

Remembering Stuart Christie, one year on

It's a year since our friend and comrade Stuart Christie died. We've posted a handful of his writings to mark the anniversary. His review of *The Sash* looks at the problem of religious sectarianism in Glasgow: 'one has to admire the courage of the actors who can get up in Glasgow and tear into their lines that strip the Orange and Papist legends down to their pubic hair.' (The Sash, Hector MacMillan [Book Review] <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/7pvnw9>)

Alans Burn's book *The Angry Brigade* doesn't get much love: 'If an author wrote a novel concerning a group of upper-class opium smoking "drop-outs" and presented it as "The Luddites" (or "Molly Maguires") it could not stand as historical fiction but on its merits as a novel. Such merits Mr Burns does not possess.' (The Angry Brigade, Alan Burns [Book review] <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/m0chp8>)

Maybe the most interesting piece is not by Stuart, but his reposting of 'Advice to My Anarchist Comrades (1901)' by Élisée Reclus: 'If you throw yourself into the fray to sacrifice yourself defending the humiliated and downtrodden, that is a very good thing, my companions. Face death nobly. If you prefer to take on slow and patient work on behalf of a better future, that is an even better thing. Make it the goal of every instant of a generous life. But if you choose to remain poor among the poor, in complete solidarity with those who suffer, may your life shine forth as a beneficent light, a perfect example, a fruitful lesson for all!' We think that, in particular, chimes with Stuart's attitudes.

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/31zf26>

A Life For Anarchy

Over the last year have edited (and written an introduction for) *A Life for Anarchy: A Stuart Christie Reader*. The book contains a selection of Stuart's writings (shorter political pieces and biographical tributes he wrote) and some of the tributes his friends and comrades paid to him.

'We hope this book will give you a sense of the richness and complexity of his life. We also hope it will act as a memorial, given that we haven't been able to meet up and celebrate his life. [...]

'We know that this is not the final word on Stuart's life. Seeing the materials that people are sharing with us and the Stuart Christie Memorial Archive, we feel

as though we are constantly learning more. We hope this reader gives you a sense of the breadth of his experiences, and celebrates his humanity, his morality and his intuitive grasp of anarchism.' (from the introduction)

Published by AK Press, it's 280 pages long and copies will be available later in the year. Money from each copy sold will go to Stuart's daughter, Branwen. We'll share more information when we have it.

Salud, comrade!

Kate Sharpley Library Collective

[See <https://www.akpress.org/a-life-for-anarchy-preorder.html>] ■

Remembering Albert

Today, the 7th of May 2021, is the anniversary of Albert Meltzer's death. Philip Ruff has written a tribute 'Remembering Albert Meltzer 25 years on' which has been posted online by Freedom Press: "Don't forget me – or I'll be back!" Those were Albert Meltzer's final words to Stuart Christie, his closest friend and collaborator, in a letter which he left with his last will and testament. In a perverse way I wish I could forget Albert, so that he would come back. But not a day goes by without me thinking about him, so I know he will remain where he is, in the anarchist back-room saloon bar of Valhalla, telling outrageous stories and guffawing loudly at his own jokes, surrounded by his awkward squad of fallen angels, Billy Campbell, Stuart and Brenda Christie and Miguel Garcia.'

You can read the rest of the tribute at <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2021/05/07/remembering-albert-meltzer-25-years-on/>

We have posted a couple of items which show different aspects of Albert's life. The first is humorous. 'Design for Revolution' is a press report of a leaflet which Coptic Press published in the lead-up to the London anti-Vietnam War demonstration, on 27 October 1968. *The October Revolution, 27th & 28th October 1968. Positions to seize and strategic tactics to deploy.* (By order of the Revolutionary Junta) is a spoof on the press and police hype:

'All revolutionists engaged in acts of sabotage to sing not the Internationale but the Eton Boating Song, thus confusing the police as to whether it is mob

Inside: more anarchist history & books.

violence or healthy youthful high spirits.’ See <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/05qh33>

