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Some thoughts on Alexander Berkman

In 2006 we said “The death of Paul Avrich has taken from anarchism its finest historian. ... Central to [his work] was a consistent and rigorous insistence on accuracy. ... He allowed anarchist voices, missing from history, to speak for themselves, with a minimum of authorial judgement or intervention.”[1]

Paul Avrich worked for years on a biography of Alexander Berkman. Some of the groundwork can be seen in *The Modern School movement : anarchism and education in the United States* (1980) and *Anarchist voices* (1995). Before his death he asked his daughter Karen to finish the work – a lot to ask and a brave thing to attempt. *Sasha and Emma : the anarchist odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman* is certainly readable, in particular the material on Homestead. That shows what Paul Avrich could do: you get a lot of information in a small space. Yet the work on the whole is a much bumpier ride, and with unfortunate gaps.

It’s hard to imagine Paul Avrich describing the Paris Commune, that hugely significant revolt, as “so named after a band of French activists seized control of Paris for seventy-two days in 1871.” (p25) You don’t expect factual errors in one of his books, nor quite so much weight given to Goldman’s *Living my life* (an influential book but not a reliable one). There is less respect for Berkman and a more judgmental tone to the book. Paul Avrich would hardly have used epithets like “hotheaded” and “criminal” so freely. Karen Avrich seems less interested in anarchism or the anarchist movement, which makes Berkman a rather static figure. *Sasha and Emma* is so busy lamenting Berkman’s militancy that it misses how his ideas evolve and his significance in the anarchist movement. For example, in the campaign for Caplan and Schmidt, Berkman originally felt “it will not do to rely too much on trade union assistance. The conservatism of their leaders makes them lukewarm towards men with our ideas” [2]. But that would change as Berkman made links with union militants. Even as an account of a friendship there are some strange omissions. There is no mention, for example, of Goldman’s exploitation of Berkman’s research for *The Bolshevik Myth*: “In this incident she exhibited a certain moral insensitivity” [3] Several other

insights from Drinnon’s *Rebel in Paradise* would have made this a more complicated and truthful picture.

Events after the deportation to Russia in 1919 are covered rather briefly. Apparently, after deportation, Berkman “languished abroad” (p.3), as if there was no life outside America. We should not minimise the difficulties he faced. But he did not float about, waiting for death. In Russia Berkman and Goldman are dropped into a situation they do not fully understand and their allegiance is fought over. Inevitably there’s a tension between these newly-arrived and well-known militants and the Russian anarchists who expect a condemnation of the Bolshevik state much sooner. But *Sasha and Emma* has no mention of the anarchist movement in Russia, except as victims at Kronstadt.

Berkman spent about the same length of time stateless in western Europe that he was imprisoned in Pennsylvania. Those years were just as hard: poverty and persecution instead of bars and brutality. Perhaps they were worse. In 1900 he had friends to dig a tunnel; in the 1920s and ’30s the way out was less obvious. Capitalist crisis only fed rampant authoritarianism. The anarchist movement was depleted. The very idea of society without the state was overshadowed by the supposed success of the bolsheviks.

Yet these were possibly Berkman’s most important years. He was a major figure in practical support for anarchists in Russia, and elsewhere. He performed the exhausting role of peacemaker, attempting to overcome the bitter divisions of exile politics. And he wrote. Berkman’s writing is mentioned, but some of its significance is missed. He was central to challenging the Bolshevik myth, which, as a defensive measure, kept the idea of socialism without the state alive. But Berkman was also intent on critically examining anarchism, as well as its enemies. *Now and after : the ABC of Communist Anarchism* (1929) was an attempt to refocus the efforts of the anarchist movement. It aimed to reconnect it with a wider public by explaining anarchism clearly and accessibly, and dealing directly with issues of the day.

So, why is there no biography of Alexander Berkman? The closest thing is Gene Fellner’s

Alexander Berkman

documentary collection *Life of an anarchist* of 1992. Had Berkman died in 1892, there would be no *Prison memoirs of an anarchist*. It's a recognised classic, but perhaps that has put people off attempting to write the whole (or the rest) of Berkman's life. Berkman himself considered the task, but never got beyond titles and outlines. The most evocative title was *I had to leave* but he was always too busy struggling, both politically and economically, to write it. His extensive editorial work on Goldman's *Living my life* contributed to its success. It also made his own autobiography less likely to be written, or published. Perhaps it's significant that he did write the introduction to anarchism and not the autobiography: his own story was less important to him than the movement.

Berkman is important as a survivor from the era of "propaganda by the deed", linking that generation to the anarchist movement's response to the challenges of the twentieth century. He was a widely respected figure in the movement. Not just because of his long years in prison, but because of his continuing commitment. This is why the anarchist aid fund was renamed in his honour after his death. After he left Russia, much of his activity was behind the scenes, partly to avoid deportation but also through personal inclination. One talent Berkman did not possess was self-promotion.

The years inside damaged Berkman. But he was not "redeemed" to obedience and never repented. The surviving texts of *Prison blossoms*, the secret magazine written by Berkman, Henry Bauer, Carl Nold and other prisoners in the Western Penitentiary have recently been republished. [4] His reading then, and the experience of writing *Prison memoirs* with the support of Voltairine de Cleyre (see p.208) laid the foundations of his skill as a writer. It was never something that came easily to him, but we should remember the power of Berkman's pen. He is never writing to impress anyone, but to convince. It is some of the strongest writing that anarchism has produced. As Barry Pateman says "agitational papers can have depth and ironic, wry humor. *The Blast* though refuses to preach to the converted. It tries to go beyond its natural community of social rebels and reach out in a clear, straightforward way to the unpolitical, the non-militant. Its use of clear and straightforward language, its consistency of tone are clear indications of that strategy. This is not a paper that rails angrily against the world like steam coming out of a safety valve. It's a paper that is angry and determined and urges its readers to think, and then fight back." [5]

It is impossible to write about Berkman without dealing with the difficult topics of violence and

capitalism. His life cannot be understood without thinking about solidarity and struggle, not only in the immediate campaigns he fought. He also, in the worst of conditions, was thinking about making the struggle for anarchy popular and successful.

