

The Individual

Newsletter of the Society for Individual Freedom – December 1993

IMPORTANT — CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please note that all correspondence for the Society should, until further notice, for reasons explained below, be addressed to 104 Drive Mansions, London SW6 5JH (tel: 071-371 7530), and not to our old address in St. John Street. The new address is that of Mr Michael Plumbe FCA, Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Some members have received a letter, accompanied by various papers, purporting to be from the Society. The letter is signed by Mr Mark MacGregor whose claim to be the Society's new Chairman is invalid. Despite the use of Lord Monson's name in the heading of the letter, our President does not of course in any way support MacGregor's pretence.

DISORDER POSTPONES THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

For the benefit of members who did not come on 25th November for the Annual General Meeting (and even for those who did, but are unclear about what happened and why), the following is a description of the events that led to the AGM being postponed and the National Council meeting taking place elsewhere.

The AGM notice, announcing that it was to be held at 6.30pm, was accompanied by a notice announcing the annual meeting of the National Council at the same time and place. Normally the AGM of the Society takes place first and the meeting of the Society's National Council immediately afterwards. Owing to circumstances explained below, it was decided to hold a meeting of the National Council first.

However, when Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes, Chairman of the National Council, called the meeting to order, he was met with a barrage of shouting by some people who refused to sit down, refused to be quiet, and refused to allow the meeting to take place. Their disgraceful and contemptuous behaviour was a shock to all of us who never expected to see such incivility (to put it at its least) within our Society.

This deplorable situation came about through the conviction of a few (not all) of the younger people who became involved with the Society recently, that they could run the organisation more effectively if they could evict and replace experienced officers of the Society who stood in their way. That they were keen and latterly contributed willingly to the work of the Society is not in doubt; that they are also uncivil and over-ambitious has now been abundantly demonstrated.

Having planned to take control, in the weeks before the meeting they got some two dozen of their acquaintances to join and support them on 25th November. However, just as they doubtless thought that control of the Society lay within their grasp, they were out-

manoeuvred by the President and the Chairman of the National Council, who decided that the situation required urgent consideration by the National Council, in accordance with the Rules.

Unable to accept that they might be outsmarted, the rebels resorted to disruption. If they believed that the decision to hold a meeting of the National Council before rather than after the AGM was in any way irregular, those who were members of it could have raised the matter in a civil and proper manner as a point of order and argued their case, and any member could have done so at the AGM. In the ensuing disorder and dispute, the objection was heard that the Society's AGM had always preceded the National Council's meeting. However, nothing in the Rules requires this, and the National Council clearly have the power to decide such matters in the best interests of the Society as they see it.

The great majority of National Council members then started to hold a meeting in an adjoining office but, when even this was curtailed by the loutish behaviour of certain people (including non-members), they withdrew and continued the meeting at the nearby Grosvenor Hotel.

Meanwhile, MacGregor and others held a meeting that purported to be the AGM of the Society but was invalid. They purported to elect a new Chairman of the National Council, a new Treasurer, and many new members to the National Council. So the same people who had objected so vehemently to change in the normal order of the annual meetings, proceeded to "elect" to the National Council an additional 23 people most of whom had only recently joined the Society - something totally contrary to the Society's normal practice. This inconsistency shows that their guiding "principle" was whatever suited their purpose.

Until 25th November Mark MacGregor had been Vice-Chairman for one year, Douglas Smith was Secretary, and Jason Hollands was the new Newsletter Editor. We acknowledge their recent contributions to the functioning of the Society. However, by their extraordinary behaviour as described, they have revealed something about themselves of which we were previously unaware (or of which in one or two cases there were only vague suspicions, now more than adequately justified). Messrs MacGregor, Smith and Hollands have spoiled their credibility and, by a decision of the National Council under Rule 3, are no longer acceptable as officers of the Society. They now have no right to represent or act for the Society.

Of the others brought in to support them, most appear simply to have been used in a way which we hope they now regret. Unfortunately a handful of them were more deeply involved in the disruptive behaviour. We hope that each of those concerned will make it clear how he or she now wishes to be regarded.

One consequence of the attempt to take over the Society (an attempt which nearly succeeded, and might have done so if the rebels had been more subtle or the defenders less alert) will inevitably be that we will have to introduce precautions to ensure that only members can attend the AGM and meetings of the National Council. We now also need some volunteers to help with the Society's work, in particular a new editor for *The Individual*.

Michael Plumbe has been elected as Chairman of the Executive Committee in place of Peter Campbell whose resignation, announced in our October issue, was of course unrelated to the events described above. Lord Monson continues as President, Barry Bracewell-Milnes as Chairman of the National Council, and Lucy Ryder as Treasurer. We also enjoy the continuing support of Sir Richard Body MP, Professor Peter Campbell, Professor David Myddelton, Major Wakley, Peter Jackson, Robert Carnaghan and others.

As the Society's office address has been compromised by the presence there of one of the troublemakers, all correspondence must in future be sent to our new address: 104 Drive Mansions, London SW6 5JH.