The second, ‘The stuff of politics’ was published anonymously in *Black Flag* in 1978. It attacks the permanent state of crisis where ‘the mugs need to work harder and go without, and yet it is their slackness or greed – as opposed to that of the hard-working industrious and self-sacrificing leadership – that brings about all the problems.’ The challenge is laid down:

‘But changes in personal values and alterations in life style will no more affect power and profit than changes in fashion. Everything in capitalist society will stand or fall by the criterion of private profit; every advance in personal freedom will always be at the mercy of whoever happen to control the State machinery in any society; the impersonal machine controlling the State will ultimately decide whether we live or die. Unless we pit against it the one thing that still gives us strength – the muscle of our labour.’ See <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/h44kp0>

Whether laughing or fighting, we won’t forget you. ■

Anarchism in North East England 1882-1992 [review]

This is a big book, but don’t let that put you off, it’s a great piece of history from below. The work that has gone into it is animated by the Archivist’s passion for the subject. They are intent on giving ‘a voice to the voiceless’, to anarchists who are often written out of history (even what passes for anarchist history!): ‘for the first time, this history records what they were actually speaking about at open air meetings, what they were saying during lectures, and what they were actually writing about at the time, hence long sections of the book are given over to them.’ [p10]

The results of this patient search are presented chronologically. There are familiar stories, like the Clousden Hill commune (1895 onwards), but also some completely new ones (a curate lecturing on ‘Anarchism: what is it? A Christian view’ in South Shields in 1900) [p44]. The author is no neutral compiler, but shares their reactions with us. After quoting a 1919 Catholic Church ruling which ends up declaring ‘to be a catholic and a socialist at the same time is an impossibility’ comes ‘What more could I possibly add to that? Other than... HOLY SHIT!’ [p95-6]

Tom Brown, the Tyneside-born syndicalist who spent most of his working life down south, appears regularly in the first half of the book. His pieces are always worth reading, but I’ll just quote one from 1966, a time of high working-class self-confidence, about the need to push for revolutionary social change: ‘We have won not only a larger slice of the national cake for less toil, but greater protection,

more job control, more respect. There are even places where the old order is reversed, and the foremen walk in fear of the men. But all this is not enough. The next big step is overdue. [...] Now we have won this round, what next?’ [p180-1] Hopefully one effect of the book will be for historians to rummage around and see if they can find his missing memoirs, or more notes and manuscripts of his. [note 1, below]

The second half of the book covers the tumultuous period of ‘the Thatcher years and the Conservative Party’s relentless psychotic endeavours against, and near destruction of, the working class.’ [p222] This is within living memory, and the Archivist takes a safety-first approach of only using initials unless a writer is well-known. This is not just about security: ‘Individual personalities go unexplored, priority given to what was being said, not the speaker.’ [p10]

Quotes from publications in the Tyneside Anarchist Archive let us hear our comrades: ‘Will it make any difference to the fat London capitalist who owns 33 Tesco stores whether you steal a mince pie? If you are hungry and the capitalist isn’t then that pie doesn’t belong to him it belongs to you.’ [p247 Quoting *Treason* no.1, November 1981, from Sunderland]. As the Archivist says: ‘Beautiful in its naive simplicity but remember this was written in 1981 by young punks from Gateshead housing estates, embracing and endeavouring to articulate their flowering rebellion – not learned anarchist philosophers.’ The book is full of treasures like this, or Big Toot steering young punks away from using swastikas: ‘It might be to shock but the swastika stands for oppression and not punk. The NF are a bunch of heartless morons. They are worse than the police or the Thatcher regime.’ [note 2]

Some participants have even been rounded up to look back (anonymously!) I liked the one about pirate broadcasting in Sunderland: ‘Our first test run was from Tunstall Hills in Sunderland just outside the town. [...] The tape recorder was started and we left the scene, keeping a watch with binoculars from the next hill, the rest us got in a car and drove with a radio on to see how far we were transmitting, fuck, it was miles.’ [p266] Some light is also shone on the history of the Archive itself, which might one day turn up in a book on anarchist libraries.

