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Comrade A. Henry's tour in the North

Letter from Agnes Henry to Freedom

Agnes Henry

13th October 1893

Dear Comrades,

Although almost a matter of ancient history for these hurrying, scurrying modern times, I feel bound, by the promises I made, to give some account of the tour from which I have recently returned.

On 27th July, I left London for Sunderland, my chief object being to get as near as I could to the mining districts of Durham and Northumberland. In Sunderland I found a very few Anarchist comrades, who had only quite recently known of one another's existence in the same town. There had never yet therefore been any associated action among them. Now, however, they have formed a group, and will certainly do all they can, together with a few more comrades in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, to push the propaganda both in the colliery districts round about and in the towns among the shipbuilders and others.

The great difficulty is the want of an able speaker, Comrade Pearson in Newcastle being the only experienced one among them. But,

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I may add that Comrade Black of Sunderland bids fair to become a good speaker if he would only persist in the attempts he has made.

Unfortunately, for lack of thorough organisation, I was not able to speak among the miners as often as I would have wished, but nevertheless the thin end of the wedge was introduced in places where Anarchist Socialism had not been heard before. During the three weeks of my stay our meetings were well-attended, and elicited intelligent and sometimes enthusiastic interest on the part of the listeners. In short, my experience strengthened me in my opinion that there is no more fertile soil where the seed of Anarchist Communism could be spread than among the miners and the other independent spirited laborers of the North. Meetings were held in various parts of Sunderland and Newcastle, and in the colliery centres of Monkwearmouth, Ryhope, Seaham and Chester-le-Street. Also a fair amount of literature was sold.

Being half way to even the furthest off of our Scottish Groups, and remembering the pleasure I had had early in this year in taking part in the propaganda among those cordial bands of zealous comrades, I could not resist the temptation to intimate my readiness to visit them again if they so desired. Accordingly, on August 18th, I proceeded to Aberdeen. The bracing air of this fine northern, smokeless town refreshes the body, while the genial and truly brotherly welcome with which one is received by our Aberdonian comrades, makes a week's propaganda there both an inspiration and a privilege. We held two indoor meetings on Sunday 20th Aug., and during the week five out-door meetings. It is very evident that the workmen of Aberdeen receive the Anarchist propaganda gladly. They seem here to be as well-prepared as anywhere for the hour when they will take their part boldly in working out that Social Revolution which we all so ardently desire. From Aberdeen we went to Dundee, meeting again with a true Scotch welcome. It was a great pleasure to find that the group had increased, in spite of their having but one speaker among them. I was also very glad to make the acquaintance of several comrades I had not met on my

previous visit. We had an excellent meeting, audience about 1000, in Barrack Park, on the Sunday. A slight, but not unfriendly opposition was made by a German Democrat. In the evening we had a smaller gathering at an indoor lecture followed by discussion. During the week we held three out-door meetings, all well-attended by attentive audiences, and generally followed by discussion. On the Friday I reached Edinburgh, and again I found myself among old friends, and made acquaintance with new ones. Here we had, Sunday, 3rd Sept., two successful meetings in "The Meadows," attended by large audiences. Several efforts made to find a hall for an indoor meeting during the week failed, and consequently I could only meet with comrades and sympathisers individually before I had to leave on the following Thursday, 7th September, for Glasgow. This too is a lively centre for Anarchist propaganda with a large and active group. It is quite remarkable in Glasgow to find such enthusiastic accord on many points as there seems to be between many of the Democrats, who are thorough revolutionary Socialists, and even between younger members of the I.L.P. and our Anarchistic Brotherhood. Everywhere I spoke the applause from these other Schools of Socialists appeared to be almost as hearty as from the avowed Anarchists. For instance when I attended a lecture given by Com. Kate Conway of the I.L.P. the moment I rose to take part in the discussion I was greeted with a burst of applause which to me was quite amazing. And here, may I add, that at any rate, in the North there are many active workers among the I.L.P.'s who have no living faith in political methods, but who have joined that movement merely because they feel the great necessity of giving the sympathetic but still timid workers a definite object to strive for, a "something for them to do," in the words of Com. Kate Conway herself. But these agitators aim chiefly at spreading Socialistic ideas, increasing the desire for fraternity, equality and liberty among all. As to our propaganda during my fortnight's stay in Glasgow there was certainly not much time wasted. The day after I arrived the usual weekly Group meeting was held, when imme-

diately a program was filled up beyond what had been already arranged for. On the Sunday morning we held a large meeting on the Green, the only opposition coming from a man who, as I learned afterwards, had been sent as a delegate from Edinburgh to the Zürich Congress¹, with the one and only direction given him by the body he represented—to vote for the exclusion of the Anarchists. In the evening I lectured in the Harmonic Hall, Watson-street to a full meeting. My subject “Anarchist Communism and the Zürich Congress” drew a considerable number of Trades Unionists, I.L.P.’s and Democrats. The discussion was lively and good. The outdoor meetings held in Greenock, Govan and various quarters of Glasgow were six in number, and none of them failures. Besides which we went twice to Blantyre and addressed the colliers there. The second occasion being on Sunday, 17th Sept., when Mr. Small, the miners’ agent for Lancashire, gave us a most cordial welcome, besides helping us in getting up the meeting. The assistance of such a good and sympathetic friend is most valuable in such quarters, and I should like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Small, the more as, though not professedly one of us he takes evidently a sincere interest in our propaganda.

In the evening of the same Sunday I lectured again in the Harmonic hall in Glasgow. The subject being “Fallacies of Government?” which led again to a lively discussion, carried on by the representatives of various parties. On the following Wednesday I left Glasgow for Hull. This town still bears evidences of the terrible tragedy of the last great dockers’ strike. It would be a fruitful field for an active, earnest propaganda. But here alas, as in other places, the cry is “we have no speakers!” Com. Sketchley for a long time held out alone, but at last, being unsupported, he can take no more active part in holding outdoor meetings. It seems that the attempt to form Anarchist clubs for mere pleasure has done much to damage the more earnest attempts at propaganda, here as elsewhere. I could, unfortunately, only stay to give one lecture in Hull which, being held on a week-day was but poorly attended. Certainly, how-

ever, the next time I go North I shall hope to stay for one Sunday at least in this town.

Finally I returned southwards, calling for a Sunday at Norwich on the way, where too I met with a hearty welcome from new and old acquaintances among the comrades. In Norwich our comrades have suffered much privation on account of their opinions as well as of the terribly depressed condition of trade. Still they struggle on with a steady sort of man to man propaganda, when they are not able to hold meetings of their own. With occasional visits from speakers from other parts, they would be able to keep up active work. We had a very fair gathering in the Market place for our morning meeting, and also an excellent opportunity, owing to a meeting being held in support of the miners, of addressing in the afternoon a gathering mainly of trades unionists, numbering about 1000. So ended my two months’ tour, on much of which I shall always look back in happy remembrance of the spirit of comradeship, which I everywhere met with, and which makes one of the great privileges of taking part in such a movement as ours.

Yours fraternally,
Agnes Henry.