

Bulletin of the
Kate Sharpley Library
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THE RIGHT TO LIVE – M. B. (Max Baginski)

Modern man is plentifully equipped with political rights. He has the right of citizenship, provided he be virtuous and not an Anarchist; he may elect his own rulers and jailers; he even enjoys, as one of the majority, the privilege of witnessing the government act “in the name of the people.”

This privilege is a particularly bad hoax, because the activities of the government and courts have usually the sole purpose of intensifying the robbery and subjection of the people; in other words, the people – in their own sacred name – doom themselves to dependence and slavery.

The hollowness and sham of political rights becomes fully apparent when we consider that all of them combined do not include *the right to live*.

The right to live, – that is, the securing of the means of existence, the organization of society in a manner to insure to each the material basis of life and make it as self-evident as breathing, – this right present society cannot give to man.

The barbaric character of the dominant forms of existence is never so offensively demonstrated as when we subject the right to live to a critical test. This right is attacked and nullified daily in a thousand various ways by coercion, poverty, and dependence. It is cruel irony to justify the existence of the murderous machinery of government, with its brutal imbecile laws, on the ground that it is necessary for “the protection of life and property.”

Among the thousands of laws and statutes there is not a single paragraph that guarantees to each member of society the right to live. The tender care for property is of little avail; for it is the chief characteristic of a society based on the sanctity of property that the great majority do not possess sufficient property to justify the expensive machinery of police, courts, jailers and hangmen.

The right to live is primarily dependent upon possession and consequent power. But as only a small minority is in possession and control, the right to live remains a chimera so far as the majority is concerned.

Anarchism regards the right to live as the pivot of its philosophy. It considers it the indispensable foundation of a society that claims to be humane.

To-day the needy, the hungry and the homeless man finds no providence, no court where he may appeal the right to live. Were he to claim it, to test this right, he would soon find himself in the workhouse or prison. In the midst of fabulous wealth, he often lacks even the bare necessities of existence. He stands isolated, forsaken. In a glance, at every turn, he beholds a plentitude of food, clothing and comforts, a thousandth part of which would save him from despair and destruction. But not even the minutest right to live gives him the power over the things, the lack of which turns him into a social pariah.

What avail the rights of citizenship, political “liberties,” or his one-day sovereignty as a voter, when he is deprived of the right to live and robbed of the use of the things he needs?

When everything, every essential of life is the monopoly of a certain class – secured by laws, armies, courts, and scaffolds – it is evident that the possessing class will completely dominate life, with the consequent subjection of the rest of the people.

The demand of the right to live is the most revolutionary demand of our day. The privileged are aware of it. Wherever the demand is voiced seriously, where it is accompanied by corresponding action, where the disinherited resort to expropriation, to the general strike, the guardians of “order” at once realize that the banner of the social revolution is fluttering in the wind.

Ceterum censeo! What is to-day hypocritically called “order” must fall and perish ere the right to live may become a joyous reality.

From *Mother Earth*, January 1912.

See page 4 for a review of “Anarchy!: An anthology of Emma Goldman’s *Mother Earth*”

SPANISH REVOLUTION

Spanish Revolution: Interview with an Eyewitness & Participant

July 2001 marks the 65th anniversary of the Spanish revolution. To mark the date we're reprinting here an interview with a veteran of those struggles.

It was during the Spanish revolution that the Ideas of Anarcho-Syndicalism were not just political theory but a practical reality. In many areas of Spain the CNT was faced with the problems of fighting the civil war but also with restructuring the whole of society based on the Ideas of libertarian communism.

During the post civil war years under the dictatorship of Franco the CNT and libertarian communist influence was almost but smashed. Since the death of Franco the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement has come out of hiding and is again beginning to grow, though at this point in time it is obviously a shadow of its former self.

For the first time documents, reports and eye witness accounts of problems the CNT faced and the solutions arrived at are becoming available. Unfortunately no real attempt has been made to translate these documents and make them accessible to the English reader- that is until now.

Currently in the North East a small group of people are working at this task with the view of publishing some of this material.

We interviewed Miguel Rico who witnessed these events first hand about some of his experiences.

Syndicalist- When and Where were you born and how did you become involved with the anarchist movement?

Miguel- I was born in the Hospitalet area of Barcelona on the 1st October 1919 but when I was very young my father found work at a cement quarry in a place called Villanueva y Getru. It was there that I was raised and educated. When I was 16 I joined the FIJL (Federation of Libertarian Youth).

