas Keell, the editor, printer and publisher of *Freedom*, and distributed by Lilian Wolfe, the acting editor of the *Voice of Labour* (all the men being in prison or hiding). The Freedom Press was raided, they were both arrested, and in June 1916 they were fined for conduct 'prejudicial to recruiting and discipline'; they refused to pay and were both imprisoned. The *Voice of Labour* was forced to cease publication, but *Freedom* managed to continue throughout the war.

Guy Aldred, the eccentric and quarrelsome 'anti-parliamentarian communist' who edited the *Spur* in Glasgow from 1914 to 1921, had opposed the war from the beginning, and not only opposed but personally resisted conscription from beginning to end and beyond. He was repeatedly arrested when conscription came in 1916 and imprisoned on and off until 1919, continuing his work inside prison, still editing the *Spur* even from solitary confinement and hunger strike, and spreading propaganda among his fellow-prisoners at every possible opportunity. He was released after most of his comrades, but went right on struggling for forty years, adopting the same stand against conscription in 1939.

D

Philip Sansom Revived 45: Anarchists

Soldiers are not supposed to think and it is a criminal offence to encourage them to do so. The laws on disaffection of the forces prescribe heavy penalties against civilians approaching soldiers and asking them to question their blind obedience to authority. 'Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die', as Tennyson put it, is the army's attitude to its own first victims: the men it pulls into its ranks and bends to its will.

Whereas today, Britain has an army of 'professionals', in the last two major wars she has relied upon conscripts—young men and women with, normally, no interest in going into the forces, but who accept conscription because they see no alternative. In the second, incidentally, Britain conscripted women for the armed forces, while Germany did not. The Nazis had this male chauvinist pig thing about a woman's place being in the home, breeding pure Aryans for the master race. The British government, more pragmatic, put single women in the forces or on the land and set up nursery schools for children whose mothers were directed into factories.

Undoubtedly many of these individuals believed in doing their bit for their country and would have joined up voluntarily anyway. Many did so in the first two years of the First World War, but by 1916 the High Command demanded more cannon fodder and Lloyd George brought in conscription for the first time in Britain. Neville Chamberlain introduced it again in June 1939—three months before the Second World War actually began.

Many of these conscripts came from families which had lost fathers or uncles in the First World War, had known nothing but depression and unemployment since, or were influenced by the anti-war and socialist feelings still prevalent even in the Labour Party right into the late 1930s. They tended to be unwilling soldiers, but equally unwilling, in the mass, to resist. Hitler's lunatic nationalism, playing upon Germany's economic and psychological suffering after the 1918 defeat, which stirred up the Germans to war fever, had no equivalent here. The prevalent attitude was simply that of having to 'stop Hitler', get 'the job done' and get back home. After all, Britain had 'won' the First World War—and a fat lot of good that had done the working man.

Churchill's gross rhetoric no doubt whipped up enthusiasm among Tory ladies to knit balaclava helmets and collect more saucepans 'for Britain' (and even, such were the weird bedfellows they had to embrace, eventually to organise 'Aid for Russia') but for the workers, bombed in their shelters by night and sweating in their factories by day, there were few illusions about Churchill. Nor about their own positions. They were caught like rats in a trap and knew no alternative but to sweat it out. The voices of revolution—the only alternative to sweating it out—were few and weak.

us was the truth, notoriously the first casualty of war. Britain during the war was very near to being a neo-fascist state itself. Everyone had to carry an identity card; food, clothing and goods of all kinds were strictly rationed (for the general population, anyway) and everyone was subject to conscription or the direction of labour. There are, however, important qualifications, which it would be unfair to ignore. First, there was provision for conscientious objection, which the fascist states (and some of the other 'democratic' ones, like France and Russia) did not allow. This was of course, circumscribed by the law, and COs had to convince tribunals of magistrate-type individuals that they were sincere and not just 'dodging the column'. Most had to accept alternative service—on the land, in civil defence, the ambulance service, the fire service and so on. Very few were given unconditional exemption, but on the other hand, many were able to survive in a kind of underground which would have been much more difficult in a fully fascist state.

And—the great advantage for those of us who were prepared to make open propaganda—a relatively large degree of 'free' speech and 'free' publication was 'permitted'; my quotes indicate that the usual laws of sedition, *lèse majesté*, libel, etc, *plus* the wartime regulations, governed all this.

The reasons for this were complex but clear. Britain was a 'democracy' fighting totalitarian states. After America was dragged into the war, Roosevelt and Churchill discovered that 'freedom' was a war aim. In both America and Britain there was a tradition of press freedom jealously guarded by the capitalist press for their own interests and voluntarily limited by them in the national state's interest. It was understood by the authorities that there was a vocal minority opposed to the war and prepared to make a nuisance of itself saying so. British experience in the First World War taught the government that to try to crush these people was more trouble than it was worth. Even inside Parliament there was an opposition within the coalition which did not want all anti-conservative or socialist opinion suppressed—it had its eyes on the eventual postwar election! Above all, since the revolutionary forces were so small, it suited the state far more to keep us sweet, legal and out in the open where it could keep its eyes upon us, rather than drive us underground into illegal channels. Finally, it accorded well with the propaganda about democracy and freedom and all that.