Sasha and Emma contain gems like Berkman's prison advice to Ammon Henacy: "don't tell a lie; don't be a stoolie; draw your line about what you will do, and don't budge, even if they kill you; never crawl or you will always be crawling; if a guard hits you don't hit back, for if one can't beat you up for good then two or ten will do it" (paraphrased on p.283). It is certainly worth reading. But it does not fully reflect the life of Alexander Berkman, or his importance. Still, writing history is an ongoing, many-handed affair. Paul Avrich in his books has left us a huge amount of information and insight, and also an example of what the very best historical writing can do. We should learn from his approach, both honest and understanding. There is an awful lot of history still to write.

Notes

- 1, "Paul Avrich 1931-2006: a historian who listened to anarchist voices" by the KSL collective in *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* 46-7, July 2006.
- 2, 30 June 1915 bulletin of the Caplan-Schmidt Defense League, quoted p4 "Introduction" by Barry Pateman, *The Blast* edited by Alexander Berkman (AK Press facsimile edition, 2005).
- 3, *Rebel in Paradise: a biography of Emma Goldman* Richard Drinnon (1961), p245.
- 4, *Prison Blossoms: Anarchist voices from the American past* edited by Miriam Brody and Bonnie Buettner.
- 5, "Introduction" by Barry Pateman, p7, *The Blast*

Sasha and Emma: the anarchist odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman is published by Harvard University Press, ISBN 9780674065987.

A Call out for a radical historical opposition to the plans for a commemoration of the start of World War 1 From Past Tense

"We know, without having to raise eyebrows much, what the official idea of commemorating World War One is likely to consist of. A celebration of sacrifice, idealizing of the armed forces, romanticisation or the alleged harmony of class relation and social co-existence pre-1914; a hymn to the national unity forged in struggle (a myth better illustrated in World War 2, but, hey, one step at a time!)"

See more at <http://past-tense.org.uk/>

Absent Friends

Nunzio Pernicone (1940-2013)

Nunzio Pernicone (June 20, 1940-May 30 2013), the leading scholar of Italian anarchism, has died of prostate cancer.

Born in Manhattan, the son of Sicilian immigrants Salvatore and Giuseppina Catania Pernicone, Nunzio absorbed anarchist ideas from his father, who was both actor and director in amateur theater groups that raised funds for *Il Martello* and other Italian radical papers, performing plays by Carlo Tresca during the 1920s and '30s.

After earning his BA and MA degrees from CUNY, Pernicone earned his PhD in 1971 at the University of Rochester, studying under the direction of A. William Salomone, the eminent historian of modern Italy. He soon became the colleague and close friend of Paul Avrich, who was then starting to establish the history of anarchism as a full-on academic field of study. All through his life, Nunzio knew many aging Italian veterans of the movement such as Valerio Isca.

Pernicone taught at several institutions and authored scores of articles on the Italian anarchist and labor movements, settling permanently at Drexel in 1987. There followed his books *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* (1993), and *Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel* (2005). What distinguishes those volumes (both of which were later re-issued) is that they represent decades of thorough research into the lives of Italian militants who are notoriously difficult to trace – even for those who have total fluency in their language.

Students of U.S. history should be especially grateful for Pernicone's biography of Carlo Tresca, which he expanded and corrected for its second release by AK Press in 2010. Some heroes of the ages remain too poorly understood or appreciated by the general public until one scholar steps forward to devote a lifetime of work to present the hero's legacy to future generations. If not for Horace Traubel, we'd have meager knowledge of Walt Whitman. Without William Archer, the English-speaking world would know very little of Henrik Ibsen. Nunzio Pernicone is exactly that important to the legacy of Tresca, whose rousing speeches and unwavering courage played a pivotal role in fighting the abuses of capitalism and fascism among Italo-Americans for half a century. This is a huge contribution.

I knew Nunzio since 1994, when he accepted my invitation to lecture at our small club in West Philadelphia. Being generous with his time and knowledge, he spoke to about twenty Wobblies and anarchists with his scratchy and somewhat deep voice. He wore a bright red shirt (his black shirt being in the wash) and gave an

intimate account of the anarchist leaders of 19th Century Italy, both comic and tragic. His manner was that of a learned comrade teaching what he knew to his fellow workers. Over the years since then, he was always ready to share information from his research and ask questions about mine.

Not long before his death, Nunzio completed his last book, *Propaganda of the Deed: Italian Anarchist Violence in the 19th Century*. AK Press will publish it soon.

Nunzio Pernicone the historian, anarchist and atheist, a lover of cats and the opera, is survived by his wife Christine Zervos and their four cats.

Robert Helms

Anarcho-Syndicalist Review no.60, Summer 2013
<http://syndicalist.us/2013/07/13/nunzio-pernicone/>

Terry Liddle (1938-2012)

KSL collective members were saddened to hear of the death of Terry Liddle. He was a thinker and writer with his roots in the ideas of William Morris, Henry Salt, Frank Ridley and a myriad of freethought and republican thinkers from the UK and the European continent. We will leave it to others to accurately describe his politics. For us Terry was the quintessential autodidact whose extensive reading and reflection lead him down many pathways that made up the countryside of the British radical movement. Some might argue that a few of these paths were dead ends but we rather think that Terry would have argued that the journey was as important as the arrival when it came to travel.

These journeys had provided Terry with an impressive knowledge of movements and people. Some of it was arcane, some scurrilous and some deeply moving. A lot of it he wanted to keep alive. His last contact with us was to get a copy of "Peter Annet, 1693-1769" by Ella Twynam for his work with the Freethought History Group. It's a little gem of freethought history and typical that Terry wanted it back in the world. As always he was funny, knowledgeable and thorough. He shared those qualities with other researchers and contributed his knowledge (in a sadly unrecognized way sometimes) to a host of scholars and their work.