REPORT OF THE RETIRING CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(The following is a slightly revised version of the report prepared by Professor Peter Campbell in anticipation of the AGM (now postponed) planned for 25th November.)

1. Open meetings of the Society

Eight evening meetings were held. They were addressed by Dr Nigel Ashford (The Case for Free-Market Federalism), Mrs Teresa Gorman MP (Fighting the Maastricht Menace), Professor Norman Barry (What is Business Ethics?), Mr Rodney Atkinson (Corporatism in Britain and Europe), Professor Peter Campbell (Freedom and Public Policy), Professor David Myddelton (The Power to Destroy: the British Tax System), Mr Marc-Henri Glendening (Political Correctness); the eighth speaker failed to appear despite having been sent a reminder about the meeting. Three of these meetings were supper meetings at restaurants; they proved more popular than the meetings at the pub.

The President, Lord Monson, kindly hosted the Annual Luncheon in the Palace of Westminster. Mr Jonathan Aitken MP was the speaker.

2. Publications

There were three issues of the newsletter, *The Individual*. The first two were edited by Peter Campbell and the third by Jason Hollands.

We launched a new publication, *The Individual Freedom Monitor*, intended to report on freedom issues in Britain, especially threats to freedom in the economy. We hoped that the *Monitor* would find a market amongst opinion-leaders in the media, politics, business and elsewhere. The first issue was encouraging but bad luck killed the venture before the second issue could be published.

Misfortune - happily less serious - has dogged another venture: the publication of the first of the Armour Papers funded by the very generous legacy of the late Alan Marsh Armour, a member of the Society. I am glad to say that we now see no obstacles to the publication early next year of Professor David Myddelton's book *The Power to Destroy: A Study of the British Tax System*.

3. The Civic Education and Research Trust

Some members will recall that in the early 1970s this Trust was formed to promote public education in the field of the individual's relation to the law. Unfortunately for reasons not now known the Trust soon lost contact with the Society. Last winter, however, the then Trustees informed us that they were thinking of winding-up the Trust unless the Society wished to take it over. We started discussions with them but progress was much delayed by factors beyond our control. In May the National Council agreed by post that Lord Monson, Sir Richard Body and Professor Campbell should be the Society's first nominees as new Trustees, but it was not until October that the negotiations with the former trustees were completed. One of our members (who wishes to remain anonymous) very kindly and generously met in their entirety the considerable legal expenses associated with the transfer of the Trust to the Society's nominees. The National Council will consider the Trust further. We hope that the Trust will be a successful sponsor of education, research and enlightening publication in the field of freedom - the tax concessions given to charitable trusts are an important means of enabling funds available for education, research and appropriate publication to go further.

4. Oxbridge recruitment

We have initiated and aided efforts in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to develop freedom-loving organisations which would be in close touch with the Society and whose membership will, we hope, be a fruitful source of recruits to the Society.

5. Presenting the case for freedom

Lord Monson and Sir Richard Body have, of course, continued their efforts in Parliament to present the case for freedom. Various other members of the Society have been assiduous in writing to ministers, departments, MPs and the Press. I would mention two members particularly: Mr Peter Jackson has corresponded tirelessly on our behalf with the Department of Health and appropriate MPs about the need to apply the Citizens' Charter so that people receiving treatment can learn fully the reasons for decisions affecting them. Mr Michael Plumbe has been a prolific writer of forceful letters to the Press.

6. Conclusion

Our record in 1992-93 has been mixed. There have been disappointments: the demise of *The Individual Freedom Monitor*, the delays with the publication of the first Armour Paper and with the Civic Education and Research Trust, and the poor attendance at the meetings in the pub. On the other hand there have been encouraging initiatives: the project for the *Monitor* was a good one, the Oxbridge project has started well, we are planning further Armour Papers. It is cheering to report the interest in the Society shown both by veteran members and relatively recent recruits. In this connection I would particularly mention the generous support that Mr Peter Curry has again given to the Society; in recognition of his interest and help over the years the Committee will propose his election as a Vice-President. I would mention also that both the *Monitor* and the Oxbridge project were initiated by younger members of the Committee. The interest shown by an increasing number of younger members of the Society is a good sign of its potential and of its continuing vitality as an independent non-party advocate of individual freedom.

Throughout this report I have used the first person plural to refer to the Executive Committee as a whole - the President, the Chairman of the National Council and the other members specified in Rule 8. It is a pleasure to pay tribute to my colleagues' deep concern for the progress of the Society, a concern which is shared by those members of the editorial board of the Armour Papers who are not members of the Executive Committee - Sir Richard Body and Mr Robert Carnaghan. I wholeheartedly thank them all for their efforts and for their kindness to me throughout the last twelve months.

Peter Campbell.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Following its recent postponement, the Annual General Meeting of the Society will take place on a date yet to be decided. Members will be advised in due course.

Published by

Society for Individual Freedom

104 Drive Mansions, London SW6 5JH

Tel: 071-371 7530