This is a wide-ranging book, from Chopwell miners to Class War hunt sabs, and doesn’t cut history down to just the best or most inspiring bits. [note 3] Obviously it’s a must-read for anyone interested in anarchism in the North East. But it’s also a useful contribution to the history of anarchism in Britain, with accounts of Tyneside Class War and the generally co-operative attitudes of local anarchists. They were happy to work together with ‘a genuine feeling of having common aims and interests. This is exemplified most in a local strike at “HFW Plastics” in Gateshead. We are seen by others

as “the Anarchists”, and are a recognised force. We were instrumental in helping to form a support group for the strikers which is non-hierarchical in form.’ [p368]

Which is not to say that there were no conflicts! The patronising response by *Freedom* to protests about racism obviously still rankles: ‘A deemed racist article in the paper sparked much protest, in particular that of a “black” member of the local Newcastle group, and the patronising responses from *Freedom* in their letters pages, even criticising the spelling in some of the protest letters, a fact that personally infuriates. Many of the older generation of anarchists on Tyneside actively boycotted *Freedom* after this debacle.’ [note 163 on p470]. I found it staggering: TJ’s description of *Freedom*’s response as ‘a ridiculing, sneering contempt’ [p363] sums it up.

Maybe the thing that stays with me most is the question of ‘where do we look for anarchists?’ I hope we’re a long way past the time when books written by the ‘big names’ were supposed to tell us what anarchists of the time were thinking. There was a whole world of people writing, thinking and talking that made up the anarchist movement. Some of them will have left only the thinnest of paper trails but been important for all that. But when the Archivist says ‘sometimes the anarchists are so entrenched within their own community, [...] that they can, at times, barely venture out of it’ [p152] you realise there’s at least as many who won’t have left a paper trail at all. How do we hear from them? The Tyneside Anarchist Archive have done a great job in recording at least some voices of the voiceless.

Notes

1, See ‘The missing memoirs of Tom Brown, Tyneside syndicalist’ <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/4xgzk7>. There’s a reference in note 245 to ‘notes for a projected autobiography [...] found after his death in “rudimentary form”’ which makes me wonder what else is out there.

2, Page 243, leaflet and article in local punk band Total Chaos’s *No Comment* zine, no.1, late 1981. ‘Big Toot, a loveable human being who was taken from us too early, was instrumental in the continuation of the local punk scene throughout most of the 1980s’. [note 453 on page 486]

3, See reviews by Tom Jennings and Dave Francis at <https://tynesideanarchistarchive.wordpress.com/>

Anarchism in North East England: 1882-1992
Active Distribution, 2021. ISBN 9781909798908
<https://www.activedistributionshop.org/shop/home/5190-anarchism-in-north-east-england-1882-1992.html> See also
<https://tynesideanarchistarchive.wordpress.com/> ■

Library News (August 2021)

Dear comrades and friends, here is the bulletin, a year after our last print issue. If you haven’t visited our website or seen any of our ‘Not the bulletin’ online updates, we are still going!

We have spent the last 18 months doing what we can in the face of the covid pandemic (and everything else). We have put a lot of articles up on the website. On our wiki, our study of ‘The 1945 split in British anarchism’ grows and grows. We have also edited a reader of articles as a tribute to Stuart Christie. More on that elsewhere in this issue.

We also salute the memory of our comrades Ian Cameron, Paolo Finzi, Ken Lester, María Lozano Molina, Enric (Henri) Melich Gutiérrez, Alan Pullin, Alexandre Skirda and Ken Weller. There are obituaries for them on our website under ‘Lives’ <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/gb5n40>.

