

In connection with Walt Dunkleberger's recent open letter on the subject of his dispute with Jack Speer, I have a few pertinent facts to present to fandom.

(1) I was one of Dunkleberger's earliest fan correspondents, and many letters in my files attest to the fact that we were good friends. My cutting down on all correspondence reduced the volume of letters between Dunk and myself; what letters there were remained on a mutually friendly basis. We were not intimate, perhaps, yet by no stretch of the imagination could we be called anything but friends. Then quite without warning, I found myself on the receiving end of rough treatment from Fargo, something like the innocent bystander who stops a stray bullet in a gun fight.

(2) As a member of the Pacificon committee, I sent Jack Speer a resumé of the first meeting. The publication of this report in Stefnews created a furore out of all proportion to the importance of the incident. Some feel that I did wrong to send out a report; I really don't see that it was such a heinous offense to give the Pacificon its first authentic publicity. Be all this as it may, I prefer not to go into the details of the rightness or wrongness of my action for fear that it might impair the Pacificon by touching off hostilities among members of the committee. The fact remains that there was a spirited row, that every attempt was made by Fanews and Fanews reporters to pillory me as a liar, and that I found it absolutely impossible to get my side of the story into the pages of Fanews at all. Whether I was right or wrong, one would expect an individual of the self-admitted straightforwardness of Walt Dunkleberger to present both sides of the question. Instead (in Fanews #320) Dunkleberger concludes an article on the subject: "We offer Speer a suggestion. Inasmuch as the item originally printed by you bears the initials FTL why not duck behind those and claim that you were 'misinformed'?"

I submit that such actions would strain any friendship. For the sake of the Pacificon, I let it pass at the time.

(3) The next exhibit may be found in Fanews #223 (Oct. 5, 1945). Wholly without solicitation on my part, Dunkleberger comes out supporting me for the directorate of NFFF: "The election of Francis T. Laney, an avowed critic of many NFFF policies, would be an asset. It is only by strengthening our weaknesses that we may become strong. Laney could assist greatly."

So far, so good, but in Fanews #227-9 (Oct. 28) he has evidently changed his mind: "After checking the platforms and letters from the various candidates we would like to go on record as endorsing the following, whose past records and avowed intention speak only of the best interests of Fandom and the NFFF in particular:...Board of Directors: Harry Warner, Jr. (Chairman), Dale Tarr, James "Rusty" Hevelin, Rick Snoary, and Joe Fortier. None of these candidates are rubber stamps or affiliated with any clique or pressure group and unbiased trustworthy administration would result from their election. None of them are seekers of personal glory but interested in the NFFF's advancement." (Underlining is mine.)

Inasmuch as I had made no utterances on NFFF matters between these issues of Fanews, and I knew very well that I was neither a rubber stamp, affiliated with any clique or pressure group, nor a seeker of personal glory; I was very much interested as to why Dunkleberger had handed me the wholly gratuitous insult of endorsing me and then retracting the endorsement. Being a believer in frank, direct action; I asked him.

(4) In a letter to me dated December 7, 1945, he says: "You ask why my change in attitude. Fran, I've always admired and respected you and though some things we've disagreed on we've always been able to 'talk it over'. I don't particularly care for your method of shout first and ask questions later but that's your way. So must be taken along with you. I respect anyone's point of view (whether it agrees with mine or not) if that individual will also respect mine. Such I've found to be impossible with Speer--You must either be wholeheartedly for him or you are against him. Hence I suppose I'm against him. Personally he has many desirable qualities but if I am forced to take his undesirable ones and like it I wont. Enough of Speer. It was reported to me by several fan that when Speer visited LA you spent most of your time fawning over him. This rather surprised me as you--from your writing--have so little in common, but, is none of my business! The reports indicated though that I had misjudged you and so was forced to change my opinion." (My underlining once more.)

(5) Being a peace-loving individual I still tried one more thing. Perhaps, I thought, Dunkleberger has such genu-

ine grounds to hate Speer that he cannot be blamed for allowing this hatred to go to such silly extremes as to turn on an individual whose published record is far more anti-Speer than pro-Speer. (of. Suspro, Mopsy, Vom, Shangri-La Affaires, Fan-Dango; various issues 1944-45) So I suggested to Dunkleberger (under date of December 21, 1945) that "if the reasons for your dislike of Speer are such that they would stand up under an impartial analysis...it could lead to much improved relations between you and me."

The result is the open letter before mentioned. It contains no factual evidence, nothing but a reiteration of previous allegations, many of which Dunkleberger would have one hell of a time proving objectively. (I hope that he is given the opportunity to try.) He does make the interesting statement: "If to be a friend of yours I must reverse all of my views and accept his ideas so that I may bow to the Great God Speer and become an intimate of his...You are asking too much."

Evidently Dunkleberger does not consider he is making an unreasonable demand when he reverses a presumably well-thought out decision of importance to the organization of which he is head on no more grounds than his learning that I entertained Speer in my home on an occasion at which almost all local fans of any importance whatever were present. I suppose I was expected to refuse my hospitality to Speer in order to remain a friend of Dunkleberger's??"

In summation:

(1) Until the commission of overt acts by him, I was on friendly terms with Dunkleberger, in fact one of his earliest fan associates. (2) Despite this supposed friendship, he made every effort to discredit my Pacificon statements, and at no time was willing to present my side of the case. (3) He publicly rescinded his endorsement of me as an officer in his NFFF cabinet without apparent cause. (4) The cause he finally gave is that he heard I "fawned on Speer". He made no attempt to investigate this allegation. (5) His published reasons for disliking Speer are entirely insufficient to excuse his nursing a hatred of such vast proportions as to cause him to act so unjustly to an unconcerned third party.

If Walter Dunkleberger is capable of acting in this way toward one person, what guarantee have we that he will not act similarly toward others? What surety have we that he will not use his high official position to do all the damage he can to other fans who associate with Jack Speer? Will such actions tend towards the "harmonious administration" he promised in his campaign literature? Dunkleberger is in a position where he can do fandom a major injury; can we face 1946 with any valid hope that he will not injure fandom and the NFFF?

I wish to make the following suggestions:

(1) That the board of directors of the NFFF create a non-partisan fact-finding panel; this panel to be elected by the NFFF board from nominations submitted by the directorate. I suggest that each member of the board be allowed to nominate three fans to serve on the panel, and that the board elect five of them. This should give an unprejudiced body.

(2) That the said panel request Jack Speer and Walter Dunkleberger to lay their feud before it for impartial study and judging, and that the panel take such steps as seem proper for the permanent and equitable settling of this dispute; including the publication of the entire case. To have the kind of postwar fandom we all want, this feuding and bickering must be brought to a stop before we find fandom split into a multitude of mutually hostile, petty groups.

(3) That such steps be taken by the NFFF board of directors to assure themselves and fandom that Walter Dunkleberger will be restrained from the commission of any further acts calculated to injure fandom so long as he holds the presidency of the NFFF. The president of the major national fan organization must hold himself above petty personalities; if constructive accomplishment seems less attractive to him than throwing his weight around to the detriment of fandom, I suggest he be allowed to do this weight-throwing in private life.

I believe that I am speaking for all fans when I say that what fandom wants is the maximum of constructive accomplishments and mutual friendships, and the minimum of feuds and enmities.

Respectfully submitted,

Francis T. Laney
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