

May 24, 1941

Fellow Bookshop Member:

Since newspaper accounts of The Bookshop's emergency membership meeting Tuesday, May 20, were neither complete nor accurate, we are sure you want to know (if you missed the meeting) what actually happened. A brief summary follows:

The meeting was held at the Burlington Hotel, with some 375 members present--so far as known, the largest cooperative meeting ever held in Washington. The meeting was closed to the press, because of the distortions with which The Bookshop's case had been handled. However, one Will Allen, a reporter for The News, entered as a member under a different name. He was recognized, and asked whether he was present as a member or as a reporter. He refused to say. Thereupon he was invited to leave the meeting as a reporter, though he was free to remain as a member. He refused to go. Then, because of his past journalistic treatment of progressive organizations and his obvious attempt to cover The Bookshop meeting in an unfair manner, the members voted to expel him from membership in the Bookshop. He still refused to go, and invited the use of force--an obvious provocation. The Chairman declined to use force, and announced that the meeting would be thrown open to the press, and that Will Allen might remain in the capacity of reporter. The other papers were immediately called, and all reporters admitted.

Under the regular order of business, the Chairman reported on the reasons why, on April 18, the Board of Trustees had voted to disaffiliate with the D. C. Co-op League. He pointed out that the controversy had been cumulative since the early summer of 1940, beginning with The Bookshop's protest at the disproportionate assessment laid on it to support the League. Relations had worsened after December, 1940, when the League attempted to censor Bookshop mailings. Finally, the recent insinuation attack on The Bookshop through the three League resolutions and the failure to support The Bookshop's membership drive, led the Board to exercise the prerogative granted in the constitution and vote to disaffiliate with the League. However, The Bookshop nevertheless answered the League's resolutions, simply as a matter of courtesy. This whole matter was taken up in the full letter recently sent to all Bookshop members.

A report was then given of the events of Friday, May 16, when the Dies Committee subpoenaed David McCalmont, counsel for the Co-op League, to give up the list of Bookshop members from the League headquarters. The facts sent out in an earlier mailing were made clear, as to: 1. McCalmont had no right to give up the list, since it was The Bookshop's property, not his; 2. He had promised Mrs. Charles Putnam, President of the Co-op League, that he would not use the list; 3. He had segregated the names in advance, so that when the Dies agent appeared and typed out the subpoena on the spot, the list was ready; 4. He had marked the list with the symbols "S" for Stalinist" and "R" for "Rochdaleite", without any factual evidence (by his own admission to the Co-op League Board) other than his personal predilections. 5. He was prepared to testify before the Dies Committee "as his duty". 6. He had held secret caucusses at the Co-op League headquarters to "take over" The Bookshop. 7. He had approached the FBI on the subject of The Bookshop, apparently because he did not approve of the authors and artists who had spoken there, or of the magazines and books sold there.

Throughout the reports, a small group of persons had been using various parliamentary devices to create diversions. At about this point an attempt was made to introduce a resolution condemning the Board for resigning from the Co-op League, and in effect sustaining the actions taken by McCalmont. The Chairman requested that the resolution be held for presentation under the proper order of business. Thereupon the resolution was changed to "an amendment to the previous motion." This resulted in some confusion, since apparently there had been no immediately preceding motion, and the Chairman again requested that it be held until the proper order of business. At this, a young woman came forward with a handful of papers, and screamed, "All right, here are our resignations!" and throw them at the Chair. She then, along with eight other persons, left the meeting, and the order of business was resumed.

Under Article II, Section 4 of The Bookshop's constitution, the members voted to sustain the Board's action in expelling McCalmont from membership in The Bookshop, on the grounds of his actions.

A resolution was passed to petition the Co-op League Board for a special meeting of the entire League to consider McCalmont's betrayal of trust as an officer of the Co-op League, in voluntarily surrendering The Bookshop's membership list to a Dies agent. (The League originally set this meeting for June 2, but on May 23, postponed it to "June 20 or thereafter"---on the grounds that there was not time to prepare for a June 2 meeting. The Bookshop's resignation is not effective until June 18.)

The following resolution was introduced, and passed: "In the name of intellectual freedom, The Bookshop, a consumer cooperative, demands of the Dies Committee the right to defend itself publicly. It condemns the illegal seizure of its membership list by the Committee. It denies as flatly untrue the insinuations that The Bookshop is a Communist organization, and characterizes such charges as an attack on every American's Constitutional right to read the books and say the things he pleases. Because the issue of censorship is so clear, the members of The Bookshop refuse to be frightened into hush-hushing ideas or taking 'controversial' books off the shelves, and stand on the Bill of Rights as an instrument still in force in America."

A motion was made and passed to permit McCalmont to make a statement before the members, because he had requested this. He was accordingly called in, and summarized his position as follows: 1. He had a legal right to The Bookshop list. 2. He had no alternative but to turn it over to the Dies agent. 3. He had held secret meetings in the hope of making a "real cooperative" of The Bookshop. 4. He no longer believed that possible.

The members greeted McCalmont's statement with complete silence. He then left. The facts previously mentioned in this letter were pointed out. A motion was made and passed expressing confidence in The Bookshop Board and its actions in the crisis. Announcement was made that no answer has been received to The Bookshop's telegram to the Dies Committee requesting a hearing. Several members offered to take life memberships in The Bookshop, (since the list was seized, there have been 56 resignations and 95 new memberships). The meeting was adjourned with a demand for a new membership drive, so the public may know that The Bookshop has nothing to hide, and refuses to accept censorship so long as this is a democracy.

P. S. Information has just been received that Zala Ardene Clear, who according to McCalmont served as secretary of his "committee to reorganize The Bookshop," has been working directly with the Dies Committee and was in conference with the Dies committee this morning. It is understood that Miss Clear, while acting as caucus secretary, helped McCalmont mark the Bookshop list with "S" and "R" symbols.

Sincerely,

*Jules Yanover*

Jules Yanover  
Executive Secretary