Thankfully, other comrades keep doing their thing (it’s hard to keep up). The new Steimer Press have republished Ida Mett. The Tyneside Anarchist Archive have printed their book. Black Cat Press have published Berkman’s *Kronstadt diary* and *Young Rebels Against the Empire* (youth memoirs of Nestor Makhno and Voldemar Antoni). The Sparrow’s Nest comrades keep on building their digital library. *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 1 Number 2 (Summer 2021) contains ‘Keeping Alive the Spirit of Revolt: Some thoughts on Albert Meltzer and his writings’ by Barry Pateman at <https://www.blackflag.org.uk/>.

Happy reading and thanks for your patience! ■

Pietro Ferrua (1930-2021)

This founding father of the CIRA died in Portland, Oregon, USA on 28 July 2021.

He was born in San Remo on 18 September 1930 to a housewife mother and a father who worked as a casino croupier. Whilst in his youth, he served in the Resistance as a runner. Come the Liberation, he and two comrades launched the ‘Alba dei Liberi’ anarchist group in San Remo. All three refused to perform their military service. Jailed in 1950 as a conscientious objector, Ferrua then went partly to ground, helping to organize international libertarian camp-outs, editing the review *Senza limiti* (1952-1954, 5 issues) and working on the sites of the International Civilian Service.

He arrived in Switzerland in 1954 to dodge imprisonment and was initially harboured in the home of Lise Ceresole (the widow of the founder of International Civilian Service) in Daley-sur-Lutry before moving to Geneva to pursue his education as an interpreter/translator. There he ran into libertarian comrades and got them to carry on with the work of Louis Bertoni; and so, in 1957, a fresh series of *Le Réveil anarchiste/Il Risveglio anarchico* appeared as

a monthly over one year, thereafter appearing fitfully. Notable collaborators there were Alfred Amiguet and André Bösigler from francophone Switzerland, Claudio Cantini, Carlo Frigerio, Carlo Vanza and Ferrua himself (he used the pen-name *Vico*) for the Italian-language content. That same year, he came up with a scheme for an exposition on the anarchist press around the world. He sent out lots of letters with varying success; out of this came the idea for an International Centre for Research on Anarchism (CIRA) to preserve the periodicals that were being received. Publications retrieved from Louis Bertoni's library and that of the Geneva-based 'Germinal' group were added to these, followed by a huge number of books that had belonged to Jacques Gross and other activists who signed up early for the project, people such as Hem Day, E Armand, André Prudhommeaux, the Swedish SAC and so on. Later the CIRA was entrusted with the archives of the SPRI and of the CRIA (the Provisional International Relations Secretariat and Anarchist International Relations Commission, respectively, 1947-1958) which were left bundled up for a long time and were not catalogued until forty years later.

Pietro Ferrua was forever trying to secure recognition for anarchism in intellectual and academic circles. To that end, he tried to assemble an honorary international CIRA commission made up of researchers and activists; he had a measure of success in this but was also rebuffed in several instances. He built up contacts with the University Library and United Nations Library in Geneva at a time when the CIRA was still made up of crates of newspapers and stacks of books sitting on the creaking shelves of a single room.

He had also recruited students and young researchers to help out with the cataloguing, the organization of lectures and the publication (and multi-copying) of the *Bulletin du CIRA*. In 1955, at the anarchist camp held in Salernes (Var department, France) networks of French, Algerian and Italian refractories were organized. Several of them were living in Geneva where the border was quite easily crossed. In a burst of international solidarity, four young people hurled a few Molotov cocktails at the Spanish consulate in February 1961, which triggered a significant wave of sympathetic opinion, but also a number of arrests and deportations. Pietro Ferrua had to quit Switzerland in January 1963, leaving the CIRA in the care of Marie-Christine Mikhaïlo and Marianne Enckell who stepped into the breach; Pietro moved away to Rio de Janeiro with his Brazilian wife and their two children. There, he quickly resumed his intellectual and militant activities, notably launching the CIRA's Brazilian chapter, up until he was expelled again in October 1969; thanks to family connections, he found a safe haven in the United States, in Portland (Oregon).