Terry spent a lot of time on boundaries of Anarchism, Marxism and Socialism. It could be a lonely place but one that rather suited him. He was stringent in his critique of Marxism but not as forceful in his critiques of Anarchism. His work against Marxist oppression in Eastern Europe shown in the broadsheet *Volya* and the publications of Kulak Press struck a chord with us in the eighties. Other friends, we are sure,

Absent Friends

could produce other, completely different examples. We do sense, though, that the great drives of Terry's life were republicanism and freethought, both reflected in the sensitive and rigorous research that was so much part of his life. We should add Terry's name to the list of other great freethought writers such as Chapman Cohen and Joseph McCabe. He is their equal and it belongs there. It is to be hoped that, eventually, a collection of Terry's writings will be produced that reflect the intellectual richness of the man we were proud to know and learn from, and with. KSL

Keith Hodgson (1962-2013)

Keith Hodgson, long time activist in the Liverpool anarchist scene, died on Saturday 23rd February 2013, aged 50. Keith, like many of his generation, was radicalised by the re-vitalised Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and by the Thatcher onslaught against working class rights and freedoms in the 1980s. As a young anarchist and CND activist, Keith rapidly moved to the direct action wing of the anti-militarist movement and also worked voluntarily in the CND Merseyside offices. This combination of organisational work and street activism was typical of Keith over the years.

Keith was part of the Liverpool Anarchist Groups of the 1980s and early 1990s. As such, Keith was heavily involved in the Mutual Aid Centre in central Liverpool (1987-1995), the militant anti-fascism organised around Anti-Fascist Action, and was active in support of workers' disputes over the years – the larger ones including the 1984-5 Miners strike and the 1986 Wapping dispute. Keith's interest in the struggle in Northern Ireland led to his involvement in the Troops Out Movement and the Phoenix Support Group for Irish Republican prisoners. Keith was one of the main editors, producers and writers of the nationally distributed Merseyside Anarchist Newsletter, and Keith took an active part in the anti-Poll Tax movement of the late 1980s/early 1990s. By the time the second LAG dissolved Keith was already a long-standing member of the anarcho-syndicalist Direct Action Movement, and took part in the subsequent launch of the Solidarity Federation in 1994.

During the 1990s Keith became a mature student. Over time he worked as a lecturer in History, gained a PhD, and wrote a book on anti-fascism.

In more recent years, Keith threw himself back into political activism. He rejoined the Solidarity Federation, helped re-launch the Liverpool branch, and became active at national level, including in the Education Workers Network. In 2009 he was a founder member of

Liverpool Anti-Fascists, and was a key activist in the group's initial work.

In May 2010 Keith had a major stroke. However, in the last year and a half Keith had started to go to meetings again – including meetings against the Tory bedroom tax – and had rejoined CND. Keith's book – *Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism, 1919-39* – came out in hardback edition in late 2010 [1] and there are moves to bring this out in paperback. His most recent writings, in late 2012, included an article for *Peace News* [2], and a review of *Beating the Fascists: The Untold Story of Anti-Fascist Action* [3].

Keith will be much missed by his partner, his family, and by many friends and comrades. A get-together to remember Keith is being planned for the near future. Notes

1. Manchester University Press, ISBN 9780719080555
2. <http://peacenews.info/blog/6897/remembering-hiroshima-liverpool>
3. in *Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2012. From www.solfed.org.uk via www.libcom.org

Flavio Costantini (Rome, 21 September 1926–Rapallo, 20 May 2013)

Sad news today: after a month's deterioration in his health, Flavio Costantini, graphic artist and friend of 40-years, passed away peacefully in a Rapallo hospice on Monday 20 September. His wife, Wanda, and other close family members and friends were at his bedside. Flavio had lung cancer for some time; the seriousness of his condition, however, was known only to himself and Wanda – until near the end, which came sooner than everyone expected.

He leaves cheery memories, and the world – artistically at least, with his visually thought-provoking images – a richer place ...

Flavio collaborated with me from the launch of the first Cienfuegos Press publication, illustrating the cover of Antonio Tellez's 'Sabaté. Guerrilla Extraordinary' in 1974, through to the jacket design of 'General Franco Made Me A Terrorist' in 2003. In 1975 we (Cienfuegos Press) published a collection of his silkscreen prints with an anarchist theme, 'The Art of Anarchy', which was selected by the National Book League as one of the top ten book covers of 1976. An appreciation of Flavio's work I wrote in 1976 appeared in 'Illustrators 50', the magazine of the London-based Association of Illustrators.

Stuart Christie

From: www.christiebooks.com.

Book reviews on Spanish anarchism

One Man's War in Spain : Trickery, Treachery and Thievery By Joaquín Pérez Navarro

This is a book that Paul Preston should have read and taken notice of. In his recent monumental 'Spanish Holocaust' he details graphically the atrocities carried out by Franco and his fascist friends during the Spanish Civil War. He also removes a veil over the terror on the republican side of the lines, particularly of the *paseos* and *checas* organised by republican, communist and anarchist militias. Much of this is truly shocking and should make us all aware that merely because someone calls themselves, or is called, an anarchist that they necessarily understand anarchism or live up to its principles and goals.

Preston's book is undeniably biased against anarchists in many ways, but its greatest sin is that of omission. Joaquín Pérez Navarro puts right that sin in this volume, where his own memoirs and diatribes, against what he sees as the counter-revolutionaries of the C.N.T. and F.A.I. Leadership, is combined with a number of documents from other individuals and groups. Some of this will be news to many. That the republican administrators usually refrained from tackling potential army mutineers early on, that they refused to distribute arms to the workers and that they subsequently resisted and reversed as many of the revolutionary achievements gained by the people in the first days of the Civil War as they could – this is widely known. Less well known is the extent to which they submitted to the communist demands for supremacy almost from the word 'go', and certainly after they had foolishly allowed Spain's gold reserves be looked after by Stalin's Russia. Secret prisons were established by the communists with connivance of the authorities. Sometimes fascists would be the ones who were locked up, tortured and shot. Sometimes it was anarchists, members of the P.O.U.M. or foreigners of an unorthodox revolutionary persuasion. The militias were also a target, being forced to undergo militarisation, with all the consequent ills of disaffection, desertion and internal power struggles and rivalries. 'Political' leaders were re-assigned and replaced with communist stooges or other fellow-travellers. Troublesome militants vanished or were repeatedly sent on dangerous missions. Formerly anarchist units were denied arms and ordered into battle under-equipped and badly-led. This was all utter madness, and of a keeping with the paranoid mindset of leader of the U.S.S.R. That this lunacy was enabled and encouraged by the Spanish government beggars belief, and that the government contained anarchist ministers from the C.N.T. and

F.A.I. would be hard to credit were it not so undeniably true.

