



Bulletin of the
Kate Sharpley Library
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HELL ON EARTH...

Alex. Berkman's first speech after his release from

Alexander Berkman was released from prison on May 18, and went direct to Detroit, Mich., where he delivered the following address on May 22:

I suppose you have heard the story about the little boy who was asked one day by his mother whether he had said his morning prayer, and little Johnny replied that he had, and then asked: "Mother, why is it my prayer is so long? Mary is such a big girl, and she has only got a little prayer". His mother said, "why, Johnny, how's that?" and then the little boy told her that when Mary was called in the morning she prayed like this: "Oh, Lord. I hate to get up." That's how I felt when my name was called. Not that I am not glad to be with you again, my friends: far from it. But, you see, I am a little out of practice, so to speak. I am of a naturally "retiring" disposition, and I have passed so many years in solitude that now I don't feel quite comfortable in the limelight. Besides, I suppose you know that I haven't done very much speaking of any kind during that time, either public or private. Some of you, tho, may not realise the absolute silence of the prisoner's life. I will illustrate this point, for the benefit of those among you whose education along prison lines has not been as liberal as my own.

About a year ago, after having served thirteen years in the state prison of Western Pennsylvania, I was transferred to the County prison to serve the last year of my sentence. I suppose the judge who sentenced me wanted me to visit all the prisons of the state, that my prison studies might be complete: or maybe he hoped that I'd never live to see the workhouse - but that's another story. When the Sheriff brought me down to the workhouse the officer in charge took my pedigree, and then he asked me what my occupation was. I was about to tell him that I had been working thirteen years steady for the same firm, but the Sheriff did not give me a chance to speak. He told the workhouse officer that I was a linguist. I suppose the sheriff had been absorbing all the nonsense that the Pittsburgh papers published about me at that time. The Officer said "a linguist? What's that?" "Oh" said the

Sheriff, "he can speak half a dozen languages". Then the officer of the workhouse came up to me and said; "young man, let me tell you something: we only speak one language here, and damn little at that." Under such circumstances you will understand that I am somewhat out of practice: in fact, I have almost forgotten how to talk at all. And, therefore, I am not going to make a so-called speech to you tonight, but I just want to talk to you a little.

First of all, I want to tell you how glad I am to be again in your midst. And you, my friends, are evidently pleased to see me, but, great as your pleasure may be, mine far exceeds yours. And I think I may say that I have been a good deal more anxious to see you than you were to see me; indeed, I have tried pretty hard on several occasions to come to you, but I have not heard of any of you trying to get into the place where I was; tho, I must admit, that I don't blame you in the least for not trying to break into hell.

Speaking of hell reminds me of an incident that happened to me on the morning of my release. I left the workhouse on the 18th of May, and when I reached the Pennsylvania railroad station a newsboy handed me a paper. I took it, and as I glanced over it, a big headline in large black letters attracted my attention. The headline read: "To Hell and Back". Well, to say that I was surprised is putting it mildly: why, I was dumbfounded. You see, some years ago, when my friend Carl Nold was keeping me company in the Western penitentiary, we conceived the idea of writing a book of our prison experiences. The greater part of the book was written in prison, and we were just waiting for my release to begin the publication of the book. The title of the book was to be "To Hell and Back". Now, you will understand my surprise when I saw that headline in the paper. I wondered how it leaked out, for it was known only to Nold and myself. But I was soon enlightened. Perusing the article in the paper, I found that to Hell and Back did not refer to our book at all,

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BERKMAN'S RELEASE SPEECH

continued from front

it proved to be a sermon by a Protestant minister of Pittsburg, a certain Rev. Russell. Now, I don't know where and how the reverend managed to steal the title of our unpublished book, but I do know that his title was not at all appropriate to his subject. In that sermon the preacher tries to prove that there is no hell. Well, if there is no hell, then how did he go to hell and back, as the title of his sermon would lead one to believe. And if there is a hell, and he went there, why, I am quite sure, the preacher would have never come back. But Pastor Russell did not take the trouble to investigate the matter on the spot; he is trying to prove that there is no hell by - why, by the Bible, of course. Now, you know, the Bible is a peculiar book; you can prove almost anything by it. Not long ago I met an old man - he was a preacher before he put on the stripes - and he tried to convince me that we were approaching the end of the world. I asked him why he thought so. Then he proved to me - by the Bible - that it had been predicted that the world would be filled with oil in preparation for the great conflagration which is to consume the world. "And now" said my preacher in stripes, "you can see the truth of the biblical prediction, for John the Baptist Rockefeller has saturated the world with Standard Oil and Lawson is applying the match. Behold the prophesy coming home"! I pointed out to the old fellow that Lawson, instead of dipping the matches in sulphur, has merely coated them with Amalgamated Copper and so they are water soaked and won't burn. But the preacher wouldn't have it that way. Like most preachers he needed a ladder to see the point of a joke.