What, after all, did the anti-war movement amount to? There were the pacifists, mainly Christian—Quakers, some Methodists, etc, mainly organised, if at all, in the Peace Pledge Union, with its paper, *Peace News*—with a smaller, militant, secularist wing originally called 'The Ginger Group', that spilled over somewhat into the anarchist movement. (A completely separate, in-

Jehovah's Witnesses, who were completely intransigent about war service and many of whom went to prison.) There was the anarchist movement, small but quite clear and united, with the exception of some of the Spanish exiles, recently (ie, 1939) fled from Spain, who held that the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini would inevitably lead to the downfall of Franco. These comrades, experienced in the anti-fascist struggle in Spain, had much to tell us about the Spanish Revolution, but were sadly naive about world politics. We knew the 'democracies' would much rather see a fascist state in Spain than another revolution, and we have been proved right.

There were also various socialist parties opposed to the war. Most fundamentalist (we compared them to the JWs in the Christian field) was the Socialist Party of Great Britain—SPGB. Comparable with the anarchists in influence and numbers, they nevertheless maintained a careful and constitutional position which posed no threat to the authorities—but practically every one of their members who appeared before a CO tribunal got off military service on the strength of the party's fundamental opposition to war. There was the Independent Labour Party—the rump of the traditional Labour movement's anti-war battalions.

There were the Trotskyists, maintaining a slightly uneasy position (as ever) in view of an anti-fascist position linked with a traditional pre-Stalin, Trotsky-Leninist-Bolshevik opposition to capitalist war, bolstered by their hatred of Stalin (murderer of their own leader) and rejection of the Soviet Union as a decadent bureaucratic corruption of a workers' state . . . which was still . . . nevertheless . . . the nearest thing they had to a Marxist-Leninist proletarian dictatorship . . . etc . . . etc. The Trotskyists concentrated on the working-class struggle at home; a valid enough activity which eventually brought them under attack from the government, after years of slander and vicious attack (both verbal and physical) from the Communists.

The Communist Party (Stalinist, as we would now identify it) changed its line three times during the war. For the first 10 days, in September 1939, the CP supported the war, seeing it as continuation of the anti-fascist struggle, and being just a wee bit slow in understanding the implications of the Hitler-Stalin pact 'for Peace and Socialism' which had been concluded in August. After 10 days of vocal devotion to the anti-fascist struggle, however, the British CP got its orders from Moscow and promptly switched its line to opposition to the war, now using class arguments common to the Left: that it was a capitalist-imperialist war in which the working class had no interest.

It is an interesting sidelight on the fundamental nature of democratic freedoms that—following the fall of France in 1940 with the sub-

Communist *Daily Worker* was banned. It was the only daily paper in the country to suffer that fate; it was of course the only *daily* paper to oppose the war at any time. But the opposition did not last long, for as soon as Hitler invaded Russia, in June 1941, the Communist Party reversed its line to support for the war once again. Immediately, the ban on the *Daily Worker* was lifted –Stalin was now an ally of democracy.

From that moment on, the Churchill government had no more loyal patriotic allies than the Communist Party, who happily joined with the Tory ladies in all their war efforts, and campaigned behind huge portraits of Churchill, Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-Chek (the anti-Communist Chinese nationalist leader), Tito, de Gaulle (leader of the 'Free French') and many others now lost in the mists of cold war and revisionism. Having been told to change their line themselves they now declared that anyone opposed to the war was a fascist traitor and 'Agent of Hitler', and, although it was clearly impossible, they screamed incessantly 'Second Front Now!'

The minority papers—*War Commentary* (Anarchist), *Peace News* (PPU), *Socialist Standard* (SPGB), *Socialist Leader* (ILP), etc—had no resources to affect the security of the state and in any case had no interest in helping the enemy. We were revolutionaries, not traitors. Because we would not fight for Churchill and the British Empire (remember Britain still ruled in India, the Carribean, Africa, Asia . . .) did not mean that we wanted Hitler to win. What we wanted—and what anarchists in Germany, Italy, France, America, Japan and, as far as we could guess, in Russia too,

Colin Ward Witnes

At the end of the war Colin Ward was a young soldier beginning to be interested in anarchist ideas. Here he describes how he was called to give evidence against the group he later joined.

The revival of interest in anarchism at the time of the Spanish Revolution in 1963 led to the publication of *Spain and the World*, a fortnightly Freedom Press journal which changed to *Revolt!* in the months between the end of the war in Spain and the beginning of the Second World War. Then *War Commentary* was started, its name reverting to the traditional *Freedom* in August 1945.

As one of the very few journals which were totally opposed to the war aims of *both* sides, *War Commentary* was an obvious candidate for the attentions of the Special Branch, but it was not until the last year of the war that serious persecution began.

In November 1944 John Olday, the paper's cartoonist, was arrested and after a protracted trial was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment for 'stealing by finding an identity card'. Two months earlier T. W. Brown of Kingston had been jailed for 15 months for distributing 'seditious' leaflets. The prosecution at the Old Bailey had drawn the attention of the court to the fact that the penalty could have been 14 years.