The tale does not end there. Corruption by Negrín's appointees meant that arms deals went astray and large amounts of money ended up in the hands of officials whose loyalty was only too suspect. The forces of 'law and order' in the rear were well-armed and well-fed, in stark contrast to many of those fighting in the front lines, and whilst the militiamen risked their lives for the revolution, Lister and other communists were attacking and dismantling collectives in the rear, both agricultural and industrial. Thanks to George Orwell and 'Homage to Catalonia', the May Days in Barcelona are well-known and well-documented but even he was not aware of the scale of the assassinations and murders carried out by the government forces during those times.

Joaquín Pérez did not like Negrín or his collaborators and this is very apparent in this book. He cannot let any opportunity pass to heap scorn and insult on those he disagrees with and this becomes a bit wearying after a while. Once we have learnt that these people are vile, treacherous, power-hungry, corrupt, noxious, rotten, bloodthirsty, craven, self-interested and the like, we do not need to be told the same over and over again. In part this effect is because this is a collection of a number of memoirs, together with an interview and other documents. They were not written with the intent of being published as one volume and if taken individually they can be seen as the polemical contemporary works which they were, intended to influence events at specific historical times.

The documents at the end of the book are among the most interesting, containing as they do testaments from other militants and some corroboration of the allegations of torture chambers, secret prisons, dodgy arms deals and the murders of anarchists and others. With the demise of the Soviet Union it might seem less important to expose the crimes of Communist Parties, but such forces still exist in this world and other similar mentalities still rule over the minds of too many men and women. Perhaps this book might serve as a starting point for someone, somewhere, to thoroughly uncover the full gory detail of the real red terror in republican Spain, the terror directed at those very same people who had initially defeated the fascist rising in July of 1936, the rank and file of the C.N.T. the working-class masses of Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid and the peasantry of Aragon and the Levante.

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Published by Christiebooks, 2013.

www.christiebooks.com ISBN 9781873976623

Book reviews on Spanish anarchism

The Death of Durruti by Joan Llarch

Another excellent title from Stuart Christie's Christie Books Press, which has published some very interesting books over the past few years. First published in 1973, Joan Llarch examines the actual events surrounding the death of everybody's favorite Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti, looking at the varied and often confusing accounts of that day.

The Durruti Column had moved from the Aragon front to Madrid in early November 1936 to defend the city against a ferocious Nationalist onslaught and Durruti was mortally wounded on the 19th of November, dying the following day, aged just 40 years.

The 'official' version of events was that, as Durruti's car stopped in the University district of the City (the scene of the fiercest fighting) Durruti was struck by a Nationalist machine-gun bullet fired from a high window in the nearby Clinical hospital. However, almost immediately an air of suspicion and mystery arose, and many people began to seriously question the manner of his death.

Amid the general confusion, Llarch comments: "What seemed consistent however, was the widespread disbelief of what had happened. Questions, as to how the disaster had come about, seemed to be on everybody's lips even though Durruti's safety was always a matter of concern; it was almost as if what had happened was, in some way, expected" (p10).

I'll not spoil the various theories for potential readers, but, safe to say, all is clearly not what it seems! Perhaps the most damning fact of all is that Durruti was obviously shot from point-blank range, as shown by the powder-burns on the leather jacket that he wore throughout the early years of the civil War. In an interview with Dr Santamaria, the doctor that treated Durruti's wounds, he states that the shot was fired from a distance of 35 centimetres. Therefore, totally dismissing the long-range sniper version, Llarch states: "there is a fallacy here, a shot fired from such a distance could not have left a powder residue around the entry point of its target. There has been sufficient evidence to suggest that Durruti's leather coat bore significant powder residue around the entry point of the chest region. this would make the long-range sniper theory untenable" (p157).

It is worth noting that the gun that killed Durruti, the 'Naranjero', was notorious for misfiring and its general unreliability. Again, not wanting to spoil it for readers, several questions arise as to whether his death was accidental or plain murder - readers will simply have to draw their own conclusions!

In this respect, I would recommend 'The Man Who Killed Durruti' by Pedro de Paz (Christie Books 2005), a fictionalized account which raises some intriguing questions about the role of Sergeant José Manzana - Durruti's military adviser who was sitting next to Durruti in the car. Also, of course, everybody should read 'Durruti', Abel Paz's exhaustive, brilliant and definitive biography of the man.

This book also provides a useful potted history of Durruti's life and the activities of the Durruti Column for those unfamiliar with the life and work of this remarkable man. Peppered with stories and anecdotes from comrades who knew or met him, we are left with a moving and colorful picture of a figure who, 73 years later, continues to inspire modern-day anarchists with his uncompromising brand of militant class-struggle anarchism.

Highly recommended.

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The Death of Durruti by Joan Llarch

Published by Christiebooks

ISBN: 9781873976616

New Pamphlet

One Hundred Years of Workers' Solidarity : The History of *Solidaridad Obrera*

by Mateo Rello, Ferrán Aisa, Carles Sanz

Translated by Paul Sharkey

Solidaridad Obrera (*Workers' Solidarity*), founded in Barcelona in 1907, is the voice of Spain's Anarcho-syndicalist Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT: National Confederation of Labour). These essays were issued to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of "Soli" and together they illustrate the changing fortunes of the Anarcho-syndicalist movement, and its enduring attempt to communicate the anarchist idea.

