

# Free Speech Defence Committee.

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CHAIRMAN—J. WEDGWOOD, M.P.,  
House of Commons.

TREASURER—G. LANSBURY,  
103 St. Stephens Road,  
Bow, E.

HON. SEC.—WM. STEPHEN SANDERS,  
3 Clements Inn, Strand, W.C.

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## REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT.

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### THE ORIGIN OF THE FREE SPEECH AGITATION OF 1912.

In the December, 1911, number of the *Syndicalist* an "Open letter to Soldiers" appeared, in which it was argued that soldiers ought to refuse to shoot down strikers. Mr. Guy Bowman, as Editor of the paper, and Messrs. Benjamin E. Buck and Charles E. Buck, as printers of it, were in consequence charged with incitement to mutiny. At the March sessions the Recorder charging the Grand Jury at the Central Criminal Court, referred to them in a speech in which he attempted (it is not quite clear why he did so) to define syndicalism. The case was tried by Justice Horridge on the 22nd March, 1912, the defendants were found guilty, Mr. Bowman sentenced to 9 months' with hard labour and the Messrs. Buck to 6 months with hard labour.

Frederick Crowsley, who had distributed a reprint of the "Open Letter" at Aldershot, was also arrested at this time and remanded.

Further, Mr. Tom Mann was arrested on Tuesday, March 19th, in consequence of his having, in a speech delivered at Pendleton Town Hall, in the borough of Salford, on Thursday, March 14th, taken responsibility for the article in question.

Mr. G. Lansbury issued an appeal for a defence fund which met with an immediate response.

### FORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

On Monday, March 25th, a meeting was held at the House of Commons, called together by Mr. G. Lansbury, at which Mr. Keir Hardie, M.P., presided and it was resolved to form a Free Speech Defence Committee. The objects of the Committee were declared to be generally to bring pressure on the Government to release the prisoners condemned under the Act of 1797, and to endeavour to stop further prosecutions under the same Act of any persons urging soldiers not to shoot on strikers. Further, to raise funds for the defence of accused persons so prosecuted and for the sustenance of the dependents of the condemned and accused persons.

A circular letter to the press dated 26th March and signed by Messrs. Wedgwood, Lansbury and Sanders, as Chairman of the Executive Committee, Treasurer and Secretary respectively, stated that "by their action in prosecuting as criminals Mr. Bowman, Mr. Crowsley, Mr. Tom Mann and others for the public expressions of their opinions with regard to the use of the military in trade disputes, the Government have attacked the very principles of our freedom." It appealed to the public for funds to provide for the legal defence of the accused, to assist their dependents, to organise public opinion by holding protest meetings, and to demand the repeal of the Act of 1797.

### **LONDON OPERA HOUSE MEETING ON APRIL 3rd, 1912.**

A Demonstration was held in Trafalgar Square on Sunday, March 31st, to promote the objects of the Committee, followed on April 3rd by a mass meeting at the London Opera House, Mr. J. Wedgwood, M.P., presided.

Mr. J. Keir Hardie, M.P. moved the following resolution:—

"That this meeting records its protest against the action of the Government in instituting criminal proceedings against Messrs. Tom Mann, Guy Bowman, and others for the free expression of their opinions with regard to the use of the military in labour disputes, demands the release of those convicted and accused, and the repeal of the obsolete Act of 1797 under which they were charged."

Miss Mary Macarthur seconded and Mr. G. Lansbury, Mr. Bernard Shaw, and Mr. W. C. Anderson supported the resolution.

The resolution was carried with three dissentients.

Mr. A. Mac Cullum Scott, M.P. proposed and Mr. J. O'Grady, M.P., seconded a resolution approving of the aims and objects of the Free Speech Defence Committee and promising to support it.

The resolution was carried.

### **MR. TOM MANN SENTENCED.**

On the 9th May, at Manchester Assizes, Mr. Tom Mann was found guilty and sentenced by Mr. Justice Bankes to 6 months imprisonment in the second division.

### **TRAFALGAR SQUARE DEMONSTRATION.**

On Sunday May 19th, a second demonstration was held in Trafalgar Square to demand the release of Mr. Tom Mann and the other prisoners. Financial assistance was granted to enable meetings to be held at Manchester for the same purpose.

### **RESOLUTIONS SENT TO THE GOVERNMENT.**

Circulars were sent out to numerous I.L.P. and B.S.P. branches, Trades Councils, and local Labour Parties, Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, asking them to assist this committee financially, and by passing resolutions to be sent to the Government.