There he was able to lecture at Lewis and Clark

University from 1970 to 1987; he headed the foreign languages, comparative literature and film history department. He had long had an interest in avant-garde artistic and literary trends; in 1976 he organized the First International Symposium on Lettrism and published several texts and works on the matter; he was also a member of the Infinitesimal Innovation International (Internationale novatrice infinitésimale, INI). It was many a year before he was able to get back to Europe and before the bans on his entering Italy, France and Switzerland were lifted. Then he lived for a time in Nice and in San Remo, where he cared for his mother.

Not that his interest in anarchism ever left him. In 1980 he successfully organized an international week of discussions, film screenings, concerts and other events on anarchism at the university where he worked; and this despite the irrational misgivings on the part of the university hierarchy. He published studies on *Surrealism and Anarchy*, *Anarchism and Cinema* and *The Anarchists as Seen by Painters*, as well as two important books on anarchists in the Mexican Revolution and a review of sources on the subject, and he pursued his research into the origins of conscientious objection in Italy.

He also contributed articles to *A rivista anarchica*, *ApArte* and the *Rivista storica dell'anarchismo*, plus the review *Art et anarchie*, the *Bulletin du CIRA* in its Geneva/Lausanne and Marseilles versions, some Brazilian publications and a number of other reviews and collective works.

On his retirement, he secured the odd commission as an interpreter, but eked out a meagre existence, which obliged him to sell off some of his archives. And he still orchestrated movie festivals, took part in various international symposia and explored several areas of research.

In recent years his health declined. He experienced the grief of the premature loss of his daughter Anna and his son Franco; and was pre-deceased by his wife, Diana Lobo Filho. A number of his ex-students who remained close to him were able to act as his loyal companions right to the end, by which time he was living in a hospice and could no longer speak.

Portions of Pietro Ferrua's archives were dispersed or impounded during his series of times in exile, but he had retained and rebuilt much of them. They have been turned over (or will be shortly) to the Archivio Famiglia Berneri in Reggio Emilia (Italy), to the Labadie Collection at Ann Arbor University (Michigan, USA) and to the CIRA in Lausanne. Ferrua's initiative also gave rise to other CIRA chapters that have been long-lived or ephemeral, but since 1974 they have been included under a variety of names under the umbrella of the FICEDL (International Federation of Libertarian Study and Documentation Centres, see ficedl.info).

Aug. 2021 Marianne Enckell, CIRA Lausanne ■

Rachel Hui-Chi Hsu. “Emma Goldman, ‘Mother Earth’ and the Anarchist Awakening”

[Book review]

It is hard not to feel some sympathy for Emma Goldman after her treatment at the hands of some historians and writers. All too often they have filleted her ideas to ‘prove’ their pre-conceived thesis or simply failed to acknowledge the complexity of the ‘Light and Shadows’ in her life that Candace Falk writes about in Volume Three of the Emma Goldman Papers. (*Light and Shadows, 1910-1916*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) There is however some evidence that this situation is gradually being remedied beyond the work of The Emma Goldman Papers. Kathy Ferguson’s *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking In The Streets* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2011) accepts the underlying principles of the anarchism that drove Goldman and her comrades and discusses how Goldman attempted to make these ideas and principles a reality. Now this important and essential volume by Rachel Hsu goes back to the primary sources in an attempt to allow the ideas and actions of Goldman to speak for themselves. It is a timely reminder that Goldman is her own person with all that entails and not just an inspiring quote on facebook, usually taken out of context.

As the title suggests Hsu focuses on the years 1906-1917, the years of the magazine *Mother Earth* and the events and initiatives that were an integral part of its life. There can be no doubt that this magazine played a leading role in the world of English language anarchism by introducing and developing anarchist ideas in previously untouched parts of America and, indeed, through the post and via translation, into many parts of the world. Hsu is keen to discuss many of the topics that filled its pages: anarchism, anti-militarism, feminism, the fight for birth control, labor struggles, freethought, free speech, socialism, syndicalism, race, the nature of the American state and a pragmatic yet inspirational transnationalism. It really is a breathtaking list but Hsu is quick to note that all these topics emanating from Goldman and the *Mother Earth* group were underpinned by their unwavering commitment to anarchist communism. Goldman was a feminist, for instance, because she was an anarchist communist and all these areas I mentioned became, or already were, an integral part of her anarchism. Some were more important than others according to circumstance but to her they were never separate or contradictory.