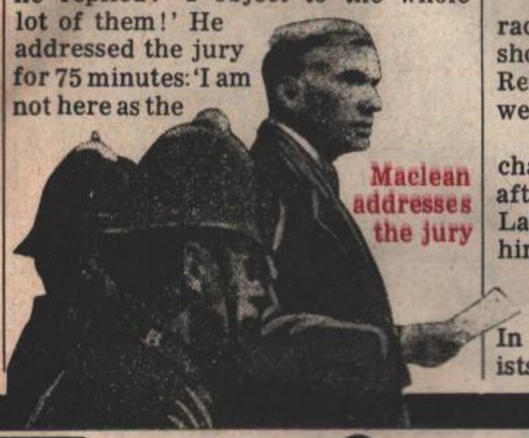
On 12 December 1944, officers of the Special Branch raided the Freedom Press office and the homes of four of the editors and sympathisers. Search warrants had been issued under Defence Regulation 39b, which declared that no person should seduce members of the armed forces from their duty, and Regulation 88a which enabled articles to be seized if they were evidence of the commission of such an offence. At the end of December, Special Branch officers, led by Detective Inspector Whitehead, searched the belongings of soldiers in various

isaffection 1797-1974

1918

In January John Maclean was elected Honorary President of the Soviet Congress in Petrograd and Russian Consul in Glasgow by the new Bolshevik government. In April he was arrested for sedition by calling for an immediate end to the war through strikes and mutinies.

This time he defended himself. Asked whether he was guilty or not guilty, he replied: 'I refuse to plead!' Asked whether he wished to object to any members of the jury, he replied: 'I object to the whole lot of them!' He addressed the jury for 75 minutes: 'I am not here as the accused; I am here as the accuser of capitalism dripping with blood from head to foot.' He was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.



Maclean addresses the jury

In July he went on hunger strike, was forcibly fed, and his health was permanently broken. With the end of the war and the approach of the general election, the authorities decided to release him—in December.

1924

In July, the *Worker's Weekly* published an 'Open Letter to the Fighting Forces' which suggested:

'Form committees in every barracks, aerodrome and ship. Refuse to shoot down your fellow workers. Refuse to fight for profit. Turn your weapons against your oppressors.'

The editor, J. R. Campbell, was charged under the 1797 Act but after a storm of protest from the Labour movement the case against him was dropped.

1925

In October 12 prominent Communists were charged under the 1797 Act and found guilty. At their trial the judge observed: 'It is not uninteresting to find the Revolution in Russia began with the army.'

1931

At the height of the economic crisis of the 1930s the Atlantic fleet mutinied at Invergordon over pay cuts of 25 per cent. Although the mutineers used militant language, their grievance was essentially economic—and their revolt was self-managed. Able Seaman Len Wincott, leading light of the mutiny and official scapegoat, was forced out of the navy and later went to Moscow where he still lives. (See his recently published book *Invergordon Mutineer*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, £2.95.)

This led to:

1934

Incitement to Disaffection Act: 'If any person, with intent to commit or to aid, abet, counsel or procure the commission of an offence under section one of this Act, has in his possession or under his control any document of such a nature that the dissemination of copies thereof among members of His Majesty's forces would constitute such an offence, he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.'

1945

Freedom Press Trial: see this page.

1972

J. C. Durkin of Southport, who had written two letters to the troops, 'A Letter from a Soldier of the IRA to the Soldiers of the Royal Green Jackets' and 'A Letter from a Ballymurphy Mother', and admitted distributing copies in Northern Ireland, was found not guilty at Liverpool of charges under the 1934 Act. But Michael Tobin, charged with possessing the leaflets, was found guilty and given the maximum sentence of two years.

1974

On 20 May Pat Arrowsmith was sentenced to 18 months' jail on two charges under the Incitement to Disaffection Act 1934. She had been arrested for distributing copies of the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign leaflet 'Some Information for British Soldiers' at Warminster, Wiltshire, on 22 September 1973. A week earlier she had been acquitted by Colchester magistrates on a charge of insulting words and behaviour—for distributing the same leaflet.

Before being sentenced Pat told the court that her trial had been about free speech, the soldier's right to disobey inhuman orders and British repression in Ireland. 'My colleagues will continue to distribute this and other leaflets and, if free, I shall consider it my duty to join them.' (See *Peace News*, 24 May and 7 June, for reports of the trial.)

Afterwards Pat wrote to *Peace News*: 'Despite objections from the judge and prosecuting counsel, I repeatedly pointed out that the present terrible situation was the direct result of oppressive British policy through the centuries towards Ireland...

'I referred to the fact that British soldiers were at present being arraigned before the European Court for their actions in Northern Ireland and Rock Tansey [Pat's counsel] succeeded in producing the Compton Report and commenting on its findings (that British troops had "illtreated" Irish people in the course of arresting and interning them). And I produced a news item about falling recruitment figures as evidence that British soldiers were already "disaffected" by the tasks they were required to carry out in Northern Ireland.'