But to return to Rev. Russell. When I read his claim that there is no hell, I really felt sorry for him. Why, what would become of religion, of the Christian religion especially, if there were no hell, or, at least, the belief and fear of hell? Religion without a hell would be like playing the Merchant of Venice with Shylock left out. Reward and punishment, heaven and hell, are the heads and tails of God's bribe money, and if there is no hell then there is no heaven, and then - goodbye Christianity.

But preacher Russell is wrong. There is a hell; there are scores of them. I, myself, have just escaped from a hell - a hell where the fires of the law's vengeance burn with a thousand hungry tongues; a hell where the hot flames of persecution burn into your very soul; a hell where the brimstone of brutal humiliation stifles the very breath of life; it is a hell where man's inhumanity to man turns the milk of human kindness into the gall of hate, despair and revenge, and in that hell is the worm that dieth not - the Shylock of the tyrant law. That hell is called a

prison. And what is a prison? A prison is the model on the lines of which civilised society is built. Indeed, what is this so-called civilised society of ours but a large prison, a capitalistic hell as wide as the world. The same tyranny and oppression, the same injustice and persecution, hold sway in this large prison as in the smaller one, only on a larger scale. As is that little prison, so is the world filled with the cries and groans of the unfortunates whom the devils of the law-god are raking into the fires of this capitalistic hell: innocent victims are slaughtered by the thousands to satisfy the greed of the rapacious beast of capital: the blood of the widows and orphans is mercilessly pressed into the wine for the rich man's drink, and the wailing of starving babes is heard in the swish of the silk dress worn by the millionaire's wife. It is the hell of a civilisation where the masses must starve because there is too much food on hand, where they must go naked because there is too much clothing produced, where they must be homeless because there have been too many houses built, and where we must all remain abject slaves for the greater glory of capitalistic liberty. Even nearer is our society approaching the perfection of its model- the prison of iron bars and stone walls. Liberty has become a hollow mockery: justice is but the sport of the counting room, and right is laughed to scorn by might. The hand of tyranny is at the throat of our very manhood, and the heel of oppression is crushing the last spark of man's native courage and independence. The curse of capitalism has entered the very vitals of our social body, and its fatal breath has spread over the wide world, contaminating with its foulness everything it touches. It has corrupted every member of our social body, so that today there is not a single institution in our society - not one single institution - that is not rotten from top to bottom, rotten to its very core.

But what is the cause of all this? Why is our society so rotten? Why is our civilisation such a failure? The reason is simply this: our so-called civilised society is built on the cursed foundation of lies; it is built on the triune [triple] lie of religion, law and private property, those three sister curses that have turned a beautiful world into a veritable hell - a hell of wild beasts, where every man is an Ishmael, with the hands of every mother's son turned against his brother.

We have become the victims of a false civilisation, blind slaves of the gods of our own creation. We have lost all sense of the real purpose and aim of life; we have sacrificed our manhood and our individuality, and today we are nothing more than the dupes of the priest, the victims of the law, the abject slaves of or capitalistic masters. Religion has

BERKMAN'S RELEASE SPEECH

hypnotised our minds, the law has stifled our native independence, and, oh, what a pitiful and terrible sight we are, standing there helplessly gazing at the empty sky toward which the finger of the lying priest is pointed, while the iron hand of the law is securely binding us, hand and foot, ready victims for the vulture of capital that is sinking its ferocious claws into our bodies, mercilessly tearing our flesh and sucking the very lifeblood of our being.

Fellow men, if we are not to perish utterly, if we are to be saved, if we are to be freed we must break this fatal spell; we must smash the chains that make us helpless victims of tyranny and oppression; we must speedily awaken, free our minds, and liberate our bodies, that we may stand forth, ere too late, in the full glory of our strength, in the free manhood of the masses - the honest producers of the world - that we may conquer the world for those to whom it belongs - the free and independent Brotherhood of Labor.

