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Wildcat Inside Story

Fight? for What? Poem read at Old Bailey

Four on charge of disaffection

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1945/1974

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“One of the most important questions, in our opinion, is that of the action of soldiers’ councils in a revolutionary situation.”

When Mr. Justice Birkett asked the meaning of “C.P.” in the letter and Sir Donald replied “Communist Party” there was a burst of laughter from the public benches.

The charge against Richards and his wife related to a poem in the leaflet “Fight? What for?” Two verses read:

Your country, who says you’ve a country?
You live in another man’s flat.
You haven’t even a backyard.
So why should you murder for that?

You haven’t a hut or a building.
No flower, no garden, it’s true;
The landlords have grabbed all the country;
Let them do the fighting – not you.

Denials by soldiers

A number of soldiers in whose possession copies of “War Commentary,” or the circular letter, have been found gave evidence, and said they had not been disaffected.

The Attorney-General said he would not press against Sansom the charge referring to the dissemination of “War Commentary.”

Mr. John Maude, K.C., for the defence, maintained that none of the accused had had the slightest intention of disaffecting any man in the Army.

The hearing was adjourned until today, and the accused were released on bail.

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Extracts from a paper which was said to have advocated anarchy, and verses of a poem which asked that landlords should do the fighting, were read at the Old Bailey yesterday.

Three men and a woman pleaded not guilty to having conspired to seduce from duty persons in the Forces and to cause disaffection. They are:

Vernon Richards (29), civil engineer, and Marie Louise Richards (26), secretary, both of Eton Place, Hampstead; John Christopher Hewetson (32), medical practitioner, Willow Road, Hampstead; and Philip Richard Sansom (28), commercial artist, Camden Street, N.W.

They also pleaded not guilty to endeavouring to cause disaffection by disseminating copies of a paper called "War Commentary."

The two Richards were further charged with having a leaflet headed: "Fight? What for?"

"Class-divided"

The Attorney General (Sir Donald Somervell) said that "War Commentary" was a paper which was headed "For anarchism."

Among the objects of the anarchists' movement was opposition to all means of maintaining a class-divided society — Parliament, the legal system, the police, armed Forces and the Church."

"The principle these people advocated," said Sir Donald, "is an armed revolution."

"'Hold on to your arms,' is an expression repeated in two successive numbers of the paper."

Sir Donald read a circular letter, which was headed Freedom Press, 27, Belsize Road, October 25, 1944, and began "Dear Comrades." One extract read:

"Soldiers' councils

"These discussions bring sympathy and unity of feeling to barrack rooms which authority is always trying to split . . . Solidarity frightens authority. You should therefore, do everything possible to establish closer contacts . . .