

The Chain Gang

It is far, far down in the southland, and I am back again, thanks be, in the land of wind and snow, where life lives. But that was in the days when I was a wretched thing, that crept and crawled, and shrunk when the wind blew, and feared the snow. So they sent me away down there to the world of the sun, where the wind and the snow are afraid. And the sun was kind to me, and the soft air that does not move lay around me like folds of down, and the poor creeping life in me winked in the light and stared out at the wide caressing air; stared away to the north, to the land of wind and rain, where my heart was, – my heart that would be at home.

Yes, there, in the tender south, my heart was bitter and bowed, for the love of the singing wind and the frost whose edge was death, – bitter and bowed for the strength to bear that was gone, and the strength to love that abode. Day after day I climbed the hills with my face to the north and home. And there, on those southern heights, where the air was resin and balm, there smote on my ears the sound that all the wind of the north can never sing down again, the sound I shall hear till I stand at the door of the last silence.

Cling – clang – cling – From the Georgian hills it sounds; and the snow and the storm cannot drown it, – the far-off, terrible music of the Chain Gang.

I met it there on the road, face to face, with all the light of the sun upon it. Do you know what it is? Do you know that every day men run in long procession, upon the road they build for others' safe and easy going, bound to a chain? And that other men, with guns upon their shoulders, ride beside them – with orders to kill if the living links break? There it stretched before me, a serpent of human bodies, bound to the iron and wrapped in the merciless folds of justified cruelty.

Clank – clink – clank – There was an order given. The living chain divided; groups fell to work upon the road; and then I saw and heard a miracle.

Have you ever, out of a drowsy, lazy conviction that all knowledges, all arts, all dreams, are only patient sums of many toils of many millions dead and living, suddenly started into an uncanny consciousness that knowledges and arts and dreams are things more real than any living being ever was, which suddenly reveal themselves, unasked and unawaited, in the most obscure corners of soul-life, flashing out in prismatic glory to dazzle and shock all your security of thought, toppling it with vague questions of what is reality, that you cannot silence? When you hear that an untaught child is able, he knows not how, to do the works of the magicians of mathematics, has it never seemed to you that suddenly all books were swept away, and there before you stood a superb, sphinx-like creation, Mathematics itself, posing problems to men whose eyes are cast down, and all at once, out of whim, incorporating itself in that wide-eyed,

mysterious child? Have you ever felt that all the works of the masters were swept aside in the burst of a singing voice, unconscious that it sings, and that Music itself, a master-presence, has entered the throat and sung?

No, you have never felt it? But you have never heard the Chain Gang sing!

Their faces were black and brutal and hopeless; their brows were low, their jaws were heavy, their eyes were hard; three hundred years of the scorn that brands had burned its scar upon the face and form of Ignorance, – Ignorance that had sought dully, stupidly, blindly, and been answered with that pitiless brand. But wide beyond the limits of high man and his little scorn, the great, sweet old Music-Soul, the chords of the World, smote through the black man's fibre in the days of the making of men; and it sings, it sings, with its ever-thrumming strings, through all the voices of the Chain Gang. And never one so low that it does not fill with the humming vibrancy that quivers and bursts out singing things always new and new and new.

I heard it that day.

The leader struck his pick into the earth, and for a moment whistled like some wild, free, living flute in the forest. Then his voice floated out, like a low booming wind, crying an instant, and fell; there was the measure of a grave in the fall of it. Another voice rose up, and lifted the dead note aloft, like a mourner raising his beloved with a kiss. It drifted away to the hills and the sun. Then many voices rolled forward, like a great plunging wave, in a chorus never heard before, perhaps never again; for each man sung his own song as it came, yet all blent. The words were few, simple, filled with a great plaint; the wail of the sea was in it; and no man knew what his brother would sing, yet added his own without thought, as the rhythm swept on, and no voice knew what note its fellow voice would sing, yet they fell in one another as the billow falls in the trough or rolls to the crest, one upon the other, one within the other, over, under, all in the great wave; and now one led and others followed, then it dropped back and another swelled upward, and every voice was soloist and chorister, and never one seemed conscious of itself, but only to sing out the great song.