WILDCAT 'inside story' No 1

Against the Army

Philip Sansom—one of the editors of War Commentary *found guilty of incitement to disaffection—describes the background to the trial and two other offences, for which he was jailed three times in 1945.*

wanted—was for the people of their own countries to make a social revolution against their own warring rulers, to establish a social order in which capitalism, with all the internal and external violence upon which it depends (crystallised for the anarchists in 'the state') was swept away and replaced by the truly free society.

It was, after all, only a very few years since we had had the Spanish Revolution of 1936 to inspire us, and it was not difficult to see the war as the death-throes of capitalism. Looking back a mere 25 years to the end of the First World War, we saw a history of revolutionary upheavals, not only in Russia, but also in Germany and Italy, while in Britain the 1920s had seen bitter class war and the General Strike, and the 1930s saw the same in France and the beginnings of the Chinese Revolution. Even Hitler's coming to power was a bastard form of revolution against the old order. Change and collapse were in the air.

We were not alone in seeing this, of course. Our rulers saw it all quite clearly, and as usual, were able to act upon their knowledge better than the working class. Just as Churchill had his plans to do a deal with the Germans if the Russians 'went too far' at the end of the war, so he also had his plans for dealing with any potentially revolutionary situation in this country.

The end of a war, win or lose, is always a dangerous time for government. The losers are disillusioned and looking for revenge; the winners are confident and looking for rewards. Millions of people with no love for their rulers have been trained in armed combat. Men who have done desperate deeds, seen fearful sights, on the field of battle, are not likely to be too fussy about methods in dealing with their class enemies. It is very difficult to control the flow of arms between countries and within countries when armies are coming home laden with their trophies. A returning army, even of victors, is a potential threat to a ruling class.

It is thus quite a logical move for a government to do its best to weaken any vocal revolutionary groups in its midst—to silence voices which might encourage soldiers to fight for themselves after years of fighting for their masters. No government can tolerate a people in arms, and the Second World War gave us two classic examples of how warring governments use each other to subdue revolutionary uprisings.

In 1943 the Italian people rose up and destroyed the Mussolini regime, only to be bombed into submission by the British Royal Air Force, who rained high explosives on the working-class areas of Turin, Milan and Genoa. While the Italians were still picking up the pieces and counting their dead, the Germans swept into Italy and took over, trying—albeit contemptuously—to rally the demoralised Italian army, restoring 'law and order', and dealing with those revolutionaries who had come out into the open after twenty years of Fascist repression.

Later, the Russians played a similar game in Poland, halting their hitherto rapid advance on Warsaw when the resistance fighters in the capital emerged from their cellars to attack the retreating Germans. Admittedly here the émigré Polish 'government' in London had played a part, hoping to get some Polish forces in control in Warsaw before the Russians arrived, and sending instructions to the Polish underground to make its move. But seeing the Russians halted, the Nazis halted too—and returned to raze Warsaw to the ground and crush the armed resistance workers. Only then did the Russian tanks roll forward again, to take control of a dazed and decimated population.

There is some evidence that, of the Allied war leaders, Roosevelt felt some shame about this—but none that any such feeling was betrayed by either Churchill or Stalin. Churchill, let it never be forgotten, was not merely a war leader. He was an astute and experienced right-wing politician, famous, before the war, for his ready use of troops in the Siege of Sidney Street and the Welsh valleys during a miners' strike and his alacrity in diverting troops from the German war in 1917 to →

ss for the Prosecution

Military Detention Camp at the time and was escorted back to my own unit at Stromness, Orkney, where the commanding officer searched my belongings and my mail and retained various books and papers. Shortly afterwards I was released from detention and applied for the return of my property. The officer said he had no authority to return them, and a day or two later I was sent for to be interviewed by Inspector Whitehead. I wrote to Lilian Wolfe telling her about these events, but (as I learned later) the military censor obliterated the greater part of my letter. I wrote a further letter and got it posted by a civilian on the mainland of Scotland. This was subsequently passed back to me at the trial. After much searching I have found this letter, and I see that I wrote: Whitehead drew my attention to the article 'All Power to the Soviets' in the November *War Commentary*, and to the duplicated Freedom Press Forces Letter of about the same date, and asked if I had read them. I said Yes. He pointed to one paragraph in the article, referring to the revolutionary effect of Soldiers Councils in Russia in 1917, and to a paragraph in the letter, which asked its readers in general terms about the existence and use of Soldiers Councils. He asked what conclusion I drew from these two articles in conjunction, and whether I considered them an incitement to mutiny. I gave a non-committal reply.

He said, looking at some of the newspaper cuttings: 'I see you're interested in the case of T. W. Brown.' He then made some observations about the case, and I said: 'I don't think that was said at the trial.' Whitehead replied: 'I ought to know. I'm the man that put him inside.'

Meanwhile in January Philip Sansom was jailed for two months 'for being in possession of an army waterproof coat and for failing to notify a change of address'—crimes uncovered when he was raided.

