

22, Sutherland Place,  
London W2 5BZ

c.c. executive members

Monday 28th January

Dear Sandy,

With ref. to your letter of 23rd Jan. I quote the relevant section of the minutes of the emergency cinema group meeting of Wed 16th Jan. These were submitted as quickly as was humanly possible (Friday 18th Jan) and it was left to you to supply copies to non staff/exec., in advance of their Monday 21st meeting.

"Would there be any other finance available for co-ordination etc. ? Had a claim been made on the insurance for sick pay for the current organiser in absence ? Group was told this hadn't happened and all the work would be expected to be voluntary. Annabel Nicolson and Anna Thew said this situation was unsatisfactory. There was some consensus that any group would firstly to have more detailed financial/budget information from administration, regarding cinema, and that an allocation for co-ordination and programming should be designated and that this demand should be relayed to the executive for ratification. Suggestion was made that the 4 weekly days available under normal circumstances for operation of the cinema should be secured for that purpose, that a minimum of 2 days p.w. and no less should be allocated for programming i.e. 1 day per programme organised. Further to this that funds remaining for the other two days should be used for the benefit of the cinema .....The principle of the remaining two days to be discussed as and when fuller information regarding cinema finance and backlog and projected cash flow are made known to the group. It was generally agreed that voluntary undertaking of a whole month's programme was not viable or satisfactory. The executive would be informed accordingly."

Tom Heslop and Tony Marcus were in fact requested at the end of the meeting, to ensure that the executive be advised, that programming would not be undertaken on a voluntary basis, and that we would only agree to set to work immediately, <sup>if</sup> on the above conditions, see underlined. To my knowledge there was discussion of, but no objection to the principles of the same. We would not attend the executive meeting in question. We understood that it was only called to discuss the then current cinema organiser. We asked merely for two clear, urgent decisions. Divulgence of full financial information and ratification of initial 1 day paid per programme organised as above. Remaining days, as said, were to be subject to full discussion, based on proper financial details (these still have not been supplied or arrangements made to see the books !)

So I refer back to your letter

The serious effect of the absence of a cinema programme was brought up at the AGM. We volunteered to co-ordinate a cinema emergency group or committee to meet without delay. This was done. No-one at the AGM offered to undertake programming and organisation voluntarily.

It was made clear, see above, that programming should not fall secondary to bureaucracy/administration, either ideologically, or for reasons relating to the practical problems that separation of programming from co-ordination might pose. Also such a move is contrary to the agreed designation for which we are actually funded by the BFI. The combination of paid administrative appointees and voluntary creative/efficient programming is ill-advised.

It appears that though these issues were all collectively discussed on 16th Jan. with clear directives to the executive, they were not only ignored, but effectively subverted by an individual proposal made by one member of staff, without as I understand, any advance notice to either executive or members of the cinema group, and late in an extremely difficult meeting. I also understand that all available staff monies for the cinema area were relegated to administration alone, an area in which the staff member had a very clear and vested interest.

It's one thing to make a proposal, but quite another to vote on it without notification of all affected parties. Since the cinema group had undertaken to prepare programmes and oversee the smooth-running of them, albeit on certain conditions, they are amongst the parties affected. They were not notified.

Deflecting from accepted procedure would, under normal circumstances invalidate the decision made. But running wholly against the constitution is not a possibility under any situation. Paid working days (employment) should be available to no less than 50% women. (It's difficult not to note that the executive, and even the non/staff exec. are now falling out of the habit).

What you've just done, makes a mockery of Equal Opportunities Policies. However short term your intentions, makes little difference to the effect of men organising (paid) women working/programming (unpaid).

There's also a philosophy and policy at the Co-op of SHARING/WORK/SHARING. To give one kind of work (bureaucracy/administration) and another kind of work (creative/programming) different investment value, goes against pretty well everything the Coop first set out to achieve. There's no precedent either, under which any staff, except the administrator (BFI enforcement), should work full-time. Sharing of part-time work is fundamental to the ideology of the place TO ENCOURAGE THE MAKING, SCREENING AND DISTRIBUTION OF FILMS, so everyone has a bit of money for putting in their ounce and a bit of time off for making the films.

There's no precedent either, under which staff in control of one area, be permitted to wholly take-over or administer another.