And always, as the voices rose and sank, the axes swung and fell. And the lean white face of the man with the gun looked on with a stolid, paralysed smile.

Oh, that wild, sombre melody, that long, appealing plaint, with its hope laid beyond death, – that melody that was made only there, just now, before me, and passing away before me! If I could only seize it, hold it, stop it from passing! that all the world might hear the song of the Chain Gang! might know that here, in these red Georgian hills, convicts, black, brutal convicts, are making the music that is of no man's compelling, that floods like the tide and ebbs away PTO

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like the tide, and will not be held – and is gone, far away and forever, out into the abyss where the voices of the centuries have drifted and are lost!

Something about Jesus, and a Lamp in the darkness – a gulping darkness. Oh, in the mass of sunshine must they still cry for light? All around the sweep and the glory of shimmering ether, sun, sun, a world of sun, and these still calling for light! Sun for the road, sun for the stones, sun for the red clay – and no light for this dark living clay? Only heat that bums and blaze that blinds, but does not lift the darkness!

“And lead me to that Lamp—”

The pathetic prayer for light went trembling away out into the luminous gulf of day, and the axes swung and fell; and the grim dry face of the man with the gun looked on with its frozen smile. “So long as they sing, they work,” said the smile, still and ironical.

“A friend to them that’s got no friend” – Man of Sorrows, lifted up upon Golgotha, in the day when the forces of the Law and the might of Social Order set you there, in the moment of your pain and desperate accusation against Heaven, when that piercing “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” [Lord, Lord, why have you forsaken me?] went up to a deaf sky, did you presage this desolate appeal coming to you out of the un-lived depths of nineteen hundred years?

Hopeless hope, that cries to the dead! Futile pleading that the cup may pass, while still the lips drink! For, as of old, Order and the Law, in shining helmets and gleaming spears, ringed round the felon of Golgotha, so stand they still in that lean, merciless figure, with its shouldered gun and passive smile. And the moan that died within the Place of Skulls is born again in this great dark cry rising up against the sun.

If but the living might hear it, not the dead! For these are dead who walk about with vengeance and despite within their hearts, and scorn for things dark and lowly, in the odor of self-righteousness, with self-vaunting wisdom in their souls, and pride of race, and iron-shod order, and the preservation of Things that Are; walking stones are these, that cannot hear. But the living are those who seek to know, who wot not of things lowly or things high, but only of things wonderful; and who turn sorrowfully from Things that Are, hoping for Things that May Be. If these should hear the Chain Gang chorus, seize it, make all the living hear it, see it!

If, from among themselves, one man might find “the Lamp,” lift it up! Paint for all the world these Georgian hills, these red, sunburned roads, these toiling figures with their rhythmic axes, these brutal, unilluminated faces, dull, groping, depth-covered, – and then unloose that song upon their ears, till they feel the smitten, quivering hearts of the Sons of Music beating against their own; and under and over and around it, the chain that the dead have forged clinking between the heart-beats!

Clang – cling – clang – ng – It is sundown. They are running over the red road now. The voices are silent; only the chain clinks.

Voltairine de Cleyre

from *Mother Earth*, October 1907, & *Selected Works* (Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1914)

NEW Dawn collective (eds.) *Under the Yoke of the State : Selected Anarchist Responses to Prison and Crime, Vol. 1, 1886-1929*

Anarchist Sources series #3

60 pages. 1-873605-48-X £5 (£3 / \$3 individuals)

Selections from Albert Parsons, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Ricardo Flores Magon, Errico Malatesta, Rudolf Rocker, Mollie Steimer, Nestor Makhno and more. These are their reflections about time spent behind bars from the Haymarket frame-up to the Sacco-Vanzetti trial, and views on how capitalism’s exploitation is society’s greatest crime and how anti-social acts would be treated in a truly free and just world.

NEW Júlio Carrapato, *The Almost Perfect Crime the Misrepresentation of Portuguese Anarchism*

Anarchist Library Series # 4

ISBN 1-873605-68-4, £3 (or £2 to subscribers)

Portuguese anarchism has been overshadowed by the events in neighbouring Spain – and often deliberately ignored by statist partisans of communism and liberalism. But, for all that, Portugal has a long tradition of libertarian organisation. It runs from the first days of the International in the 1870s, to the insurrection of 1910, fighting the fascist dictatorship from the 1920s to the ‘70s, continuing up to the present day. This pamphlet uncovers that hidden history.