In consequence of this work a very large number of resolutions were sent in to the Government, and it is probable that this, together with the constant questioning of the Government by members of the House especially those connected or in touch with this Committee, was the cause of the reductions of sentence which the Home Secretary advised in the case of all these "don't shoot" sentences.

### **REDUCTIONS OF SENTENCES.**

On 21st May, 1912, Mr. McKenna announced that Mr. Guy Bowman, who had then served nearly two months of his sentence, would be released at once; and that Mr. Tom Mann's sentence would be reduced to two months.

The sentence passed on the Messrs. Buck had been already reduced to one month.

### **THE CASE OF MR. CROWSLEY.**

Mr. Frederick Crowsley distributed on Sunday February 25th, among the soldiers at Aldershot copies of a reprint of the "Open letter." He was charged under the Incitement to Mutiny Act before Justice Channell at the Hampshire Assizes on Tuesday, June 18th, and declined to undertake not to repeat the offence. The judge said if he had undertaken not to do it again, the law would have been vindicated, as it was he must sentence him to four months imprisonment with hard labour.

Mr. Crowsley's sentence was subsequently reduced to two months imprisonment.

### **THE ILKESTON CASES.**

At the Derby Assizes, on Tuesday June 25th, before Justice Coleridge, Mr. Thomas Mayfield, dealer, Mr. Nelson King, tailor, Mr. James Morley, publican, were charged with inciting to murder in an article, called "Revolution," which appeared in an Ilkeston paper called "Dawn" on February 1st. They pleaded guilty to a minor count of inciting to commit a breach of peace and the more serious charge was not proceeded with. The defendants were bound over in their own recognisances of £50 each to come up for judgment if called upon.

### **OTHER CASES.**

Assistance, legal and otherwise, has also been given in the cases of Messrs. Strike, Thompson and Lambert. In the first case a month's imprisonment was imposed for alleged interference with the police; in the second the accused was fined for illegal disorder; and in the the third case an acquittal was secured.

### **FINANCES.**

The accompanying Financial Statement shows that the committee had an income of £781 16s. 8d. and expended £601 2s. 4d. leaving a balance of 180 14s. 4d.

For the Committee

WM. STEPHEN SANDERS,  
*Hon. Sec.*

February 19, 1913.

## Financial Statement to January 31st, 1913.

RECEIPTS.	£	s.	d.	EXPENDITURE.	£	s.	d.
To Subscriptions and Collections ...	...	45	3	Case of Messrs. Buck and Bowman ...	...	40	0
Opera House Meeting—Tickets ...	...	49	11	Maintenance Expenses—Mr. Bowman Messrs. Buck ...	20	0	0
Collection ...	...	94	14	Legal Expenses ...	125	11	4
	94	14	2	Case of Mr. Tom Mann— Maintenance Expenses ...	67	0	0
				Legal Expenses ...	40	8	0
				Case of Messrs. Mayfield, King and Morley, Ilkeston— Grant toward Legal Expenses ...	50	0	0
				Case of Mr. F. Crowsley— Maintenance Expenses ...	28	3	0
				Case of Mr. Thompson—Legal Expenses ...	11	12	6
				Case of Mr. Strike—Maintenance Expenses ...	8	0	0
				Case of Mr. Laubert—Legal Expenses ...	4	4	0
				Hire of Opera House, with Attendants ...	69	2	0
				Postage, Telegrams, Telephone, and Carriage of Parcels ...	27	9	5
				Grant to Manchester Committee for Free Trade Hall Demonstration ...	25	0	0
				Clerical Assistance ...	15	18	6
				Printing ...	17	1	6
				Rent of Office ...	11	7	6
				Poplar Trades Council expenses, two Trafalgar Square Demonstrations ...	12	2	3
				Travelling Expenses ...	9	18	3
				West Ham Trades Council expenses, Trafalgar Square Demonstration ...	5	5	0
				Advertisements ...	4	17	0
				Typing ...	4	1	11
				Distributing Handbills ...	1	4	0
				Badges ...	1	0	3
				Stationery ...	1	15	11
				Balance ...	180	14	4
	94	14	2		£781	16	8

We, the undersigned, have examined all accounts and have seen all receipts, and find everything in perfect order.  
February 1st, 1913.

Auditors ( FRANK SMITH,  
E. W. WRIGHT.

J. WEDGWOOD, *Chairman.*  
G. LANSBURY, *Hon. Treas.*  
W.M. STEPHEN SANDERS, *Hon. Sec.*