Syndicalist- Was that the average age of the members of the federation?

Miguel- Some were younger but most were 17, 18 and 19 years of age.

Syndicalist- Now did you become involved?

Miguel- You did not just join, things were not done like that. At that time the police were trying to infiltrate the movement at all levels and there were many informers everywhere. In our town you became a member of the Libertarian Youth on the recommendation of an already respected member. This

is what happened to me. I was recommended by an older person who knew my views and beliefs and knew I was to be trusted. I then joined. My brother who was two years younger than me joined by the same method.

Syndicalist- How many were in the Libertarian Youth, and what activities did you engage in?

Miguel- At one time there was as many as 200 in the Libertarian Youth in our small town. Our activities were mainly propaganda, getting our ideas across to the workers but also raising funds for the movement. We would also hold a meeting, as I said we had to be very careful so although the secretary and committee could meet in safe cafes and bars our full meetings were always held outside of town. You see at that time it was very common for people to go on picnics in large groups at weekends, this was what we would do.

Syndicalist- In 1936 the revolution broke out. How did this affect the Libertarian Youth in Villanueva y Getru?

Miguel- The first affect that it had was that the older members joined the militia and went to the battle front. We who were left knew that the work of the Federation had to go on, the fight against the fascists was not just at the front but also at home, a rearguard was needed. A new committee was elected and the work went on. At one time I held the position of local secretary. Once I was delegated to attend a conference in Barcelona it was at the time that the anarchists controlled the city. It was then that I saw what was really possible, how things could be organised with true equality and freedom. We as delegates were booked into one of the biggest hotels in Barcelona. The dining room provided free meals to the delegates. It was here that I met a fellow anarchist nicknamed 'Zupa'. He was once one of the best pickpockets in Barcelona. I'll always remember the time that a group of us went to a restaurant that before the revolution was considered very posh, a place that only the rich could afford to eat in, but now it was run by the workers it provided cheap meals to the people of Barcelona as well as the militias who were passing through. The restaurant still used the silver cutlery that it had used before the revolution. While we were eating our meal we noticed that the knives, forks and spoons began to go missing one by one. We all knew it was 'Zupa' but we could not catch him in the act. When we got outside 'Zupa' put his hand in his pocket and took out all the missing cutlery "'Zupa,' we all said "'you don't need to steal anymore.'" "I know" 'Zupa' said after he had taken them back "I was just practising."

SPANISH REVOLUTION

Syndicalist- How long were you secretary of the local Libertarian Youth ?

Miguel- About four months and then I joined the militia. I did not tell my mother that I was going to join because I knew that this would upset her.

Syndicalist- What was the name of the militia you joined?

Miguel- I joined the Hortiz Column which was sent to Caspe In Aragon. After that we were sent to help In the battle for Belclite but in order to do this we had first to take a small town called Fuen de Todos. As we entered the town a machine gun started to cut down our comrades. The firing came from a priest who had mounted a machine gun on top of the bell tower of his church. We had to send for a Republican plane to bomb the church, It was the only way that we could take the town. It was during the battle for Belchite that I was wounded, we lost many comrades there.

Syndicalist- You were wounded more than once. Is that right ?

Miguel- Yes, after I recovered from the wound I received in the Battle for Belchite I rejoined my Column but was wounded again. I was taken to the hospital and the doctor told me that I was being sent to a recuperation centre and then on to the army barracks at Olot. This was at the time that the Communists were trying to militarize the militias. I told the doctor that I would go home until I was fully recovered and then report to the barracks at Olot. After about three weeks I went to report and was arrested for collaboration with the fascists. I was taken before a court martial and found guilty. I just could not understand it, but later I found out that the communists were doing this to anarchists everywhere. I was put in a cell to await sentence. Eventually I heard the keys In the door and was convinced that I would be taken out and shot. This was the first time that I was really scared. Everyone is scared when going into battle but you tell yourself that somehow you'll survive but this time I was convinced that I was about to die. The door of the cell opened and there stood a Colonel who said 'release this man' .I then recognised him as a Colonel who we had fought beside in Aragon. He was only there to inspect the new recruits but had heard that a prisoner was being held and had insisted on seeing me. On his word I was released. There was no doubt about it this man saved my life. Under the communist advisers from Russia the militarization went on and I ended up in a communist led brigade.