REVIEW : Islands of Anarchy Simian, Cienfuegos and Refract 1969-1987: An Annotated Bibliography

At first glance John Patten’s comprehensive bibliography of the efforts of these anarchist publishers would appear to be for a very limited audience. It follows what I assume to be the academic standard for bibliography, including details of all books and pamphlets published by these imprints (linked forever to the names of Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer). However, the scene-setting introduction and appendices make it something that is useful as well to the everyday anarchist.

The introduction explains how new technology, in the form of cheap duplicators and later offset litho allowed much cheaper reproduction of the printed word. This can only get better as the tools to publish become more available. The interview with Christie gives some sense of what was going on in the late 70s and shows how he saw the work of Cienfuegos as connected to the wider movement. It still won’t have the widest appeal ever, but it will interest all would-be publishers.

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The Readers Respond

A Day Mournful and Overcast by an ‘Uncontrollable’ from the Iron Column

“Provides a wonderful introduction to the spirit of anarchism” – Workers Solidarity Movement, Ireland
See publication section for this and other pamphlets...

FERRER IN ITALY

Almost a century after the shooting of Francisco Ferrer y Guardia on 13 October 1909, a symposium was held at Barcelona University on 16 October 2001 on "Ferrer and Italy." What follows is a summary of three of the Italian contributions that bear witness to the various facets of Ferrer's influence in the Italian context.

Claudio Venza, **Solidarity and Revolt: The October 1909 Ferrer Campaign**

In Italy the protests against the shooting of Ferrer assumed various forms and involved a wide spectrum of political and social forces ranging from anarchists to freemasons, socialists to republicans, trade unionists to radical democrats. The working class campaign involved general strikes which were sometimes spontaneous, with attempts to storm Spanish consulates and Church buildings. The demonstrators regarded the latter as "lairs of the parasites and reactionaries", ie. places harbouring the real authors of the judicial murder so recently carried out. There were especially strong popular protests in the Milan and Rome areas where there were prolonged violent clashes with the police and army. As regards the political forces of institutional reformism, besides their law-based demands (which failed) such as repeal of the state subsidies to the Catholic Church and the abolition of religious orders, there were symbolic initiatives such as the renaming of certain streets and squares which were named after the "martyr for freethought" (the Via Archivescovado – Archbishopric Street – in Florence being a case in point). In addition to objections from some bar associations outraged at the absence of the usual legal guarantees from the court martial recently conducted in Barcelona which had resulted in the death sentence on Ferrer, respectable bourgeois personages who had held the post of honorary Spanish consuls tendered their resignations.

Several hundred towns, large and small, were caught up in the anti-clerical protests, whilst the numbers of demonstrators can be estimated at hundreds of thousands, with several thousand arrests and hundreds officially recorded as injured. The areas of greatest virulence coincided with the areas of greatest libertarian influence, such as Tuscany.

Such mobilisation demonstrated that in Italy too there was considerable interest in the Modern School and its founder, an interest and sympathy demonstrated earlier in 1906 when Ferrer was first arrested. Such protests also indicated that anti-clerical sentiment was very widespread in various strata of society and political denominations. In addition, the subversive and secular potential signalled by this tidal wave of rebellion show widespread and staunch opposition to the elitist, selfish use of power by the ruling classes in the Giolittian era which oscillated between reform programmes and repressive behaviour as well as engaging in corrupt practices.

Within a couple of days, the initially inter-class unrest prompted by moral outrage gave way to differentiated and indeed contradictory approaches: the approach espoused by the secular moderates was rather wordy, whereas that of the more aggressively anti-clerical subversives was determinedly radical. At bottom, there were factors common to both camps: ranging from the attempt to whittle away at clerical influence over part of the population and

institutions to a determination to develop a rationalist and "scientific" culture as a concrete alternative to the superstitions and other aspects characterising the Catholic, conservative mind-set. In the heated week after 13 October 1909, Francisco Ferrer became an ideological and practical reference point for a huge and wide spectrum of social forces and political groups determined to modernise and release Italian society from the tutelage of the Church, a tutelage which in fact has never lessened.