Contents

Solidaridad Obrera 1907-1939: Notes towards a history of CNT journalism by Mateo Rello

Catalunya, a Catalan-language Soli by Mateo Rello
Solidaridad Obrera, Clandestinity and Transition, 1939-1987 by Ferrán Aisa

Solidaridad Obrera 1976-2006: A look back at the history of CNT journalism over the last 30 years by Carles J. Sanz

50 pages. ISBN 9781873605646 Anarchist Sources, 10 £5 (£3 to subscribers)

Book reviews: Makhno; Anarcho-syndicalism

The Ukrainian Revolution (July-December 1918) by Nestor I. Makhno [Book Review]

This is a vital primary source on the Makhnovist movement. Makhno, both a peasant and anarchist, articulates the rage against the landowners which drove the revolution:

“We are fighting for the freedom of all those dominated and degraded by the power of your sort of people, the people who support thrones occupied by dunces [...] who build prisons in which are left to rot those whom your mendacity transforms into criminals and thieves. You build scaffolds to hang the very best and bravest of those who fight for the freedom of the oppressed. In fact, it is scarcely possible to enumerate the actions of your class, which are criminal toward those by whose labour, by whose sweat and blood, you and your fellow social parasites are able to maintain your life style.” (p.109-110)

Makhno’s skill as a guerrilla commander is clear in the historical record, and reflected in his account here. However, Makhno wanted victory – a new social order – rather than being satisfied with vengeance. And while the physical battles inevitably occupy the bulk of the text, there are also signs of the difficulty of creating a new society in a war zone: see the discussion of mills and dairies on p116-17. Not strong enough to defend them if they were collectivised, the owners were left with a new, lower, price scale, and the threat of return visit to enforce it.

Memoirs inevitably carry echoes of later disputes about what happened. There’s some hindsight in his disappointment with the failure of “urban anarchists” to engage with the Makhnovist movement. Also, there’s the critique of the performance of anarchists which led Makhno to the Platform: “According to these dictums, one should preach to the masses and incite them to take the path of revolution, but at the same time one should refrain from leading these masses in an organized manner” (p182).

Readers will be glad to hear Black Cat Press are planning two more books by Makhno: *A Rebellious Youth (1888-1917)*, and *The Makhnovshchina and its erstwhile allies – the Bolsheviks* (covering 1919-21).

This is the usual high quality production from Black Cat Press. As well as maps, footnotes and a glossary and appendices, there’s an excellent introduction: “The Makhnovists were not backward looking rustics who romanticized the past but people whose experience of the modern world in southeastern Ukraine with its mix of rural and industrial life had give them a glimpse of

what the future could be like with a different social system.” (p.xiii)

The Ukrainian Revolution (July-December 1918) by Nestor I. Makhno, introduction by Vsevolod Volin. Published by Black Cat Press. ISBN 9781926878058 <http://www.blackcatpress.ca/>

Fighting For Ourselves: Anarcho-syndicalism and the Class Struggle by the Solidarity Federation [Book Review]

My favourite definition of Anarcho-syndicalism has to be from a review of *The Couriers are Revolting* along the lines of “It seems to mean they didn’t mess about”. While this book goes into more depth than that, it has a similar practical focus: “Doing and thinking are but moments of the same process of organisation” (p8).

Fighting for ourselves asks how we got to our current situation with a solid critique of ‘regular’ trade unionism and the Labour Party. “Reform has become a euphemism for attacking our living standards. Unions have been allowed to remain social partners so long as they accepted their role was no longer to police the shop floor in exchange for annual improvements in pay and conditions, but simply to manage their stagnation and decline with minimal disruption.” (p89).

It also asks how we might win some social battles. Now, all anarchists should be interested in that. What’s also good is their historical overview of anarcho-syndicalism. The Spanish CNT is mentioned and understood in context, but so are other movements like the FAUD (Free Workers Union of Germany) and FORA (Argentine Regional Workers’ Association), as well as nearby currents like council communism. The Direct Action Movement gets mentioned, so a history of the DAM might appear one day. Or perhaps the Solidarity Federation might produce an introductory critique of capitalism: *How we get robbed?*

Fighting for ourselves is well written, clear and asks interesting questions about anarchist history and practice. Read it if you’re interested in either.

Fighting For Ourselves: Anarcho-syndicalism and the Class Struggle by the Solidarity Federation ISBN 9781904491200 www.solfed.org.uk

The Solidarity Federation also have a couple of pamphlets out: *Workmates: direct action workplace organising on the London Underground* and a reissue of *Anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real: from shipyard resistance to direct democracy and community control*.

Book reviews: AFA; Emma Goldman

Beating The Fascists Review

Any political biography from whatever quarter is going to involve some degree of score settling and any one version of events is inevitably disputed. *Beating The Fascists* is no different. It has caused more controversy than it deserves. There was a string of disgraceful and embarrassing accusations on Indymedia with people slagging the book before they had even read it and many accusations were levelled. This must have given the fascists a good laugh and merely amplified the 'People's Front of Judea' aspect and bitter sectarianism in the anti-fascist camp. One of the main disputes on Indymedia was over the proposed moniker 'the Authorised' version of Anti Fascist Action (AFA). This has now been changed to the Untold Story. Fair enough. The book should actually be called the Untold Story of London AFA by Red Action as it is mainly focused on London AFA and Red Action in particular. Unsurprising seeing as who wrote it.

The book is well written, at times funny, and although from a fairly singular point uses insider information from the folk who were actually there which makes it very readable. The case for physical opposition is made absolutely clear and uncompromisingly. Physical force is not for everyone but that does not mean it cannot be employed alongside other strategies against fascism. All the big events are described in some detail: the Crass gig riot at Conway Hall and the band's subsequent criticism of Red Action; Blood and Honour at Hyde Park; the battle of Waterloo; Ian Stuart Donaldson's various kickings; and there is a good analysis of the National Black Caucus march at Bermondsey which got seriously attacked and saw fascist rioting for the rest of the day with the police totally losing control. The book rightly criticises the organisation for a massive blunder and a rout that could have been avoided. One AFA member recalls the day and how he barely escaped. And it is these anecdotes – rather than the dry analysis of SWP hacks like Dave Renton – that give the book its flavour. Some of the stories have clearly been well polished over the bar but are honest and unflinching in the descriptions of fear and outright violence. Accounts of events will always be disputed and obviously, in the heat of battle, participants' experiences and views of events can differ radically but the subjective nature of the descriptions counter balance any dry theorising (of which there is little, save the skipworthy introduction).

Beating The Fascists makes clear the SWP's appalling behaviour over their expulsion of the defence squads and the treachery of their leadership. The Central

Committee, then as now, have no idea what goes on at street level and their concerns over the anti-fascist squads were about their autonomy rather than anything else. The apocryphal story of Tony Cliff seeing the squads in action against the NF then drinking in the same pub is only one example of the C.C.'s Stalinist fictions. Also, the person who started the squads, Graeme Atkinson, was charged with dismantling them by the SWP which was designed to humiliate. At the time of writing, 2 groups of UAF and SWP were routed from Manchester and Oldham which shows they never learn. In dodgy places, security is needed. Anyway, the expulsion of the Squaddists did them a favour as now Red Action could exclusively focus on successful and militant anti-fascism whilst the SWP could 'fight the torys.' And a fat lot of good that did.