Before I close, I want to tell you again how happy I am to be back again among you, my friends and comrades. I have passed so many years in the exclusive company of a select circle of thieves and brutes - some in stripes, but more in brass buttons - that now it does my heart good to be where I can look into the faces of honest laboring men ('Tis no reflection on the gentlemen of the press or of insurance, if any be present).

Yes my friends, I am glad to be again in your midst: and I am glad to be able to tell you that I have come out of that hell sound in body, and, what's more important, sound in spirit also. The sentence of twenty two years that the bloodhounds of the law imposed upon me, the living death of my prison existence, and all those special persecutions that I had to suffer on account of being an anarchist - all these have failed of their purpose: they have failed to kill me, and they have not succeeded in breaking my spirit, and I am here tonight to throw my defiance into the teeth of the accursed enemy, defying the beast of capital, its handmaid the law, and the whole brood of their filthy hirelings to do their worst: and here tonight I want to declare as publicly as I can that I am an anarchist, my undying hatred toward all tyrants and oppressors of mankind, and my eternal, active enmity toward the assassins of justice and liberty.

That I am here tonight, and have survived those fourteen years of hell torture, is owing to that grand and noble ideal, whose wonderful power has sustained me during all those years of torture and persecution. What is persecution? What is imprisonment, or even death? How weak, how insignificant, how helpless are all the tyrants of the world, even in their wildest fury, to quench the fires of

liberty that burn in the heart of every true man and woman the world over.

Has persecution ever stifled the voice of truth? Has imprisonment ever conquered the genius of justice? Have the gallows, the guillotine, and the gibbet ever triumphed over the heroic spirit of liberty? No: a thousand times no. The blood of the persecuted and tortured victims of tyranny has ever fertilised the valley of liberty and the greatest heroes of freedom have sprung from the very graves of its martyred dead.

Clad in the armour of our grand and noble cause, we are invulnerable, invincible, are immortal, and death itself is but our servant. In our ideal we possess the greatest of all blessings, the consciousness of being right, and knowing that we are right we have the scornful contempt of the conventional mob and we bid defiance to the enemy and dare him do his worst, confident as we are in the final triumph of our cause, knowing that in the not far distant future we shall plant the flag of anarchy on every hill and in every dale and we shall proclaim to the world a free and universal brotherhood.

From *The Demonstrator*, June 6th, 1906

KSL News

Readers of our pamphlets should be glad to know that our very first one is back in print. *Personal Recollections of the Anarchist Past* by George Cores is available for £1 from the usual address (see inside the back page). Written in 1947 and not published until the early '90s, these are recollections from the inside of the anarchist movement 1883-1939 by a forgotten veteran. - and ones which have a clearer view of people and events than some 'histories' do.

The next of our titles to be reprinted was the first of our bibliographies: *A Contribution to an Anarchist Bibliography of Latin America*, by Max Nettlau for £4. Despite the modest title, this is a quite voluminous work for the years 1890-1914.

Finally, our next new title is Louis Lecoin: an Anarchist life by Sylvain Garel (£1.50). This biography covers in passing great events from Syndicalist agitation early in the century, the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti to the Spanish Civil War. It is in transit to the printers and should be available in April. We have other pamphlets to follow soon after.

Mario Castelhana

Mario Castelhana, the Portuguese anarcho-syndicalist militant who had been director of the CGT newspaper *A Batalha* when its presses were destroyed by the fascists and its publication suspended, died in the Tarrafal concentration camp on 12 October 1940, as a result of a stomach complaint.

As well as being a precious militant of the CGT union confederation, he stood out also as a figure of great moral stature among the deportees in the camp, by virtue of his courage, high mindedness and the example he set of comradeship, earning universal respect.

Castelhana was born in Lisbon on 31 May 1896, the third child of a couple of modest business people. At the age of 14 he entered the post office as a telegraph clerk; but through hard work and perseverance, and above all on the basis of merit, he went on to become a qualified book-keeper.

He became involved in trade union activity very early on and faced with a choice between reformism and libertarian activism he opted for the revolutionary syndicalist opposition and took part in the rail strike in 1911 following the introduction of the Republic and the disappointment of the hopes that the working classes had vested in it. But it was in the 1914 strike that he took part with his doctrine fully formed.

The Republic busied itself with a crackdown on the labour movement which had already come out against Portuguese participation in the Great War and the government made an especial target of the strike which was lost.

Castelhana's actions ensured that the working class remained united and clung on to its trade union vigour - crucial at a time when the economic crisis provoked by the war was so serious, with wages lagging behind the cost of living.