Finally, it's illegal for staff to vote on an issue which so directly relates to their/ or their colleagues' interests. This is particularly strict under charity law/to avoid hanky panky with funds given in good faith. It appears that staff as a group actually took part in voting in the people they spend all their time working with. Normally you would under such circumstances declare and then abstain.

The appointment, however temporary you may feel it to be (I note with alarm that it was not a definite period....what if you don't get good applicants, or have to wait for any other reason of emergency, 6 months perhaps ? ), is invalidated on more than one count.

Point 2. is really already covered. Repeat:- No-one at the cinema group meeting proposed that Tom or Tony or anyone else for that matter would gobble up the entire allocation for cinema backlog on bureaucracy. So much for Art. And it was made very clear that any person undertaking the preparation of a programme would see it through, publicity schedule, running the programme etc. and all, to avoid late publicity/poor catering. That whoever did it would take full responsibility. Seen like that it's outrageous, paid administrators, unpaid artists - a bit more of what we get from the patriarchy, male control, female labour (without control ). I for one won't work goodwill and voluntary alongside some-one who is being paid for what they do in the same place. I won't sit silent and party to the imposition of any hierarchical division of labour. It makes me sick that paperwork can be given pennies and expertise and creativity is expected to be done for love. I've not got much love left 10 years on that game. If I programme, I expect to oversee it, make sure it runs smoothly, take the flak if it doesn't. I can't leave it (the running/publicity) to administration that might not have the same commitment or expertise.

The initial fervour and excitement of a joint creative proposition to restore energy to the cinema, having soured, I'd like you to realise that we shared the business in good faith. I took on two programmes on the clear understanding & condition that I would be paid one day per programme, knowing this would mean possibly two days preparation, a few trips in and out to see to proper publicity, clearing up and overseeing the actual programme. So far, on my part (others are in the same boat) I've spent over 3 days tracing films, writing up the copy and attempting to chase things up. Today I learn the booking for the typesetters was left so late it couldn't be done till this week, meaning that the month's programme won't be out till late next week, effectively bypassing the 1st Feb. opening programme and party we'd agreed to organise, and coming so close to Annabel's arranged days as to make it hardly worth running them. None of the cinema group (outside the Co-op staff) have received any information, not even a single phone call to say what is going on on this score. We've called in, on innumerable occasions to ask what's happened to the collectively agreed schedule, to suggest the need to meet. We've had no list of magazines to which to send publicity, we've had to virtually wheedle out information. We made our solid commitment, and the running of the show has been pulled to the centre, with deadlines over-run and no trust left that our work so far has even been welcome. You speak blithely of Tom and Tony doing film bookings, smooth running AND publicity and being paid for the pleasure. Meanwhile the first three programmes delegated have been all but scuppered through poor organisation on their part. It is apparent from one and a half weeks on the job that they do not have the expertise or knowledge to handle even basic co-ordination. Having no cinema programme or organiser for over a month is bad enough for the Co-op's future, but the practical obstruction of all the efforts that have been made so far by members of the group, to see that programmes would be put together, satisfactorily publicised and so forth, is out of order.

I have no confidence whatsoever in the performance of the administrative so-called side to date. What the hell is really going on? I have a right to know what you are doing with the work we've done. I have a right to see that the programmes we've put together get properly publicised. I have a right to see you oversee the way in which a programme I am organising is run.

You endlessly speak of CO-OPERativity, where then is your co-operation in this endeavour? All of us have made commitments in our programmes to persons and/or organisations outside the Co-op. Do we honour our responsibilities to them, their expectations of us? Or do we all just not bother, and let the place wallow in its worsening reputation, its bureaucratic quagmire, its lack of vision, and its emulation of dominant hierarchies? In the end the place is nothing without films and the people who've slaved to make them for love of ideas. At its best administration subsumes creativity. At its worst, the current scenario, it exploits and destroys the very life of the thing.

No, the spectre won't go away that easily.

Sincerely,



Anna Thew

P.S. Consider the appointing of a treasurer on the non-staff exec. to regulate the pattern of administration/ consider....whether elections weren't actually a point at which the members could have a say in who does what and how/consider what it really means to you to create a core membership in distribution which, (and who says WHO DETERMINES WHO'S CORE?) excludes openness, excludes the people who make the work, see it through from start to finish, excludes all those out of London, all those who're not resident in Britain, cuts out the notion of international and broad national involvement and hems itself in for the voluntary floorsweepers.