On 22 February 1945 Marie Louise Berneri, Vernon Richards and John Hewetson were arrested at 7.30 in the morning and charged with offences under Defence Regulation 39a. At the court they were joined by Philip Sansom who had been brought from Brixton Prison. They appeared four times at Marylebone Magistrates Court and their trial took four days at the Old Bailey. On 26 April Richards, Hewetson and Sansom were found guilty and each was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. Marie Louise Berneri was found not guilty and discharged on a technicality which infuriated her. Marie Louise was married to Vernon Richards, and her defence counsel had simply to point out that, since husband and wife are legally as one, a wife cannot be accused of conspiracy with her husband! Although Marie Louise was furious about this, she was not as furious as Inspector Whitehead, who realised he had dropped a clanger.

The judge was Norman Birkett and the prosecution was conducted by the Attorney General (Sir Donald Somerville). But the whole prosecution case was simply that laid down by Inspector Whitehead: to connect the circular letter sent to the hundred or so members of the forces who were subscribers to *War Commentary* with various articles on the history of soldiers' councils in Germany and Russia in 1917 and 1918, and on the situation in European resistance movements which, as the Allied armies advanced in 1944, were being urged to hand over their arms to the governments then being set up under military auspices. One of the headlines in *War Commentary*, for example, demanded 'Hang on to Your Arms!' and this was used by the prosecution to show that the paper was telling British soldiers to keep their rifles for possible revolutionary action. The article was in fact—and the context made it clear—addressed to the Belgian underground, after the Germans had withdrawn, but before a new government had been imposed upon them. Much of the prosecution's 'evidence' was as flimsy as this.

The defence solicitor was a man named Rutledge, who was overshadowed by his clerk, the genial and flamboyant Ernest Silverman, a tragic character most of whose life was spent in prison for innumerable cases of petty embezzlement (he later died in Parkhurst serving a long sentence of preventive detention). The Freedom Press trial was probably his finest hour. He was certainly a good and honest friend to the defendants, and they in later years made great efforts to alleviate his lot. Ernest briefed some very eminent barristers: John Maude (later a Tory MP and a judge) to defend Hewetson and Richards, Derek Curtis Bennett for Marie Louise, and James Burge for Philip Sansom. Here of course were the tactical dilemmas for anarchists. Having engaged an expensive defence you put yourselves in their hands, and the defence line was that here were four upright citizens (Richards was working as a civil engineer at the time and Hewetson was casualty officer at Paddington Hospital) putting forward their idealistic point of view with no intention of causing disaffection. The four soldiers called by the prosecution (including me) to establish that the offending material had been received by them, testified for the defence that they had not been disaffected.

None of the accused liked the way their case was presented. Marie Louise in particular wanted to defend herself and did not want to rely on the technicalities of the law for an acquittal. On the other hand, if the object of the whole proceedings was to silence the Freedom Press it would have been foolish to strike intransigent attitudes and get, in consequence, far longer sentences. In the event, she and George Woodcock were able to carry on the work of the paper during the period when their comrades were in jail.

A Freedom Press Defence Committee was organised to raise funds for the defence (energetically collected by Simon Watson Taylor—who was also raided by the police, who, discovering his fascinating library, declared their anxiety to join the surrealist movement!) and this won the support of many public figures—George Orwell, Herbert Read, Harold Laski, Kingsley Martin, Benjamin Britten, Augustus John, Bertrand Russell and many others. It subsequently became the Freedom Defence Committee, which was involved in many other civil liberties issues. I ought to explain that at that time the National Council for Civil Liberties was dominated by the Communist Party and was totally uninterested in the defence of anti-patriotic people because of the alliance with Stalin. Its principal activity at that time was demanding that Sir Oswald Mosley should be put back in prison—and hanged.

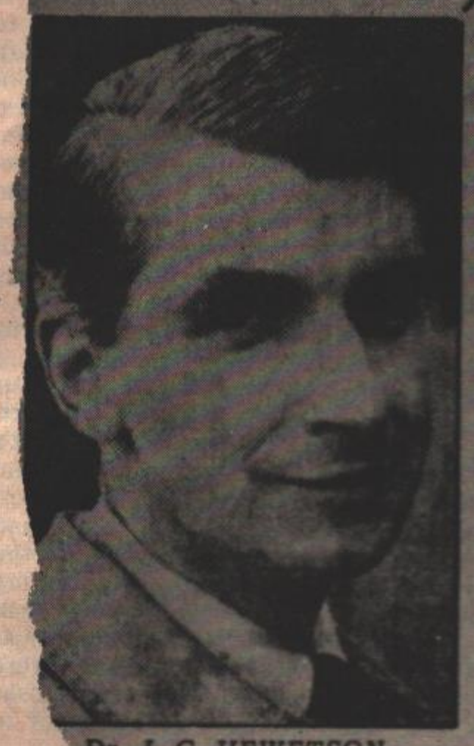
The particular regulation under which the Freedom Press trial was conducted was rescinded very shortly after the editors were jailed, though its provisions were substantially the same as those of the Incitement to Disaffection Act. After all these years, two questions remain. Were the defence tactics correct? And why was the prosecution brought in the first place? On the first question, I think that there is a world of difference between the individual prepared to face martyrdom for a cause, or for its propaganda effect, and a group of people who have a functional task to perform: the production of a newspaper. (And in spite of Herbert Read's rhetoric at the time about the 'hundreds who were willing to step into their place', the truth was that there were pitifully few.) There was every reason to suppose that if the defendants (who incidentally were not the authors of the alleged subversion) had not adopted the usual rigmarole of defence, they would have got very long sentences. As it was, they were given shorter sentences than T. W. Brown or John Olday, whose 'crimes' were much more trivial. They emerged to make *Freedom* the outstanding journal that it was in the late 1940s.