In 1918 the railway workers struck and waged a vigorous fight, bringing further government repression, even to the extent of open wagons filled with strikers captured by the police being hooked up to the locomotives of trains manned by soldiers dispatched against the railwaymen.

Whilst the strike was not a full success, some demands were met and there was a revival of trade

union activity, with the union retaining its fighting strength. In 1920, a rail strike was declared on all networks and two men, Mario Castelhana and Miguel Correia were extraordinarily busy in the coordination of the strike. Yet again the railwaymen were targeted by government repression and the strike was a partial success, even though Mario Castelhana and other activists were sacked.

Mario carried on with his militant activities in the sector which continued to look upon him as a railwayman and he took over as director of the union paper *O Ferroviario* (The Railwayman), investing it with a distinct revolutionary syndicalist flavour.

The Russian Revolution led some syndicalist militants over to the Communist camp but Castelhana, like virtually all of the membership, stuck with the CGT, although the experience of the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat pushed him into the anarcho-syndicalist camp.

In this regard Mario set about building up trade union cadres and helped organise the Railway Workers' Inter-Union Conference in Oporto in 1921, at which he was appointed to the organising commission of the First Union Congress of Railway Workers held in June 1922 and at which the Rail Federation was launched. Mario became its secretary in charge of international relations.

At the congress, Miguel Correia, a leading militant with the State-owned Southern/Southwestern rail network, proposed that the Federation affiliate to the reformist-minded International Trade Union Federation. Castelhana pointed out the drawbacks to such affiliation and the congress sided with him.

He was later elected editor-in-chief of the Rail Federation's paper *Federacao Ferroviario* and in 1926 joined the CGT's Confederal Council as the Federation's representative. Within a short time he had taken over from Santos Arranha as director of the CGT mouthpiece *A Batalha*.

In a fraught period of political upheavals, Castelhana with his lofty values as a revolutionary militant plus his moral and ideological standing stamped a clear policy upon *A Batalha*'s response to events and there was no flinching in this after the revolt of 28 May 1926 hoisted a reactionary government into power.

The following year, on 7 February 1927, a revolt broke out in Lisbon in the wake of one in Oporto. Although the revolt emanated from the

A PORTUGUESE ANARCHIST

republican camp, it enjoyed more support from the workers. On the morning of 7 February 1927 *A Batalha* was run off on the presses of the *Diario de Noticias* and spelled out the CGT stance and policy.

When the revolt was crushed, *A Batalha* was suspended, the CGT outlawed and driven underground and a short time later *A Batalha*'s presses were smashed by the police.

Castelhana went to ground, taking up a place on the CGT Confederal Council and liaising with the unions that were still operating, albeit closely monitored by the secret police out of which the PIDE would emanate.

In June that year, Castelhana, Rijo, Alvaro Ramos, Quintal, Ferreira da Silva and many another were captured and on 15 November they were deported aboard the sinister prison hulk the 'Pedro Gomes'.

Castelhana and Rijo wound up in Novo Redondo in Angola, where they found clerical work on a plantation. They were made very welcome on account of their exemplary and decent treatment of the black population.

Both men's health led to their being transferred to the Azores. Mario wound up on the island of Pico.

In 1931, when a popular uprising erupted in Madeira with the support of the political deportees, Castelhana, Rijo, Goncalves Bibi, Fernando Barros and other libertarian militants came together in Funchal where they engaged in trade union work alongside the locals. Castelhana, Rijo and Bibi, with help from the determined actions of comrade Margarida Barros, hid out in an attic in Funchal and were smuggled out to Lisbon, hidden among coal, by a stoker on board the 'Lima'.

Mario resumed his CGT activities and in early 1933, when Salazar imposed his fascistic legislation upon the country with regard to the unions and working conditions, anarcho-syndicalist militants - albeit decimated by the unrelenting repression over seven years of non-stop struggle, set about preparing the ground for the general strike of 18 January 1934, in which Castelhana was very much to the fore before being arrested after two days.

Like all of the comrades rounded up in the ensuing crackdown, he was deported to Angra do Heroismo and thence to Tarrafal.

