

THE CENSORSHIP.

[Copy.]

Guild Hall, Swanston Street,
Melbourne, November 26, 1917.

To the Hon. Senator Pearce, Minister for Defence.

Sir,—We, the undersigned editors of newspapers published in Melbourne, desire to call your attention to what we believe to be the improper use to which the Military Censorship is being put in connection with the Reinforcements Referendum campaign. We refer particularly, first, to the discrimination in treatment between Conscriptionist and Anti-Conscriptionist matter; and, secondly, to the discrimination between Anti-Conscriptionist papers in various States of the Commonwealth.

We are prepared to furnish evidence to show that both these complaints are well founded, and, in view of the gravity of the question which voters are being asked to decide, and of the Prime Minister's promise that no further restrictions should be imposed upon publication, we feel it to be our right and duty to appeal to you for fair treatment.—We remain, yours faithfully,

- (Signed) T. J. Miller, Secretary.
 F. Sinclair ("Fellowship")
 W. McMahon ("Tribune")
 W. Wallis ("Labor Call")
 Thos. Shortill ("Advocate")
 Cecilia John ("Woman Voter")
 John D. Michie ("Railways Union Gazette")
 Gerald R. Baldwin ("Biweekly No")
 Henry Stead ("Stead's Review")
 R. P. Thompson ("Truth")
 C. R. Bowers ("Timber Worker")
 W. H. Webber ("Grocers' Assistant")
 R. S. Ross ("Socialist")

The reply is as follows:—

Dear Sir,—With reference to the letter dated 22nd inst., signed by various editors of newspapers published in Melbourne, complaining of military censorship in connection with the Reinforcements Referendum campaign, and intimating you were prepared to furnish evidence to show that the complaints were well founded, I am directed to request you to be so good as to furnish instances of the discrimination in treatment between Conscriptionist and Anti-Conscriptionist matter, and also to the discrimination between Anti-Conscriptionist papers in the Commonwealth.—Yours faithfully,

(Signed) T. TRUMBLE, Acting Secretary.

FREE RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP.

Anti-Conscription Committee.

At a business meeting of the Free Religious Fellowship, held a few days after the announcement of the Referendum, it was resolved that the Fellowship, as a free religious body, could not attempt to pledge its members to one side or the other in the coming campaign, but that an Anti-Conscription Committee of the Fellowship should be formed. Mr. W. F. Allen was appointed secretary of this committee, with a small sub-committee, and a general plan of campaign was arranged.

The Anti-Conscription Committee raised funds to the amount of about £190, and it is expected that when all accounts have been paid there will be a respectable credit balance. It is suggested that this balance should be devoted to Peace propaganda. A final statement of accounts will appear in next month's "Fellowship."

The activities of the committee consisted chiefly in organising meetings, publishing leaflets, advertising in the "Herald," and co-operating with kindred organisations. In all, about thirty meetings were held under the auspices of the Fellowship Committee. In addition, the committee joined with other bodies in a number of other meetings, the largest being a religious service held at the Guild Hall on Sunday evening, December 20, under the joint auspices of the Fellowship Committee and the Peace Alliance, when the speakers were Rev. H. Hope Hume, Mr. S. Mauger, and Rev. F. Sinclair. Altogether, the Fellowship provided fifteen speakers, some of whom gave their services to other organisations.

The committee published and distributed nearly 200,000 leaflets. One of these, a manifesto signed by nine Protestant clergymen, was reprinted in four other States, and also, as an advertisement, in the Melbourne "Herald," and in several other papers in different parts of the Commonwealth. This manifesto was the subject of innumerable sermons, articles and letters, including a learned criticism from the pen of Prof. Boyce Gibson, and is believed to have been one of the most influential documents published during the campaign. Another of our leaflets, "Questions for Voters," had the honour of being made the subject of two court cases, one against the printers, and the other against Mr. Sinclair, the charge being that the leaflet had not passed the military censor. We lost both these cases, and they cost us nearly £30, but the committee consider the expenditure worth while. Two other cases were brought against the printers and editor of "Fellowship" for having disobeyed the censor in connection with the November issue. The case against the printers was won by us, with costs against the Crown, and the charge against the editor was withdrawn. During the campaign, the editor of "Fellowship" joined with eleven other Melbourne editors in addressing to the Minister for Defence a protest against the abuse of the censorship for political purposes. The matter is being "investigated"

by the Defence Department. Perhaps it is not out of place to mention here that, in connection with the campaign, one of our members was convicted on a charge of "offensive behaviour" ! We are not ashamed of him, and the committee unanimously agreed to assume financial responsibility for his case.