During this period Goldman earned her living by public speaking but we do need to remember that it was during the time-line of this volume that she

discovered herself as a writer, realizing that she had the ability to express complex ideas in a forceful and straightforward way and it was these writings that enhanced her reputation immeasurably. That said, it was through her talks that her reputation also grew. She embarked on huge and exhausting tours that criss-crossed America sometimes speaking to a handful of people, sometimes to large and excited crowds. She was a full-time propagandist and spoke on any topic that might draw in a crowd and introduce them in all sorts of roundabout ways to anarchist ideas. She was deliberately provocative and challenging and, at the very least, encouraged people to think about the role authority played in their lives.

We should also be clear, as does Hsu, that all this wasn’t just Goldman. The anarchist milieu included those who put out the chairs for the meetings and braved the after effects of her visit in small town America as well as the regular correspondents and editorial team around *Mother Earth*. It was often edited by others – Alexander Berkman for instance – when she undertook her demanding tours and we need to be aware of the political dynamics between those close to *Mother Earth* to see how their ideas developed and their influence on Goldman.

You will find all of this and more in *Emma Goldman, ‘Mother Earth’ and the Anarchist Awakening*. Hsu trawls *Mother Earth* for information and does not back away from the contradictions or complexities that we can find there. She is equally aware of the importance of print culture to anarchism as she is of the lively and sometimes challenging public meetings that are mentioned. She sees Goldman as a trail-blazer whose anarchism consists of a richness that, perhaps, is only just being fully understood. Hsu’s work means that after reading this book we gain a real sense of all the events and ideas that are bubbling over and merging together during these critical years

There is something else that Hsu hints at and one hopes she decides to take it further in her future work. Namely what effect did anarchist ideas have on those who came into contact with them during this time? How did the literature study group, the supporters of free speech, the fighters for birth control or those engaged in labor struggles for instance see themselves in regard to the anarchists who regularly worked with them? And what effect did the ideas of Goldman and other anarchists have on the wider society at large? As Hsu suggests English language anarchism during this time – mainly thanks to Goldman and all those around *Mother Earth* – drew in a wider audience than it had ever been able to do in America before and tracing its effects on wider thought and action would be an exciting project.

As well as understanding and appreciating the difficult, resolute and courageous woman that was Emma Goldman, Hsu’s work analyses the

development of the complexity of Goldman's (and others') anarchist thought revealed through all those years of challenges to authority in so many different arenas. Sometimes they took the offensive but all too often they were forced on the defensive. *Emma Goldman, 'Mother Earth' and the Anarchist Awakening* allows us to see Goldman as herself and not who we might like her to be during, perhaps, the most important years of her life. Through the work of Hsu we appreciate Goldman as a conscious anarchist and thinker who is part of a wider anarchist movement that is in constant reaction to the world around them.

Barry Pateman

Rachel Hui-Chi Hsu. *Emma Goldman, 'Mother Earth' and the Anarchist Awakening* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021. ISBN 9780268200299, \$45. ■

Oppositions: some anarchist writings of Ida Mett [Review]

This chunky pamphlet gives us ten articles by Russian-born anarchist Ida Mett, most written in the 1930s. 'They are, sometimes, written on the run or with the barest information to hand but all of them reflect someone who is searching for ways to understand the nature of power and how anarchists can combat this power. Much of these writings contain sparks of hope at a time when darkness appeared to be suffocating anarchists and their ideas.' (9, from Barry Pateman's biographical sketch)