The second question is very hard to answer. Actually the state and the armed forces had very little to fear from the anarchists. There was not the slightest threat of the kind of mutiny that was so savagely repressed in, say, the French army in 1917. The government obviously took the trial seriously since the Attorney General himself prosecuted. Who ordered the trial? Was it the War Department under Sir Edward Grigg? Or the Home Secretary, the vindictive Herbert Morrison? Or was it just our old friends of the Special Branch intent on proving what diligent fellows they are?

My own marginal part in the proceedings brought me a rich reward. The defendants became my closest and dearest friends.

'FIGHT, FOR WHAT?' POEM READ AT OLD BAILEY

Four on charge of disaffection



Dr. J. C. HEWETSON

MARIE LOUISE RICHARDS

EXTRACTS from a paper which was said to have advocated anarchy, and verses of a poem which asked that landlords should do the fighting, were read at the Old Bailey yesterday.

Three men and a woman pleaded not guilty to having conspired to seduce from duty persons in the Forces and to cause disaffection. They are :

Vernon Richards (29), civil engineer, and Marie Louise Richards (26), secretary, both of Eton Place, Hampstead; John Christopher Hewetson (32), medical practitioner, Willow Road, Hampstead; and Philip Richard Sansom (28), commercial artist, Camden Street, N.W.

They also pleaded not guilty to endeavouring to cause disaffection by disseminating copies of a paper called "War Commentary."

The two Richards were further charged with having a leaflet headed: "Fight? What for?"

"Class-divided"

The Attorney General (Sir Donald Somervell) said that "War Commentary" was a paper which was headed "For anarchism."

Among the objects of the anarchists' movement was opposition to all means of maintaining a class-divided society—Parliament, the legal system, the police, armed Forces and the Church."

"The principle these people advocated," said Sir Donald, "is an armed revolution."

"'Hold on to your arms,' is an expression repeated in two successive numbers of the paper."

Sir Donald read a circular letter, which was headed Freedom Press, 27, Belsize Road, October 25, 1944, and began "Dear Comrades." One extract read:

Soldiers' councils

"These discussions bring sympathy and unity of feeling to barrack rooms which authority is always trying to split. . . Solidarity frightens authority. You should therefore, do everything possible to establish closer contacts. . . .

"One of the most important questions, in our opinion, is that of the action of soldiers' councils in a revolutionary situation."

When Mr. Justice Birkett asked the meaning of "C.P." in the letter and Sir Donald replied "Communist 'arty" there was a burst of laughter from the public benches.

The charge against Richards and his wife related to a poem in the leaflet "Fight! What for?" Two verses read:

Your country, who says you've a country?
You live in another man's flat.
You haven't even a backyard,
So why should you murder for that?

You haven't a hut or a building,
No flower, no garden, it's true;
The landlords have grabbed all the country:
Let them do the fighting—not you.

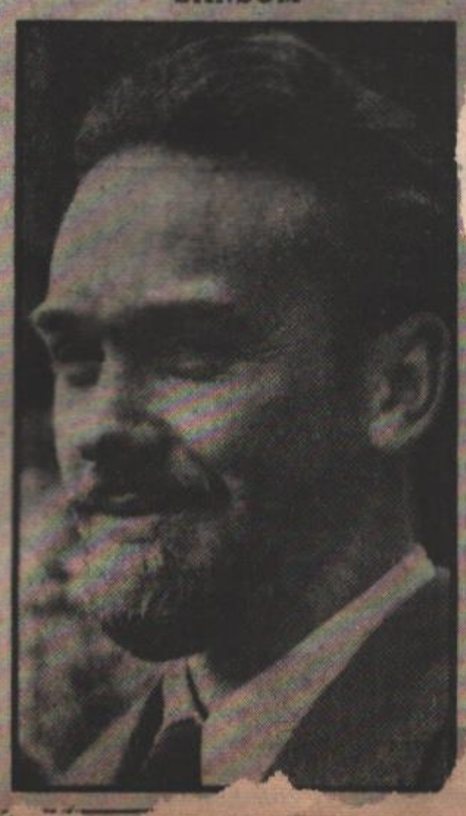
Denials by soldiers

A number of soldiers in whose possession copies of "War Commentary," or the circular letter, have been found gave evidence, and said they had not been disaffected.