In Tarrafal, Castelhana stood out among the deportees by virtue of a moral stature founded upon energy and integrity. This was particularly demonstrated during the so-called "acute danger" when the camp was stricken by an epidemic. Most of the inmates were bed-ridden and without medicines. Bringing all his moral authority to bear and abetted by his companions, Mario organised medical assistance as best their meagre resources would allow. Tables, chairs, anything that would burn was used in the boiling of the questionable water supply that was used to eke out what little medicines they had in order to save many precious lives. And once this crisis had passed, Mario Castelhana succumbed to a stomach complaint that killed him within days.

Even those who did not share his libertarian ideas did not deny him their tribute and respect.

Adapted from *A Batalha* (Lisbon) of 16 November 1974

Technicalities

Our last issue of the bulletin, no 20, has recently been uploaded to our website at:

<http://members.aol.com/wellslake/Sharpley.htm>

The website also contains details of our publications.



On a sadder note, 'technical difficulties' mean that some people who've emailed us at:

kar98@dia1.pipex.com have had their messages

bounced. Hopefully this will be mended by the time you read these words!



Details of our latest publications are on page 3 - we always welcome constructive feedback, suggestions etc. Our address is on the back page.

OBITUARY

Jack (Yankel) Frager

January 3, 1903 to March 7, 1998

Anarchist and labor activist Jack Frager died at the age of 95. Born in Ukraine, in the village of Ismeryuka, raised in Mogeliev-Podolske, he was a youthful participant in the Russian Revolution of 1917. In order to escape being conscripted into the Red or White armies, he fled to Romania, went through Danzig, and made it to Argentina, where he lived for 18 months. While in Buenos Aires, he self-published *Gustav Landauer* on anarchism, in Yiddish, and never lost his enthusiasm for Landauer's ideas. He arrived in New York in 1923.

Jack was an unhyphenated anarchist. He served on the Committee to Defend Sacco and Vanzetti, made arrangements for Emma Goldman's last U.S. speaking tour, made his own speaking tours of the U.S. during the 1930's, helped found the Libertarian Book Club of New York city in the late 1930's, was on the editorial board of "Freie Arbeiter Stimme" ("The Free Voice of Labor") a Yiddish language anarchist newspaper, was active in the Painters' Union (which included fighting against a Communist takeover, and in later years, against corruption) and taught labor history at Brookwood Labor College. He had a life-long interest in Yiddish language and culture, published Yiddish literature, and was active in the League for Yiddish. An ardent peace activist, he marched against the Vietnam war and nuclear weapons, and was arrested several times. At one demonstration a young woman was crying as they were being taken in. "No tears," Jack exclaimed, "we won't give them that satisfaction! Instead, we sing!" He was last arrested at age 88 during a Hiroshima Day protest, for painting the shadows of bomb victims on sidewalks in New York City. The rain washed away the evidence, so the charges were dropped.

When he was 80, he visited Spain to meet with the resurgent, post-Franco anarchist movement. At 87 he visited Ukraine.

Jack raised a family with his partner, Myra (May Frakt), who he married in 1939. Jack and Myra had three children. He worked as a house painter, then as a foreman and estimator. In 1968 he retired, and he and Myra travelled the country. They settled in Florida in 1980, and in 1985 Myra died. In 1993 his daughter Cheshire brought him back to New York as

he began to suffer from Alzheimer's disease. "Daddy was indefatigable," said his daughter Cheshire. "when he sought anti-war and Yiddishkeit groups in Florida and didn't find them, he started them. He never lost his ideas, energy or commitment." In the early 1990's, Jack was on the "Meander Quarterly" mailing list.

The War Resisters' League and the Libertarian Book Club co-sponsored a memorial tribute to Jack on June 9th at the Brecht Forum.

Ed Stamm (based on information provided by Cheshire Frager)

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Subscriptions to the bulletin for a year (4 issues) are £3 (inland) or £5 (overseas). Institutional rates are £6 (inland) and £10 (overseas) [unfortunately we can't take dollar cheques, but sterling ones payable to 'Kate Sharpley Library' are fine.]

We would be more than happy to hear from comrades interested in our publications (an up-to-date list is inside the back cover), in donating material or money.

Would any comrades with address corrections or receiving multiple copies please contact us.

KSL

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ENGLAND

Quote Corner

"Like the Nemesis of old, whom neither prayers nor threats could move, the revolution advances, with sombre and inevitable tread over the flowers with which its devotees strew its path, through the blood of its champions, and over the bodies of its enemies."

--Proudhon

*If you want to be happy,
Hang your landlord
Cut the parson's throat,
Wreck the churches*

From "*Pere Duchesne*" sung by Ravachol at his execution