Francesco Codello,

Ferrer's Influence over Libertarian Education in Italy

In Italy in the years between 1906 and 1910, Francisco Ferrer came to symbolise libertarian education and was at the same time the outstanding victim of a cultural obscurantism represented by a reactionary alliance between Church and State. Italian anarchists looked at him and at his work as the embodiment of those aspirations to freedom, justice and solidarity proper to the libertarian tradition, even in the field of education.

Between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the first world war, the Italian-language anarchist movement was experiencing a period of considerable cultural and organisational renaissance. Among the liveliest, best supported ventures and debates was a debate on education. Libertarians regarded teaching and education as two of the main means whereby the yearning for radical social change could be aroused in the lower classes. At the Rome anarchist congress in 1907 there was unanimous support for a motion (probably drafted by Luigi Fabbri, 1877-1935, a schoolteacher and close collaborator of Errico Malatesta, 1853-1932) affirming the need for "anarchists in Italy to act as the promoters of the scientific rational approach of the modern school institution, after the model of Ferrer's achievement in Spain". In the ensuing years there were several attempts to set up such educational ventures in a number of cities such as Bologna, Milan, Turin and Pisa. One of the most telling experiments took place in Clivio, a small town in the province of Varese, from 1910 to 1914 (with a sequel in 1920). The libertarian press as a whole devoted a lot of coverage to the education issue and to Ferrer's Modern School. In particular, promotion of the ideas of the Spanish educator was conducted through two reviews – *Il Pensiero* and *L'Università Popolare*, the former run by Fabbri and Pietro Gori (1865-1911) and the latter by Luigi Molinari (1866-1918). Indeed, Fabbri and Molinari rank among the better known militants who enthusiastically embraced Ferrer's ideas and publicised his work. Molinari himself tried unsuccessfully to sponsor actual educational activity.

Several years on, Fabbri was to write: "It is up to those of us who were friends but are followers of Ferrer's ideas rather than of the man to abide more strictly by his demanding testament. Idolising the man does not enter into it. We retain affectionate memories of him but our task is to carry on with his work, in which the bourgeoisie will never follow us, and teach a new godless and master-less civilisation."

Other activists like Malatesta and Camillo Berneri (1897-1937) expressed reservations about the short-term practical usefulness of Ferrer's theses. In fact, they favoured instead

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theoretical options more closely mirroring the political and social tensions present in Italy. Even so, all militants acknowledged that Ferrer and his Modern School had alerted the whole of society (and especially revolutionary movements) to the crucial nature of the educational issue and potential alternatives to the prevailing Catholic or authoritarian systems of schooling.

Franco Bertolucci,

The Ferrer "Myth" Spreads through Tuscany

Francisco Ferrer arrived in Italy along with a few hundred other Spanish delegates to take part in the International Freethought Congress held in Rome from 20 to 23 September 1904. In the Italian capital, he met up with numerous libertarians like the Frenchman Paul Robin, the Dutchman Domela Nieuwenhuis and the Italian Luigi Fabbri. One anarchist, Antonio Agresti, has left us vivid testimony regarding the active presence of the Barcelona educationist.

The respect and personal friendship Ferrer earned on this occasion fuelled the solidarity campaign launched in mid-1906 when the Catalan educator was first arrested. In Tuscany as elsewhere in Italy, over several months in 1906 and 1907, there were conferences, demonstrations and fund-raising "for Ferrer". Many publications started to carry essays by Ferrer with especial attention given to his educational theories and achievements.

That international solidarity campaign was revived between September and October 1909, following the Barcelona educator's second arrest. Throughout Tuscany there were numerous demonstrations which peaked between 13 and 16 October, immediately after Ferrer was shot. On 14 October especially, there was a general strike throughout the entire Tuscany region and lots of businesses posted up notices reading "closed for international mourning." Several processions of workers and anti-clericals crossed the cities and ended in street-fighting: this was the case in Florence, Pisa and Livorno. All of the leading elements of the subversive and democratic left were involved in the solidarity campaign, from the anarchists to the socialists, republicans and freemasons. Among the anarchists, those most active were the lawyer-poet Pietro Gori, the Sicilian anti-organisationist Paolo Schicchi (1865-1950) and the Tuscan journalist and agitator Virgilio Mazzoni (1869-1959).