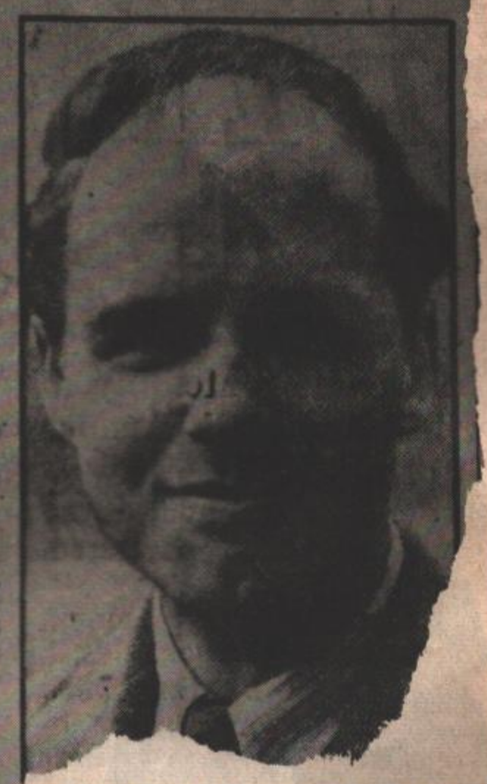
The Attorney-General said he would not press against Sansom the charge referring to the dissemination of "War Commentary."

Mr. John Maude, K.C., for the defence, maintained that none of the accused had had the slightest intention of disaffecting any man in the Army.

The hearing was adjourned until today, and the accused were released on bail.



VERNON RICHARDS (right) and (below) PHILIP R. SANSOM



send them to the rescue of the Romanovs in Russia. He was an alert counter-revolutionary, ready at all times to use the full force of the British state against his own class enemies.

Towards the end of the war there were signs that the British working class was beginning to give up its uncomplaining class-collaboration. In the autumn of 1944 the miners at the Betteshanger Colliery in Kent, after five years of unremitting toil for the war effort, staged the first—and only—wartime strike in Britain's coalfields. Nor was this the only sign that the British workers, sensing the end of the war, were determined that there should be no return to the terrible conditions of unemployment and poverty that had been their lot in the 1930s.

Indeed, six months before the Special Branch raided the anarchists, they had launched a successful attack upon the Trotskyists, four of whose leaders were jailed for inciting a strike—something which was not to be tolerated in wartime!

The attacks upon Trotskyists and anarchists, then, should be seen in a certain context. When Colin Ward asks 'Why was the prosecution brought in the first place?', I feel that he is not using the advantage of hindsight. We certainly did not know it at the time, but there was already a great deal of disaffection among the British forces. Just as the working class in industry was asking what was going to follow the war, so the working class in uniform was asking the same question. Once D-day had been successful, it was obvious that Germany was losing the war. Hitler had made stupid mistakes in attacking Russia (not even 'necessary', since Stalin was honouring his part of the 1939 bargain by supplying Germany with oil and grain!) and then declaring war on America after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour (though the US was still isolationist, as far as Europe was concerned). This new situation, by the end of 1941 created an alliance of industrial and military power the Third Reich could not possibly withstand. Although the Allies between them had neither the troops nor the commanders of the *calibre* the crack Nazi divisions had at the beginning of the war, they had the *weight* of men, metal and materials—and, of course, the Russian winter.

Germany was finished by the time the Russians reached Warsaw and the Americans reached Paris; it was only Churchill's stubborn demand for 'unconditional surrender' that kept the Germans fighting. How much the ordinary squaddy knew this, I don't know, but it seems obvious now that fewer and fewer soldiers were prepared to add their names to the lists of late casualties in a war they hated anyway.

Ironically, this was not something we found out until we were actually in prison. Once we got inside, we found the nicks full to overflowing, not with criminals from the home front but with soldiers sentenced by military courts in France, Italy, Germany, for desertion and subsequent offences. When a soldier deserts in a foreign country in wartime, how is he to survive? He has been trained to use a gun, so he survives by armed robbery, by hold-ups, by black-marketeering, by selling government property and by gun-running. We heard hair-raising stories of the sale of fleets of lorries and masses of material, food, petrol and oil—all of which was in short supply in the countries our boys were 'liberating'. In the process our boys were liberating themselves—until they were caught by the military police. Then they got enormous sentences, of 10, 15, 25, 30 years' imprisonment—and shipped back to England to serve them. Returning soldiers' tales elaborated this story of mass desertions. One ex-8th Army man told us that by the time his unit had travelled from toe to top of Italy, 80 per cent had deserted—and the remainder fell in behind a victory march of Tito's partisans in Trieste to show where their political sympathies lay.

These men were mainly soldiers, but there was a fair sprinkling from the Royal Navee and the RAF, and they were being delivered to the main London 'reception' prisons in batches of 20 or 30, two or three times a week. Pentonville, closed in the 1930s, had to be re-opened to deal with the rush. I myself was part of a working party sent over from the Scrubs to clean and redecorate the dirty old dump. In the event, of course, these men served only small periods of their long sentences. They were distributed to local prisons around the country—presumably to the prisons nearest their home towns—and after a few months, quietly given a 'special release' and, of course, a dishonourable discharge. The prisons could not possibly have held them all, but back at their units, the sentences were supposed to have a deterrent effect upon their fellows.