Our advertisements in the "Herald" were the first of their kind to appear in the daily papers, and were the "thin end of the wedge" which enabled the Trades Hall to get their full-page advertisement inserted just before polling day. Similar advertisements were refused by the "Age." Like other anti-conscriptionist bodies, we had difficulty in getting halls for public meetings. The Auditorium and the Athenæum were refused to us, and permission to hold a religious service in one of the theatres was refused by the Chief Clerk.

The committee wishes to express its appreciation of the whole-hearted support which it received from members and sympathisers, who so freely gave money, time, and energy to the cause. It has been suggested that the committee should become a permanent part of the Fellowship, and devote itself to propaganda work in connection with other urgent public matters, while keeping clear of party politics. If this suggestion is adopted, we hope to have the continued help of those who have supported us so far, and to enlist other sympathisers in this branch of the Fellowship's work.

W. F. ALLEN,

Hon. Secretary Anti-Conscription Committee,
Free Religious Fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP NOTES.

At the first meeting of the Fellowship held in the New Year, reference was made to the death of Mr. W. Forster, and a motion of condolence with Mrs. Forster and her family was passed. Mr. Forster was one of the original members of the Fellowship, and, until prevented by failing health, one of our most regular and devoted members. He leaves behind him a gracious and honoured memory.

After some delay, Mr. R. H. Long's volume of verses has appeared. Copies may be obtained from Mr. G. Byrne, from Cole's Book Arcade, and Andrade's (Melbourne); or from the publisher, Mr. H. Stone, 74 Flinders-street, Adelaide. The price is one shilling.

The quarterly business meeting of the Fellowship will be held on Saturday evening, February 9. The chief business will be that held over from the November meeting, viz., the election of officers for 1918, and the discussion of Mr. Brock's motion that the name of the Fellowship be changed to "Free Christian Fellowship."

Week-night meetings of the Fellowship will be resumed in February. Further notice of these meetings will appear in next month's "Fellowship."

THE FREE RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP.

What It Stands For.

Adopted 1911.

Members of the Fellowship are not asked to give assent to any hard and fast doctrinal statement. The attempt to imprison the truth of religion in rigid form is not only futile, but harmful. The following statement is therefore merely tentative. Those who read it are asked to remember that "the letter killeth, the spirit maketh alive."

The Free Religious Fellowship stands for Freedom with Fellowship in Religion.

I. **Freedom** is incompatible with dogma; i.e., with the attempt to limit, by outward authority, that spirit of inquiry, which is itself a part of true religion. "The only infallible guardian of truth is the spirit of truthfulness." Life is the great sifter of doctrines, and the ultimate court of appeal.

Each member of the Fellowship is therefore responsible for the forms of his own religious belief only.

II. "**Fellowship** is life; the lack of fellowship is death." Religion, like all other human interests, is social, and requires for its realisation the give and take of common life. The Free Religious Fellowship, by uniting its members in the bonds of comradeship and good will, aims at strengthening them to meet the deeper problems of life.

III. **Religion** is a natural and permanent human interest, arising spontaneously from the reaction of man's spirit to his physical and spiritual environment. It can never be fully or finally expressed by any verbal statement, though every such statement may enshrine some imperishable truth. Religion constantly seeks outward expression in acts of worship and duty, but its roots lie hidden in man's nature. In its essence, religion may be described as the aspiration of the spiritual in man towards fuller communion with God, and the constant effort to live the spiritual life made possible through that communion. It is not, therefore, a mere intellectual exercise of emotional luxury, but an adventure of the soul among spiritual realities.

Adopted November, 1917.

The Fellowship stands for the realisation of what Jesus called the Kingdom of God on earth—that is, for a society based on justice and brotherhood. It therefore urges upon its members the duty of taking part in the work of combating, not only such generally recognised evils as drink, prostitution, war, etc., but also the more fundamental evils by which these are directly caused or intensified, such as the treatment of labour as a commodity, the exaltation of the rights of property over the rights of human beings, the monopoly by the few of the sources of wealth.

The Fellowship does not commit its members to a detailed social policy, but insists only on the necessity of deciding political and social questions in the light of religious principles and not of personal interests or of expediency.