In the weeks and months after Ferrer's death, the image of the "freethinker martyr" spread throughout Tuscany and 13 October was added to the secular, subversive calendar of the lower classes. In several cities as well as villages, that date became the occasion for the naming of streets, unveiling of plaques and inauguration of monuments commemorating the educator shot in Barcelona. One of the most impressive commemorations took place in Carrara on 13 October 1913: upwards of 20,000 people (out of a total population of 50,000) took part in the unveiling of the plaque: industrial and commercial activity in that city in Apua ground was at a standstill all day. Such monuments and sculptures represent a standing testimonial to Ferrer's enduring with the history of the Tuscan libertarian and labour movement. It was no accident that the fascist authorities were to try everything to destroy such examples of secular working class memory, in which they were not

entirely successful. After the second world war, albeit on a lesser scale, the plaques and monuments which had been smashed or removed were reerected. Signifying that the life of the educationist Ferrer had not been forgotten: indeed by then he had become one of the emblems of the struggle for progress against "ignorance and fanaticism" and of the yearning of the oppressed for a "free and fair" society.

Source: *Bollettino Archivio Giuseppe Pinelli* 18, p. 43-47

Recently received

Hobnail Review: a guide to small press & alternative publishing

'Review and listings magazine which features independent, self-published and small press journals, zines and other publications that offer avant-garde, surreal and abstract perceptions of reality; new perspectives and radical alternatives, challenging and reinterpreting accepted norms and values in art literature and lifestyle' ie it covers Radical, small press, zines and 'weird' stuff. As such it's bound to include something of interest you wouldn't know about otherwise!

Hobnail Press, PO Box 44122, London, SW6 7XJ. Send for a sample! Published 3 or 4 times a year : £1/\$2 a pop.

Class War Calendar

It's not too late to get your copy. The 2004 Class War calendar is out now, a 20th anniversary celebration of the year long Miners Strike, the most important strike in recent British history. £7 from Class War, PO Box 467, London, E8 3QX

The New-found Freedom

Many KSL Bulletin readers will be aware of how much Freedom has changed over the last couple of years. It has drawn in a new set of editors and contributors and the dynamism they have brought shows in its pages. Regular international news has joined the round-up of what's going on in the workplace. There is now a page given over to different views within the movement, which has featured input from the KSL, as well as the controversial Green and Black Bulletin and the Workers' Solidarity Movement. And to quote on reader: "was very struck reading the Comments pages what a bright lot anarchists are! I couldn't image any trot paper having such a spread of well thought out and argued views."

If you haven't seen Freedom for a few years, you should definitely give it a look. Available from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1

Credit

This issue of KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library produced January 2004 by the Kate Sharpley Library. KSL, BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX
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www.katesharpleylibrary.net

Thanks to comrades who sent letters, orders and donations, including the anonymous bundle of Kropotkins, and the Nettlau book. Feedback welcome.

SPREAD THE WORD

How to Set Up a Local Newsletter

1 Organise a meeting. You've talked about it down the pub with a few mates. You all think it's a great idea. There are a few more people you can think of who'd be interested. So just get on with it - it's not going to happen otherwise. Fix a date, time and venue (could be someone's house, it's not a public meeting). Leave other possibilities wide open. It's important for everyone involved to have had a say in the shaping of the project from the start.

2 Get it all sorted. There's no point in having your founding moment and then coming away having vaguely agreed to do something soon. Probably. When we've got our act together. The minimum you should have agreed is a name and address, which will in turn enable you to set up a building society account in your newsletter's name. We use a PO Box, which costs about fifty quid a year. We had to chip in up front to start it but donations over the next 12 months covered the renewal (just). It would probably be better to have an actual local street address, not just to save cash but so people could drop stuff in by hand and bypass the official mail system.