The book puts forward Red Action's case against Steve Tilzey and Dave Hann and does not miss an opportunity to mention Hann's 'legal troubles' a couple of times. Hann does not mention the case in his *No Retreat* book (which should be read in the same way as this – with amused scepticism) so it is difficult to cross reference and come to our own conclusions. The score settling about the *No Retreat* book and Steve Tilzey's relationship with *Searchlight* does leave a slightly sour taste.

Beating The Fascists quickly dismisses the nonsense point of view that anti-fascists are somehow fighting on behalf of black or Asian people. Anti-fascists fight against fascists because of political opposition not as some misguided social work. The book also refutes the fascist claims that all anti-fascists are 'soft' or 'middle class.' Even some fascist websites acknowledge that AFA/Red Action were a force to be reckoned with on the day:

"90% of today's "nationalists" would have shit a brick faced with AFA and not the lollypop brigade of today's UAF . They did have firms in Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and down south but I always rated the Manchester lot as their main boys they were very tasty ... when the boot was on the other foot like in Moston when they ambushed a small group of us and we came of worse you just had to say fair play." (from S-front).

The book does point up the heavy white male aspect of Red Action (although AFA was much more gender mixed) but this kind of anti-fascism is not for the meek. It requires violence, physical stamina and people able to dish it out as well as take it. There can be no dispute over Red Action's organising skills, the hassles and isolation that they faced with the internecine disputes amongst the left, and their uncompromising ability to

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take it to the Nazis. And, more importantly, win. Anarchists should read it with the expectancy that it is biased towards Red Action and realise the need for an anarchist version of events that, in particular, put more focus on AFA in the North and Scotland, anarchist versions that either contradict, compliment or rectify the version put forward by *Beating The Fascists*.

Verdict: Buy it, then write your own.

by Malatesta [not that one]

Beating The Fascists by Sean Birchall from Freedom Bookshop, £15. www.freedompress.org.uk

<http://malatesta32.wordpress.com/>

2010/10/31/ beating-the-fascists-review/

Beating The Fascists On Urban75.net

Beating the Fascists is the subject of a thread on Urban75.net (with all the detours that internet discussions have). It's well worth reading, but the prize piece has to be an anecdote from LiamO on the tension between militant antifascists and some of the more respectable anti-racists.

It seemed to me that every time one of our mob spoke the reaction was to their language and speaking style rather than what they said. I fell foul of this when I referred to something as 'clearly a load of old bollocks'. Some of us may have included a 'fuck' or two as well but only as conversational punctuation, certainly not directed at any person. At this point a particularly shrill middle-class woman jumped up and interrupted me (which was something we had been at pains not to do to them).

She started banging on about swearing, how offensive she found it and how she could not imagine sending the likes of me in to speak to a Asian women's group. I replied neither could I and why would anybody send me to do a job that would obviously be more suited to a woman and probably an Asian one. Surely this was a matter of horses for courses and that was the idea of this meeting? We felt that in the past the Left had concentrated far too much on aiming it's activity and propaganda at the victims of racism. We were proposing that as well as this AFA should work in and among the potential recruits of racist organisations – the disaffected white working class – and that required a different skillset and language.

Neither was it a matter of either 'jaw, jaw' or 'war, war' but of both. Not of propaganda Vs street activity but of both together. I finished by saying I was sorry she did not like the way we spoke but that we all had roles to play, I did not see mine and her roles overlapping too

much and if she was so offended by a couple of swear words then frankly I did not give a flying fuck.

There was uproar and I caught a sideways-look from some of our senior people as I had set off the very thing we had all been told to avoid – and it was now in full swing.

A shouting match broke out and the Chair (one of them of course, as they would have sulked if it was one of us) struggled to hold it together and to 'Chair' rather than join in on one side. Suddenly Rupert arose from his front row seat. Immediately the Chair demanded silence for his new Comrade from the Farm. Given that about a dozen people were all waiting to speak this was not exactly how things should be. But this was Rupert. He was from Broadwater Farm. He was working class AND black which made him 'special'. The NMP [Newham Monitoring Project] lot fell silent as their champion held the floor.

In fairness we were all interested in what he had to say too.

"I tried to come to this meeting with an open mind. We are all in this thing together, y'know what I mean? So despite what I was told about people beforehand, I come to meet people, make friends and find ways we could work together. I have to say I am absolutely gutted by what's gone on here today." Well said Rupert they enthused and nodded knowingly to each other.

"From the very start there was a bad atmosphere and a bad attitude from some people in this room. Look at it now – you could cut the atmosphere with a knife. This ain't no way to carry on, people." And on he went. By now the murmurings of enthusiastic endorsement were becoming more pronounced and they were clapping his every remark as he warmed to his task.

"It's obvious that one group in here are genuine. One group are ready and willing to work together. But the other group don't wanna listen to no-one else, they just think the other mob are wrong all the time. They've basically got a BAD attitude. They are just insulting. It's pathetic and it's just plain wrong". By now they were besides themselves with glee and cheered his every word as he tore into the 'bad guys'.

Until, that is... when Rupert turned round... looked at them with a look of pure "WTF" and said "What's the matter with you people? What are you lot clapping for? I ain't talking about THEM... I'm talking about YOU!"

This stopped them in their tracks and they sat open-mouthed as he continued (they could not interrupt him of course, or shout him down. How could they? After all he was THEIR champion. He was working class, he was

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black and (I don't know if I've mentioned this but) he was from Broadwater Farm.

"All you lot seem to care about is if people use big words and talk like you or not. If they don't, you don't listen. Why can't you just listen to what they're saying, instead of how they say it? My first experience with the NF was when I got hit on the head with a bottle and called 'nigger' on Tottenham High road – by some geezer who two days before had been in our flat fitting the gas. Now if those days are coming back with the BNP, I know who I want watching my back and it ain't fuckin' you lot..."