The editors have resisted the temptation to focus solely on the best-known events, the 'bright lights' of anarchist history like the Spanish or Russian revolutions. They are here, and her protest 'The French Popular Front Stalking The Spanish Refugees' is proof that solidarity and internationalism were principles, and not just slogans, for Mett. Her writings on Russia have some fascinating revelations. The final piece (*Oppositions: Standing Up To Dictators*, from 1954) shows how literature (Zorin's play *The Guests*) reflects the freer and more critical atmosphere after Stalin's death: 'Varvara also states: "God, but I detest the bourgeois." From the script it is obvious she is referring to Soviet bourgeois.' Mett then switches to sharing how 'the German journalist Brigitte Gerland, freed from the Vorkuta camp just last year, bumped into young students in the camp who subscribed to anarcho-syndicalist beliefs.' (57)

Mett's solidarity with her comrades in Spain and Russia did not prevent her from acting where she stood, and *Oppositions* sheds some light on the history of anarchism in Belgium. Her writings on anti-fascism in Belgium criticise the Socialist party's embrace of the 'lesser evil' and she points out 'in the Borinage and around Liege and in the port of

Antwerp, the folks who brought us July 1932 and June 1936 are still around. That is the great unknown but at the same time the great hope: the latent and spontaneous forces of the proletariat.' (17)

I found the approach of the editors (Steimer Press) heartening:

'Anarchist history, to be worthy of the designation, must differ from ruling class history in much the same ways that anarchists oppose the rulers themselves. We don't seek to replace their cops with our cops, or old privileges with new ones. And we shouldn't try to replace their statues and idols with a new list of saints and enshrined icons.

'But this is not an argument against knowing our history, or for throwing anyone under the proverbial historical bus. [...] We just want more: *more* stories of *more* people who chose to put their lives and liberty on the line to advance the cause of life and liberty for all. The ultimate movement against hierarchy and all forms of oppression should read as broadly and horizontally as possible, while still remaining true to our ideals. After all, every one who has actually spent significant time in anarchist circles and spaces knows that the day to day work of anarchism – free food hand outs, political prisoner support, mutual aid work, making zines and posters etc – is what the movement is really about. It is the regular people that choose to show up week after week, year after year, to do this unpaid, unglorious, and sometimes dangerous work who are not only the backbone of the movement, but its heart and mind as well.' (5)

Steimer Press (named for Mollie Steimer, but that's another life-story) have given us the chance to learn about Ida Mett's anarchist life. Lets see what they do next!

Oppositions: Some Anarchist Writings of Ida Mett, edited and published by Steimer Press, 2021, translations by Paul Sharkey, cover art by teev; ISBN 9781873605417, \$6. Available via <https://burningbooks.com/products/oppositions-some-anarchist-writings-of-ida-mett>.

See <https://steimerpress.noblogs.org/> for more of Mett's writings. ■

Insurrection: The Bloody Events of May 1937 in Barcelona [Book review]

Anarchists often look at the explosion of possibilities in the Spanish revolution of July 1936, but this book studies the revolt which tried to preserve those gains. *Insurrection* is the third part of the 'Hunger and violence in revolutionary Barcelona' quartet. [note1]

Guillamón makes his position clear: 'there is no fathoming the May Events of 1937 unless one appreciates that Barcelona's revolutionary workers

were not fighting for a bourgeois republic, nor for a democratic state. The barrio revolutionary committees, which had grown out of the defense committees' victory over a mutinous army and a fascist coup attempt, were **fighting for social revolution and for a new world IN A CLASS WAR**. They fought to bring about the destruction of the state by replacing it in every one of its functions, expropriating factories and properties from the bourgeoisie, raising an army of volunteer militia members, taking charge of the political, social, and economic management of a city with more than a million inhabitants. And this is something that nationalist, social democratic, fascist, reformist, leftist, rightist, or Stalinist historiography can neither stomach nor contemplate.' [p297]

To talk about committees might sound a bit dull, talking that could be left to people who enjoy that sort of thing. But this is how people were being fed, work organised and militias organised: **'The barrio-level revolutionary committees were the actual social movement that, in its everyday practice, replaced all the functions of the state. By their very existence, these embodied the social revolution in progress.'** [p262] This explains why the republican opponents of the revolution attacked the committees (sabotaging supply of food to the working class in the process): **'The [PSUC, see note 2] slogan "More bread and fewer committees" was turning into the dismal reality of "Neither bread nor committees".'** [p106].