3 Think of a good name. OK, maybe you can't take that advice from a group with a title like The Pork-Bolter. But it is a genuine historical nickname for Worthing people and the piggy identity has provided us with hours of puns. The main requirements are that it should be a local name and that it shouldn't put people off reading your stuff by being too overtly political. This may not come naturally to most would-be rabble-rousers, but you are addressing ordinary people here and not fellow subversive scum. On the same lines, there is no need to invent a separate name for the group producing the newsletter. It may well prove an own goal to declare that ON THE BOG What's Going Down in Little Bogweed is published by the South Bogshire Emiliano Zapata Revolutionary Militia Propaganda Outreach Cell.

4 The nitty-gritty. Thinking of a name is the fun bit and may well take up 95 per cent of your opening meeting (if you let it). But you've also got to start thinking about boring detail, like what size is the newsletter going to be, how often will it come out, how many will you get printed and so on. Without wanting to come across all sycophantic, we were greatly inspired by the example of Sch-you-know-who in our inception and had no qualms about blatantly copying their format. You'd be amazed how much you can fit on a double-sided piece of A4. As far as frequency is concerned, once a month seems about right for us. Quantity is obviously limited by funds. Try getting 500 done to start with, then up it to 1,000 or more if your distribution is working. Another advantage of the double-sided A4 format is that it is easy to photocopy and you may be able to supplement your print run with the help of office-worker volunteers (and various people will be busy copying and distributing them around their mates and colleagues who you won't even know about...).

5 Printing. Cheap photocopying/printing is hard to come by, but very useful. Don't just rush out to the nearest High St print shop. Ask around for ideas about cheaper options. Try your local student union or college print department or local resource centre. If all else fails, why not bring out the

newsletter at whatever cost and appeal to readers for leads on cheaper printing. You never know who will come forward.

6 Paying for it. You'll probably find yourselves fulfilling this role. But spread between the group members it doesn't come to much. If you meet at someone's home instead of in the pub, you'll have probably paid for the next issue from what would have been spent at the bar. Other costs may well be covered by donations/subscriptions once you've got going.

7 Getting it out. Distribution is a piece of cake when it's free. It's just a question of getting them all out into the hands of the local population. You can do that most directly by standing in the town centre and thrusting them rudely into people's hands (with a smile on your face). And you can leave them in public places like the library or town hall (small amounts but frequently - they tend to get removed). Ask in shops if you can leave a pile on the counter. And in pubs. You'll be surprised at the positive reaction to a lively local newsletter. Keen people should also be able to subscribe for a small charge to cover postage (though since they're local you could drop them in by hand and save the stamp).

8 Contents. You'd forgotten about that small detail, hadn't you? What do you put in the bloody thing? This should not really be a problem for anyone who's got as far as even thinking about doing a newsletter. First of all you read all the mainstream local papers. And then you get very angry with all the crap that the councils up to and the MP is on about. And then you don't just forget about it and resolve not to read annoying local papers any more, but instead you cut out the relevant bits and bring them along to the next newsletter meeting'. And everyone else gets angry about and says how crap the council is and takes the piss a bit and someone else has cut a bit out of The Big Issue which sort of fits in. Meanwhile, a person with biro-manipulating skills writes down the best bits. And lo, the contents start to emerge. Add in your own little campaigns (anti-GM, anti-CCTV, anti-negative attitudes etc), plus titbits about worthy local groups (Friends of the Earth, animal welfare etc etc) and you've got a newsletter.

9 Campaigns. Gives a positive focus amidst all the sniping from the sidelines. But obviously depends on what's happening locally. And what you're into.

10 Keep it local. Forget the recommendation to act locally and think globally. You have to start thinking locally as well. Only then can you go on to draw your political conclusions. For instance, trying to persuade people here that global capitalism is a bad thing because it is destroying the Amazon rainforests is a waste of time. But talk about the way that money-grabbing property developers are allowed to build all over green spaces on the edge of your town and your readers will understand why you then call for an end to the rule of greed and money over people and countryside. In your newsletter your views can clearly be seen as common sense. You are normal and the council/property developers/Government are the outsiders - reversing the way radical views are conventionally presented. Use words like 'we' and 'our' a lot.