The loud silence was by now only broken by the laughter we were all doing our best (unsuccessfully) to hold in. All I could see was the shock on their faces, the anguished looks of betrayal – and the shoulders of several burly men shaking as they tried to restrict themselves to a polite chuckle instead of the belly-laugh such a turnaround deserved.

He finished by apologising if he had hurt anybody's feelings but said this shit was too important to let people's feelings get in the way and sat down to a big round applause – from us.

Strangely, this frank reality check had a very positive effect on the proceedings. Of course some of them would never get over their own prejudices and offended sensibilities but it sort of shook the best of them from their self-constructed cocoon and they began to engage positively. I doubt this would have happened without Rupert's intervention.

The relationship between RA, DAM [Red Action, Direct Action Movement] etc and those in the 'nicer' anti-racist sector was always a little strained, but good people from both sides found ways to work together in common cause for a considerable length of time.

<http://www.urban75.net/forums/>

[threads/beat-the-fascists-the-authorised-history-of-anti-fascist-action.251690/page-64#post-10880142](http://www.urban75.net/forums/threads/beating-the-fascists-the-authorised-history-of-anti-fascist-action.251690/page-64#post-10880142)

Emma Goldman: political thinking in the streets by Kathy Ferguson [Book review]

Emma Goldman is much discussed and often mythologised. Here's a book which look at her ideas in context.

This is an academic work, so in places you get analysis about "producing opportunities for embodied participation in anarchist lifeworlds." (p83; I have to point out that the next line is "Among the anarchists' greatest successes were their beerhalls.") Ferguson can also deliver some dry humour: "Given that the same agents and agencies tracked [Goldman and Berkman] over long periods of time, one would think that their Jewishness

would cease to be news." I also enjoyed her musings on the archive effect. "There is always one more dusty file to read ... One tries not to lose what one has painstakingly gathered, but in the end, one wants a book about Goldman, not a reproduction of the Goldman archive." (p9, 11)

Looking at Goldman's ideas in context makes for useful insights. Ferguson suggests it is impossible to discuss the attitude of radicals to political violence if we ignore the violence they experienced from state and capitalist forces. The book also discusses how Goldman can be so much closer to Mexican and Mexican-American movements than African-American ones.

Ferguson does not come across as a confrontational writer, but her book is a corrective to myth-making around Goldman. She notes how Goldman has been recruited "to serve as an icon of feminist struggle." (p211) Very telling is her inclusion of Paul Avrich's misgiving: "Avrich was concerned that the full force of Goldman's anarchism would be defanged by the popular image of Goldman as a free-spirited crusader for a revolution in which we could all dance." (p39)

Emma Goldman: political thinking in the streets is so interesting because it does *not* demand that Goldman be perfect or a role model. The quest for "coolness", to celebrate rather than understand, is corrosive but not confined to academia.

Ferguson challenges the image of Goldman as lonely pioneer, a woman ahead of her time: "Goldman was very much *of* her time: her time and her place were saturated with the bodies, voices, and ideas of many hundreds of radical women ... They have largely been forgotten, not by innocent oversight but rather by the highly attenuated, individuated and celebrity-oriented way that memory is produced, leaving us with a stunted version of our radical history. Rather than a rich and complex history of radical thinking and acting, we inherit an emaciated account in which a few stalwart people, either lionized or demonized, fought the establishment. My goal is not to minimise Goldman, but to explore the context that made it possible for there to be an Emma Goldman, and in the exploration to claim radical *movements*, not just radical individuals, for contemporary feminist histories." (p251, 252)

If you're interested in Goldman's life or ideas, read this book. A "rich and complex history of radical thinking and acting" is a lot to ask for. But what other sort of history would you want?

Emma Goldman: political thinking in the streets by Kathy Ferguson is published by Rowman & Littlefield (paperback \$35/ £21.95)

Sam Frydman – Zalman Friedman

Sam Frydman – Zalmen Khaimovich Friedman
Friedman, Zalmen Khaimovich; variations of name: Fridman, Sema (Semka); Fridman, Sem; Frydman S. Born October 6, 1891, Zarembi-Kostsel'nye, Octrovsky uyezd, Lomzhinsky gubernia; died November, 1942, Birkenau-Auschwitz, Poland. Participant of the anarchist movement in the USA, Russia and France.

Biography

Son of Chaim Yankel Friedman and Roza Mink. Tailor by profession. Before the February Revolution participated in the anarchist and labour movements in Chicago, USA. Member of the Union of Russian Workers. After the February Revolution of 1917, returned to Russia. Until the spring of 1919 he lived in Odessa, and was a member of the "Odessa Federation of Anarchists". In the spring and summer of 1919 he was in the Makhnovist movement; he took part in battles with the White Guards. He belonged to the Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine "Nabat".

In the autumn of 1919 he was arrested in Moscow on suspicion of belonging to the Moscow organization of Anarchists of the Underground. According to the memoirs of B. Yelensky: "As a rigid vegetarian, he demanded a diet in prison of vegetables and fruits. He was clamorous in this demand, quite indifferent to the fact that he was imprisoned in the dreaded All-Russian 'Vecheka,' a name that produced a feeling of terror everywhere in those days. One day all of the imprisoned anarchists were summoned from their cells and lined up in a large hall. Before long the door opened and the terror of the All-Russian Cheka, Dzerzhinski, with his entire coterie, entered. Recklessly disregarding all risks, Semke went directly to this dreaded figure and demanded that, as a vegetarian, he be fed a vegetarian diet." [1]

In February 1921 he was present at the funeral of P. A. Kropotkin. By the end of February 1921 he was in Odessa. In mid-1923 he left Russia; B. V. Yelensky met him in June 1923 in Constantinople. Later he emigrated to Paris, where he belonged to the Group of Jewish Anarchists. In the 1930's he took part in the work of the Relief Fund of the International Workers' Association for imprisoned and exiled anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in Russia.

His address before the war was: 33 Avenue Jean Jaurés, Pré-Saint-Gervais, Paris, France. [2]

In 1942 he was arrested in Paris by the Nazis. On August 24 he was deported on Transport No. 23 from the Drancy transit camp to Auschwitz.