But looking at this story of workers against politicians (and politicians against workers) we have to recognise that there were 'anarchist politicians' who aided the reconstruction of the republican state: 'Spanish anarcho-sindicalism's top leaders thought of themselves as skilled negotiators and were manipulated like puppets' [p279] One theme of the book is how the CNT could contain the contradictory perspectives of revolution and collaboration without being torn apart.

It's an intensely political book but Guillamón is keen to distinguish his interpretation from the facts he has dug out. And he has done plenty of digging. See the reports of the Argentinean anarchist Jacobo Prince who 'originally described the situation as "an attack of collective madness," but later delved somewhat deeper and explained "at the root of it all is the fact that our people, at the grassroots, feel let down, that the gains of the revolution are slipping from their grasp [...] we are being persecuted in the old ways. And so they reacted violently."' [p152] Or the archival documents that show it was not simply the Stalinists who wanted to destroy the CNT: **'Companys and the Generalidad government had repeatedly insisted that the Air Force bomb the main CNT buildings in Barcelona.** Such insistence shows that the Generalidad and PSUC were prepared to go to any lengths, ABSOLUTELY ANY

LENGTHS, just to destroy the revolutionaries within the CNT ranks.' [p347] [note 3]

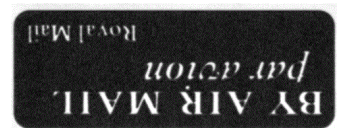
The appendices contain contemporary reports and testimonies of participants. But they also shed some light on the human cost of the revolt, from the murder by the Stalinists of Camillo Berneri and Francesco Barbieri to the painstaking identification of ten of the twelve victims of the Karl Marx Barracks Massacre. I would recommend reading this after *Ready for Revolution* but, if you can't, start by reading the glossary. This gives a clear view of the organisations, protagonists and ideas involved. Let me just quote *part* of the entry for 'uncontrollables': 'In the eyes of many, the revolutionary process had gone too far. The first step toward bringing it to heel was to curb it so that it would go no further. The time to wrest back lost ground would come after that. Which is where the new notion of "revolutionary order" came from: it meant nothing less than stopping the revolution from embedding itself and looking upon "revolutionary gains" as a new and **finished order** in need of protection from uncontrollable/ revolutionaries, from maverick criminality, from the expropriated bourgeoisie, and from fascism. **The success of the label "uncontrollable" was rooted in this very ambiguity, in the incorporation and confounding of two separate meanings: the criminal and the revolutionary.'** [p417-8]

Insurrection is a vital contribution to Spanish Civil War history. It's also a critical examination of what revolutions do and what they need. **'The revolution is made, not by the party and not by the vanguard, but by the proletariat,** even though a proletarian revolution will inevitably fail unless there is an organization capable of defending the proletariat's revolutionary program'. [p295]

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<https://www.akpress.org/insurrection.html>

Notes

- 1, Part one, *Ready for Revolution: The CNT Defense Committees in Barcelona, 1933-1938* was published in English in 2014. The others (*The Bread War*; and *The Repression Targetting the CNT and Revolutionaries (1937-1938)* are not translated. See also *The Friends of Durruti Group* (1996)
- 2, PSUC, Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia. A merger of Socialist and Communist parties under Communist control.
- 3, Incidentally disproving Orwell's gloomy prediction in *Homage to Catalonia* (start of chapter XI) that 'Future historians will have nothing to go on except a mass of accusations and party propaganda.' Those governments like their paperwork. ■



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