11 Have a laugh. A jokey approach makes people read your newsletter and explodes certain ill-founded stereotypes

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about individuals involved in radical political initiatives. Could be a problem, though, if your group does in fact happen to be entirely composed of humourless left-wing gits.

12 Media. You yourselves are the new media for the town, so, you don't need to worry about publicity. But if they want to give a rival organ a boost, that's just dandy.

13 Carry on publishing! There will be ups and downs. New people will join your circle. Others will drift away. It might seem like nobody's taking any notice of you at all. But be sure that your message will be permeating the very fabric of your community. It's got to be worth it. Free examples of The Pork-Bolter available from
Pork Bolter PO Box 4144 Worthing BN14 7NZ

Clem Turff

Clem Turff, who many readers of this bulletin will remember, died in January 2003. His death was certainly hastened by the beating he received at the hands of the police on the criminal justice demo in Hyde Park. To my mind, Clem typified many of the things that are good about anarchists, remaining a humorous and committed militant despite his own personal demons. Apart from a brief notice in Direct Action the anarchist movement hasn't marked his passing in words, a situation we would like to rectify. If anyone has reminiscences or anecdotes of Clem, please send them to svartfrosk@yahoo.co.uk or the KSL address. I plan to try and collect them together as a short pamphlet.

Martin H.

The Paris Auto Bandits [The "Bonnot Gang"]

The world stands aghast at the reign of terror that held the city of Paris in its grip. At last the "bandits" have been hounded to death. many and varied have been the opinions expressed in the radical press of the world. We had not contemplated writing our opinion on this subject, but when we read the condemnation of these men in one of the leading revolutionary weeklies, last week, we could not refrain from expressing our small tribute to the men who had the strength of their convictions to risk all that they possessed, a miserable life, in carrying them to their logical conclusion.

For years these men had preached the expropriation of the master class, and pray why should they wait until the Social Revolution had conquered before carrying out their plans? Why should they submit like sheep to exploitation and tyranny and do nought but raise a feeble baa of protest?

Before condemning these men let us try and imagine ourself in their position. Let us try and understand the motives which led them to commit the acts of violence for which they have been condemned.

Expropriation of the master class. What real revolutionist can condemn expropriation? Now, or in the future. It matters not. Expropriation of the means of existence or for the spreading of propaganda is always justifiable.

But in this case there is also some circumstances which must be considered. Hounded by the police and detectives these men were denounced as anarchists and agitators, wherever and whenever they succeeded in obtaining work. What then was left for them to do? Were they to starve slowly in the midsts of wealth and luxury? Become parasites on the workers, or expropriate the wealth that was rightly theirs? Not only was it their actual right to expropriate the means of existence, it was their duty.

As to the horrible murders to which they were driven, by the bloodhounds of the law, who can hold them responsible?

"Smitten stones will talk
with fiery tongue
And the worm when trodden
will turn."

It is all well and good to speak of the ideal life, but in reality, for we all get down to brass tacks once in a while, life itself is a compromise in this miserable parasitic society.

Our good friends who speak of having a model life for the sake of the cause, remind me very much of the metaphysicians who teach that the body is nought and must be sacrificed as an offering to the almighty god in order that the soul may live.

Speaking of such men as Bakunin and Cafiero and the beautiful lessons of their lives, Let us remember that both Bakunin and Cafiero, although they gave their fortunes to the spreading of the propaganda, both had the full benefit of their wealth in the leisure time and opportunities that they had had to study and develop themselves into supermen, so to speak. Neither of these two great intellectuals, at any time, had to suffer the spiritual hunger along with the material hunger as the so called auto bandits of Paris.

The one great mistake that we all make is that when a really great man dies we canonize him right away, and hold his life up as an example to future humanity. His ideas are likewise crystalized in a stage of evolution, while the world and all life goes on evolving so that we come to live in the domain of the unreal, thinking in the past and living in the present.

And when a case like the so-called bandits of Paris is put before us, living as we do in the realm of the past, we are horrified, for it is impossible for us to perceive the motives, the conditions and circumstances which led up to the so-called crime.

The Social War, New York, v. 1, n. 3, March 26th 1913.