From the train carrying Friedman and his wife Dora to the concentration camp, he threw a note which contained, in the words of B. Yelensky, a request to whoever found it "that the letter be forwarded to our address. It eventually reached us and the contents were brief and heart-rending: 'We are being led away; we do not know where. Take care of our child.' That was the last we heard of Semke and Dora." [3]

After the end of the Second World War, the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund and other anarchist organisations rendered assistance to Michelle Friedman, daughter of the murdered anarchists.

Wife: Deborah Khenikh Friedman (born Yankel', 22 June 1899, Berdichev, Berdichev uyezd, Kievskaya gubernia; died September 1943, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland). In 1919-1923 she was a member of the Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine "Nabat". After 1923 she was in emigration. She was a member of the Group of Jewish Anarchists in Paris. On 24 August 1942 she was deported by Transport No. 23 from the Drancy transit camp to Auschwitz. She was murdered in Auschwitz in September 1943.

by Kirill Limanov. Translated by Malcolm Archibald. From YEZHYEVIKI – EJWiki.org – Academic Wiki-encyclopedia of Jewish and Israeli themes <http://ejwiki.org/>

Archives

International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.
Alexander Berkman Papers. Inv. no. 22.

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B. Yelensky. *In sotsialn shturem: zikhroynes fun der Rusisher revolutsye (En la Borrasca social: memorias de la revolucion rusa)*. Buenos Ayres: Bukhgemeynshaft bay der yidisher ratsyonalistisher gezelshaft, 1967 <http://www.archive.org/details/nybc208032> (Yiddish); *Le mémorial de la déportation des juifs de France / Beate et Serge Klarsfeld*. – Paris, 1978;

Memorial to the Jews deported from France, 1942–1944: documentation of the deportation of the victims of the Final Solution in France / S. Klarsfeld. Paris: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983, p. 204;

B. Yelensky, *In the Social Storm: Memoirs of the Russian Revolution*. available at <http://www.libcom.org/library/memoirs-russian-revolution-boris-yelensky>
Journal Officiel de la République française, 27 octobre 2009, No. 0249, Texte n°52

Sam Frydman – Zalman Friedman

[http://www.lesmortsdanslescamps.com/content/2009/JO2009p18120-18124ALL.html?nom=Fr ydman%20\(Zelman\)&titre=JO2009p18120-18124](http://www.lesmortsdanslescamps.com/content/2009/JO2009p18120-18124ALL.html?nom=Fr ydman%20(Zelman)&titre=JO2009p18120-18124)

Notes

[1] B. Yelensky, *In the Social Storm: Memoirs of the Russian Revolution*. available at <http://www.libcom.org/library/memoirs-russian-revolution-boris-yelensky>

[2] Letter of Z. Friedman to B. Yelensky, 1939. Paris, Sept. 21, 1939

Dear and beloved Boris and Bessie:

It is a long time since we have had employment. I shall probably have to leave in the near future. Dora and Michelle will remain without any means of subsistence, because their means of livelihood became exhausted some time ago. Michelle is four years old, and very delicate; attached to her mother. Hence it is impossible at this time to place her anywhere else, so that Dora should be able to go to work; the child must stay with her. And it is not yet certain whether they will be allowed to remain in Paris. It is precisely on this account that I want to write to you and to make a request. I have never turned to the movement for any help for myself – for others, yes; and I realize fully your economic situation.

Nevertheless, I beg you, if you can do anything for the family, don't let Dora and the child become destitute. Do everything possible... to help Dora and the child in such an emergency. You surely understand that without me Dora is helpless; but let us hope that everything will turn out for the best in the end. If you are able to send anything, it is best to handle it through the bank or through the American Express, in Dora's name. On the papers her name appears not as Dora, but as Deborah. If she is not in Paris it will be forwarded to her. This letter is being written by me, not in the name of the movement, but in my own name. The other comrades will probably write their own account.

But you surely understand that it is most urgent to give help to a mother and her child. I hope you will comply with my request. Write, dear friends, all about yourselves and the relatives. Keep in good health, dear and beloved friends Boris and Bessie and the rest.

Sam Friedman

Source: B. Yelensky, *In the Struggle for Equality: The Story of the Anarchist Red Cross*. Chicago; Alexander Berkman Aid Fund, 1958, pp. 69–70.

[3] B. Yelensky, *In the Social Storm: Memoirs of the Russian Revolution*. available at <http://www.libcom.org/library/memoirs-russian-revolution-boris-yelensky>

The Kate Sharpley Library wiki: would you like to help make history?

The Kate Sharpley Library now has a wiki (collaborative online workspace). We are always interested in any research on anarchism and anarchists. Our hope is that the wiki will be a place where research is shared and chatted about.

Current projects include:

A listing of Freedom Press pamphlets (1889-1923)

Free Society Pamphlets

Liberty (London 1894-1896) pamphlets

Figures for Anarchist newspaper circulation

US Anarchism 1886-1919 Bibliography

Listing of who was at the International Revolutionary Socialist Conference, London 14-19 July 1881 (and also at the International Conference of Revolutionary Socialists 1890, held at the Autonomie Club, 6 Windmill St, Tottenham Court Road on Sunday August 3, 1890)

Plus “Still unanswered” (Who was the Russian agent in Barcelona that Krivitsky mentions?, and whatever happened to Guy Bowman?)

And the beginnings of a list of Anarchist Action Groups against Franco

You can help make history at:

<http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/>

Credit

This issue of KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library brought to you in August 2013 by the KSL Collective. Thanks to everyone who helped. Feedback always welcome.

Important note on the Bulletin

Please drop us a line if you are getting the bulletin by post and would rather get it by email (or read it on our website).

The cost of postage goes up and up every year so it would be one way to save money. It's a very long time since we put the bulletin subscription up – and we'd rather not in tough times.

We don't want to stop people reading the bulletin. But if you're not a friend, subscriber, or sending us your publication, we might be asking you for your email address.

If we don't hear from you, then you may not hear from us.

All of our readers should know that there's a lot more articles posted on our website than we're able to fit into the bulletin. Keep your eye on it!

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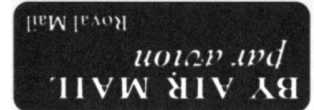
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