Now, none of this was known to the people at home—except relatives of the men shipped back in disgrace, and they kept quiet. Even we—who had contacts in the army in this country—had great difficulty in finding out what was going on abroad. The censorship saw to that. No word reached this country about the feelings of our soldiers when they made contact with the civilians of either occupied or enemy countries. But when we spoke to them in prison (and I can honestly say that there was no antagonism between those fighting men and us 'conchies'—except perhaps on the part of a few ex-officers in for fiddling the mess accounts and such-like gentlemanly offences) they told us how they felt about the suffering and the destruction they had seen. The truth had dawned upon them—that the Italians were not all fascist beasts; that the German workers, struggling just to survive in their factories and their homes, were not all Nazi monsters, but were victims of their lunatic regimes, caught in a whole series of crazy, complicated traps, just as they were themselves. So they quit. They walked away from the war, just as later so many Americans in Vietnam were to do and, even, a few of our 'professionals' in Northern Ireland are doing now.

The point I am making then, is that the anti-war groups in Britain, whilst making propaganda against the war, did not know the extent of the disaffection in the actual theatres of the war. And it was happening without having anything to do with us (compare Lenin in Switzerland in 1917!); it was simply the war-weariness and revulsion common to the end of every war.

But the government knew it! So, for these reasons, plus the fact that we provided a scapegoat for an unpleasant fact, it set out to crush our small revolutionary voice before the soldiers came home. This is the main answer to why we were prosecuted at that time. There is a supplementary answer too, that may explain the timing of the attack by the Special Branch. That is, that in the autumn of 1944, a serious split occurred in the ranks of the Anarchist Federation between a syndicalist faction (who later formed the Syndicalist Workers' Federation) in co-operation with the Spanish exiles already referred to, against the 'pure' anarchists. It could be that the Special Branch, like the jackals they are, thought that a time of dissension and apparent weakness was a good time to do for the anarchists. A lesson for today!

In the event, the undoubted rebellious spirit among the returning warriors was safely defused by the General Election of 1945 when the electorate showed its gratitude to Churchill by booting him out and returning the Labour Party with an enormous majority on what Emmanuel Shinwell described as the revolutionary programme of nationalisation and the welfare state. So that was that! It had seemed to us, until the Special Branch made its move, that in fact we had very little success with our attempts at disaffection. As Colin indicates, the prosecution was unable to produce a single soldier ready to admit he had been disaffected. No doubt the Special Branch has learned more about the use of *agents provocateurs* since then!

We had a list of about 200 contacts in the forces, most of whom simply subscribed to *War Commentary* in the usual way and some of whom asked for pamphlets or booklets, or received our monthly circular letter. Until we were raided we had quietly maintained these contacts and occasionally one of these conscripts would visit us while on leave. We saved a few souls, I suppose. There was one tank driver who was whipped out of his job and transferred to the Pioneer Corps a week before his unit left for France. We had never met him, but he subscribed to *War Commentary* and had ordered a few pamphlets. He was of course delighted; he probably owes his life to our little organisation . . . but it was hardly disaffection!

Well, there was one thin, pale, sensitive little soldier who visited us one weekend and went sadly back on Sunday night. At midnight on Monday, there was this tap on the door—and there he was again, saying, 'I can't stand another day of army life!' Without saying a word to us, he had simply gone back to pick up his belongings and walked out. He eventually became a poet. . . . And of course there was Colin Ward. How were we to know then what a contribution he was to make to the anarchist movement? He is, as usual, over-modest in saying 'They emerged to make *Freedom* the outstanding journal it was in the 1940s', for he, too, was a member of the editorial board at that time—a very constructive period in the paper's history. Colin himself went on afterwards to make *Anarchy* (first series) the outstanding monthly journal it was in the 1960s, producing 118 issues under his sole editorship.

For my part, I achieved a little more notoriety after the main trial. On the day before my release from the Scrubs (for disaffection of the forces, remember), I was served with a call-up notice to present myself for medical examination—in order to be conscripted into the Forces! This was clearly a move by the Special Branch to harass me further (they had been furious at the leniency of our sentences) and of course it worked, since I refused to submit to a medical, and was subsequently awarded another sentence of six months.

By this time, however, it was 1946. The war was well and truly over and the Freedom Defence Committee was able to mount a vigorous campaign on my behalf, in which even the *New Statesman* thundered about 'nonsense' and spiteful prosecution. I was let out on special release, after six weeks, for which, I was assured, I should thank Herbert Morrison (erstwhile conchie of the First World War) then Home Secretary. Instead I thanked my comrades of the Defence Committee. It might be worth, some time, returning to a consideration of the anarchist movement in wartime. The issues were sharp, the enemy well defined and anarchist attitudes were clear and uncompromising. Organisation had, perforce, to be tight, but there was a high degree of solidarity and mutual aid not only within, but between the anti-war groups in the sort of 'underground' that grew up. Those who went to prison had a sharp lesson in the nature of authority which democracy sometimes blurs, and the attack on the anarchists, far from weakening us, brought us added strength and support.

Another thing we learned was the truth of the saying attributed to Frederick the Great: 'If my soldiers began to think, not one of them would stay in the ranks.' It would seem that the greatest disaffecter of them all is war itself—especially, as Vietnam and Northern Ireland show, a war that cannot be won.