

Dear Comrades and Friends:

During all the years that I was an active participant, it was easy for me to send out various appeals for our movement and particularly for the A. Berkman Aid Fund, but now that I wish to send out a personal appeal I find it much more difficult. However, I hope that all those who have worked with me and who know of my activities will understand and will respond.

It is now fifty years since two Jewish immigrants from Tzarist Russia landed at New York, bringing with them a sad story of our comrades in Russian prisons and places of exile; who were in great need because they were excluded from the help which reached the prisons through general agencies. With this thought in mind, those two men started to consider means of raising funds to meet this need, and as a consequence the first Anarchist Red Cross was organized in New York, followed by groups in Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit.

A few years ago a comrade suggested to me that, since I have been one of the active participants in the Mutual Aid work for our comrades all over the world, I should try to write a historical review of all the organizations which have taken part in assisting Anarchists in need.

Since I am not a writer, and even less, a historian, I first of all rejected the thought of undertaking this work, but later on the fact that some important historical data had never been recorded in full, began to worry me. Specifically, I was concerned with such questions as: who were the people who refused to help our comrades in Russian prisons and why they refused; and also, why our comrades were not rescued when Hitler's hordes came sweeping into France. I attempted a first chapter and sent it to George Woodcock, asking for his opinion. He advised me to finish the work, and said that he would be willing to help in editing it.

What I have done is by no means a complete study. To have made use of all historical materials would have demanded and required a lengthy book, and would have necessitated a large sum of money for translations, printing, etc. Accordingly, I have compiled a short historical narrative of the fifty years of work undertaken by all the organizations that took part in Mutual Aid activities.

This is the story behind my personal appeal to you for a contribution toward a fund which will enable me to publish the booklet, and in this way to leave a document that will be useful to future students of history.

I hope you will understand and will help me in this work.

Yours fraternally,

Boris Yelensky

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