Syndicalist- Do you remember the name of the brigade?

Miguel- If I remember rightly I was sent to the 134 Brigade 10th Division First Company.

Syndicalist- What were your experiences there as an anarchist In a communist dominated brigade?

Miguel- Well I kept myself to myself after my experiences at the barracks in Olot. I thought the best thing to do was keep very quiet. By my actions it was clear to everyone that I was not a communist member. One day I was approached by a captain (who I found out later had been a centurion delegate in an anarchist column), he explained that it was not safe for anarchists and that I should be careful what I said and did. I stayed with this captain as his assistant. The collapse of the Republic was soon to follow and I managed to cross the border Into France.

Syndicalist- Now were the refugees treated by the French Government ?

Miguel- The refugee camp that I was in was just like a concentration camp. People there starved. There was food in the camp but the guards made people barter for it with any possessions they might have left. There was no medical treatment so disease spread through the camp. Many of the very old and very young died.

Miguel went on to fight against the Nazis in the French army and eventually with the British troops in North Africa. We finally asked Miguel if he would one day write a book about his life, he replied, "maybe one day I will but at the moment there are more important things to do like translating as much material as possible."

From *The Syndicalist* (Tyneside) Number 7, July 1986.

Kate's Story

The Same Old Kate by Albert Meltzer
Pussnik Press ("Cat lovers with an irrepressible affinity with the Russian revolutionary tradition – tyranny tempted with assassination!") have kindly given us here at the Kate Sharpley Library a number of copies of this play, written by a founder of the library on Kate Sharpley, the person it was named for. Only 8 pages long, it's available for a donation or an SAE from the usual address.

Revolution in Spain

The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, Volume 1
by José Peirats Valls

This history is, as Paul Preston says “A landmark in the historiography of the Spanish revolution” and covers the development of the CNT as well as the revolution itself. It is a history written from one side of the barricades, and comes with an intelligent justification of ‘committed history’ and a fascinating account of its genesis and publishing history.

As Paul Preston says, for those whose field of study is modern Spain, this is an obligatory purchase. Given that this edition has been indexed and footnoted it may prove more useful to scholars than the original Spanish-language editions. Chris Ealham is vigilant in disputing points of interpretation where necessary, and in referring readers works of analysis and research that have only recently appeared.

Those interested in revolution will be able to trace the development of a series of important practical debates: to what extent does a syndicalist policy open the door to reformist degeneration? To what extent does insurrection produce a vanguardist outlook? How can ‘proletarian unity’ be forged with organisations not committed to a revolutionary outlook (the question that bedeviled relations between the CNT and UGT through the early ’30s)?

The strength of this work, a strength which should recommend it to all potential readers, is that it provides the raw material for an assessment of both the CNT and the Spanish revolution. Of course, we are treated to some lyrical prose, but in exchange we get the authentic voices of history in quoted documents and eyewitness accounts. These cover tactical debates and congresses, the battles with the boss’s gunmen in the years of *pistolerismo*, dissension on the collaboration of parts of the anarchist movement and the choking of revolutionary spirit with militarisation and the revival of statism. To quote Juan Peiró (speaking in defence of the collaborationist policy!) “Either the government is surplus to requirements, or the [popular] committees are.” Unfortunately authoritarianism hiding in revolutionary guise was able to demolish the gains won by the revolution – reintroducing the state under the watchwords of ‘discipline’, ‘unity’ or ‘military necessity’.

However, the constructive achievements of the collectives are recorded in the final chapter of this volume. The enthusiasm for mechanisation and fertiliser might surprise some who imagine rural anarchism to be based on some Arcadian dream; but the question raised here is still relevant: should those who produce the food starve? Is the earth a common treasury or private asset? Anyone looking to changing the system

we live under would do well to consider the efforts and mistakes of the past. Roll on volumes two and three!

Price £15 plus postage, Special offer price for KSL subscribers £12 plus postage
Postage 1st class £2.39 and 2nd class £1.74

The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, Volume 1
by José Peirats Valls

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‘Mother Earth’ Rides Again

Anarchy!: An anthology of Emma Goldman’s *Mother Earth* Edited and with commentary by Peter Glassgold
ISBN: 1-58243-040-3 May 1, 2001

\$25.00 paperback original / 428 pages plus photos

This is an impressive production; not only in the sheer volume of material that has been gathered, but in its quality. This is even more important given how hard it would have been to access these articles in their original form: copies of *Mother Earth* are not easy to come across. Most reprinted *Mother Earth* material before this has been from the pen of Emma Goldman, but this anthology covers all the range of contributors, (the pieces from Voltairine de Cleyre almost make it worthwhile on their own) and topics, so that Glassgold doesn’t try to edit out ‘inconvenient’ history - whether it’s armed struggle or Ibsen!

It has been well edited, too; Glassgold doesn’t assume that (for example) everyone will know about Anthony “Witchfinder General” Comstock or the details of the San Diego Free Speech Fight, but briefly introduces the necessary knowledge without overpowering the pieces - or turning them into museum specimens- and lets them speak for themselves.

In fact, it’s the relevance of these articles that makes this book a real pleasure to review. there’s no indication of how much it’ll cost in the UK, but perseverance should get most libraries to order a copy - so get requesting!

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS

Internationalism in practice

An American soldier in a hospital explained how he was wounded: he said "I was told that the way to tell a hostile Vietnamese from a friendly Vietnamese was to shout 'To hell with Ho Chi Minh!' If he shoots, he's unfriendly. So I saw this dude and yelled 'To hell with Ho Chi Minh!' and he yelled back 'To hell with President Johnson!' We were shaking hands when a truck hit us"

From *1001 Ways to beat the Draft*, Tuli Kupferberg

An examination of what happened to the US military during the Vietnam War can help us understand the central role the "the military question" will play in a future revolutionary struggle. It isn't a question of how a chaotic and rebellious civilian populace can out-gun the well organized, disciplined armies of the capitalist state in pitched battle, but of how this mass movement can cripple the effective fighting capacity of the military, and bring about the collapse and dispersal of the state's armed forces. What set of circumstances can compel the inchoate discontentment endemic in any wartime army or navy to advance to the level of conscious organized resistance? How fast and how deeply can a subversive consciousness spread among enlisted people? How can rebels in uniform take effective, large-scale action against the military machine? This will involve the sabotage and destruction of sophisticated military technologies, an irreversible breakdown in the chain-of-command, and a terminal demoralization of the officer corps. Circumstances must make it clear to officers that they are fighting a losing war, and that their physical safety can best be guaranteed if they give up, surrender their weapons and ran away. The "quasi-mutiny" that helped defeat the US in Vietnam offers a significant precedent for the kind of subversive action revolutionaries will have to help foment in the fight against 21st century capitalism.

Both from *Harass the Brass*, Kevin Keating in *Bad Days will End*, numbers 4-5, Winter-Spring 2001

Revolutions per minute

"For the workers, against the bosses, bureaucrats and left-wing posers" – Send an SAE for publication details.

BCM Box 3328

London WC1N 3XX

www.red-star-research.org.uk

Their website also contains an expose of the labour party love affair with big business.

From the postbag

"I want to congratulate you once again because it [KSL Bulletin] is a great theoretical tool for us, the militants, as it gives us some historical texts dealing with problems that we face in our daily militancy"

"If an illiterate Italian peasant can remain an anarchist from 14 to 80 how is it that these sophisticated urbanites can give it no more than two years? When I look at the Prague protesters I see their ghosts in 10 years time and they are working for the corporations as personal therapists in the human resources departments."

Groupe Athos Magnani from 'Prague Autumn' issue of 'Athos'; Red Robbie, Box A, Arjuna 12 Mill Road, Cambridge CB1 2AD. send cash, stamps, SAE's

A critique of the cult of 'direct action' (which hypes the activity of a – decreasing – handful of activists over the engagement of the mass of the population, anarchists being sucked into political (rather than social / economic) struggles; all from a sharp working class class-struggle anarchist perspective.

NEED

issues 5 and 6 of the *Merseyside Anarchist newsletter*
issues 10,13,14 of *Wildcat* (the Manchester paper)
issues 1-10 of Volume One of *Libertarian Education*

GOT

Recent acquisitions include:

Some lovely calendars from the 1970s issued by the Solidarity Bookshop, Chicago.

Thoreau: the Cosmic Yankee. Centennial Appreciations published by The Roman Forum and the Rocker Publications Committee, 1946.

Spain July 19, 1936-July 19, 1937 Augustin Souchy.

The Gambler by Nikolai Gogol trans. Alexander Berkman 1927.

How to Rock and Roll by Sam Tracy San Francisco: Black Kettle Graphics, 2000.

Freedom press catalogue, 1926/27.

The Life of Francisco Ferrer by William Archer New York: Moffat, Yard and Co, 1911 signed by William Thurston Brown, American anarchist sympathiser and Modern Educator.

The Russian Revolutionary Party, Kropotkin, 1882

A series of *Undercurrents* direct action videos.

This issue of *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* brought to you by the KSL collective in July 2001.

KSL, BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX

KSL, PMB 820, 2425 Channing Way, Berkeley CA 94704, USA

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS

New KSL Title

Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Story of a Proletarian Life*
The name of Vanzetti, like that of his comrade Sacco, resonates – it marks the biting point where revolutionary activism and state repression come to blows. This pamphlet, written in prison, throws a little light on the life of a man who was much more than a poor fish peddler, fighting for liberty and destined for the fame of a martyr.

Kate Sharpley Library, 2001. 1-873605-92-7
£5 (£1.50 to individual bulletin subscribers)

Two KSL Titles back in print

David Nicoll's *Life in English Prisons* is back in print and still only £1

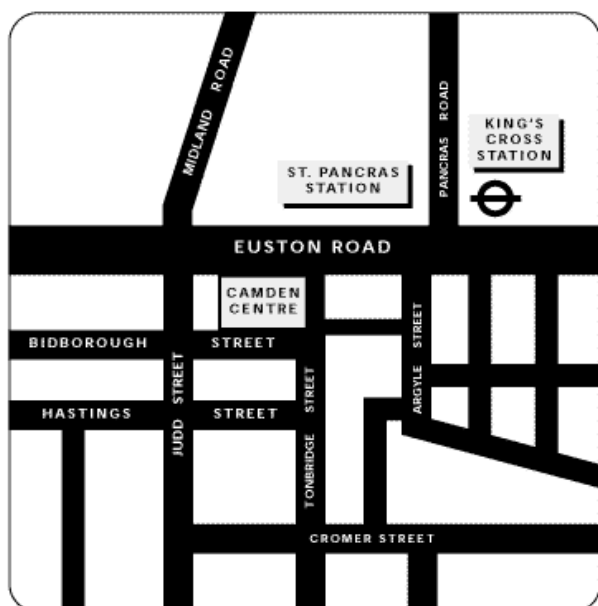
Tom Brown *British Syndicalism: Pages from Labour History* is back too: Writings from a shop steward concerning tactics in the class war – from the sharp end. £1

Books!

The KSL will, as usual, have a stall at the London Anarchist Bookfair (grandly retitled Anarchism 2001!). This is in a new location, so pay attention to the map.

Location: Camden Centre. It's at the back of Camden Town Hall, just opposite St Pancras Station. Directions on the website

<http://www.anarchistbookfair.org>



The Death of the Red Guardist

It was in Munich on the first of May,
a matter of life and death.
The whites were raging, the lead was flying,
grenades spat death and ruin.
Manning the machine gun at the Stachusskiosk,
a red guardist shot in all directions.
The bullets rang all around him.
He was bleeding from many a wound:
Just shoot! I'll serve until my death
– the revolution!

What does the bought soldier know
of the struggle of the oppressed masses?
Our blood is spilt for our freedom and future,
those who fall die for their class.
And nearer, ever nearer comes the white mob.
Already the bullets are running out.
Take up the Browning! What's death and danger!
Just shoot! You won't see me be a coward!
Here stands and falls a red guardist of
– the revolution!

Grenades hit the Charles Square.
The church windows shatter.
The red soldier stands there alone, bleeding.
He greets the enemy without trembling.
Then a blow from a rifle butt makes him keel over,
and in dying he threatens the whites:
You cannot take my beliefs from me,
even though I myself am lost:
I die but it lives on
– the revolution!

ERICH MÜHSAM

Muhsam – who fought in the 1919 Munich soviet – was murdered by the Nazis on 10th July 1934.

Art and Anarchy

A future issue of the KSL Bulletin will contain some material on anarchist cartoonists and illustrators, with a focus on practical libertarian artists, rather than 'fine artists' and their involvement with libertarian ideas. Readers are invited to tell or show us their favourite images and artists – or even which illustrations they have seen far too often and would like to see retired!

Recent enquiry

The 1945 prosecution of the editors of War Commentary for 'Seducing HM forces'.

[reconstructed]