



Antonio Téllez Solà, the Herodotus of the anti-Franco maquis

Antonio Téllez Solà, who has died at his home in Perpignan aged 84, was one of the last survivors of the anarchist resistance which fought to overthrow the Franco dictatorship. He was also one of the first historians of the post civil war urban and rural guerrilla resistance to the fascist regime. In his actions and his writings, Tellez personified refusal to surrender to tyranny.

The son of a railway worker, he was born in Tarragona and was radicalised by the October 1934 insurrection in Asturias, which failed when the unions outside the mining region failed to give their support. On 19 July 1936, when the workers, this time united, held at bay the rebellion of most of the Spanish officer class against the infant left-wing Republic, Téllez was in Lérida where he joined the anarchist youth organisation, the Juventudes Libertarias, immersing himself in the struggle to fight fascism and preserve the social revolution with which the union rank and file had answered the generals' attempted coup.

Téllez joined the army aged 18, in the final stages of the Republic's collapse, and saw action on various fronts until February 1939 when, with thousands of other anti-Francoist refugees, he was forced into exile in France. There he spent a year in the Septfonds concentration camp and then a further six months in the camp at Argeles sur Mer, two of many locations in which the French government interned the people who had held fascism at bay for almost three years. Escaping at the end of 1940, he joined a band of Spanish guerrillas operating in the Aveyron department, serving as part of the IX Brigade (French Forces of the Interior), resisting the occupation until Liberation in 1944.

In October 1944 Téllez took part in the ill-advised 10-day invasion of Francoist Spain by approximately 6,000 Spanish republican guerrillas of the CP-led Unión Nacional Española (UNE) via the Arán and Ronçal valleys in the Pyrenees, one of the first operations mounted by the maquis against the Franco regime. With the defeat of the UNE at the battle of Salardú, he moved to Toulouse where he set up clandestine arms dumps for the guerrilla campaign.

For two years Téllez served on the second peninsular committee of the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth (FIJL), carrying out clandestine

liaison missions between the anarchist movement in France and Spain. Resigning from organisational activity in April 1946, he travelled undercover in Spain for three months establishing contacts with the guerrillas and what remained of the illegal anarchist movement. Téllez was unable to generate financial or organisational support for the Resistance due to the hostility of the Toulouse-based National Committee of the exiled anarcho-sindicalist union, the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) to armed struggle. Frustrated by oligarchic tensions and self-serving politicking, he moved to Paris where he worked as a reporter for Agence France Presse from 1960 until retirement in 1986, when he moved to Ceret in the Pyrenees and then to Perpignan.

In Paris Téllez continued to contribute to the anarchist press, but from 1954 onwards it was clear that his life's work was to write the histories of the legendary names of the anarcho-sindicalist action groups: Francisco Sabaté Llopart, José Luis Facerías, Wenceslao Gimenez Orive, Francisco Denis, Raul Carballeira, Marcelino Massana Bancells - and many more, from the mountains and sierras of Catalonia, Aragón, Asturias and Galicia in the north to the Levante and Extremadura in the west and east, to Andalucia in the south.

I met Téllez for the first time in Paris in 1973. While I was on remand in Brixton prison he had sent me a copy of his newly-published biography of Francisco Sabate, which I translated from Spanish into English. After my acquittal I visited him to discuss the book, which he was constantly updating and revising, as he did with all his work. We became firm friends. His archives were enormous and his apartment overlooking the Père Lachaise cemetery was stacked from floor to ceiling with boxes of files, documents and photograph albums. His accomplishments in a particularly difficult area of study were quite remarkable given that

his subject matter was clandestine groups and secretive and highly individualistic militants who were activists rather than theorists, many of whom were outcasts from their own organisations. I witnessed a good example of this in Paris, when I introduced Téllez to Octavio Alberola, the coordinator of Defensa Interior, the clandestine anarchist group responsible for organising assassination attempts on Franco

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Antonio Tellez

<from front between 1962 and 1966. The two men had never met and Alberola was taken aback when from on top of his wardrobe, Téllez produced the original plans for the proposed 1963 assassination attempt on Franco at the Puente de los Franceses near the Oriente Palace in Madrid. We never did discover where he acquired them.

Tellez's published and unpublished output was phenomenal, covering the period from Franco's victory on 1 April 1939 to his death on 20 November 1975, and beyond. He had two main objectives: to record the lives of selfless men who would not compromise their ideals nor treat with a system they found villainous and vile, men who devoted their adult lives to freeing Spain from the last of the Axis dictators. His work has been a major contribution to the movement for the recovery of historical memory which is now playing such an important part in contemporary Spanish politics. Téllez's other objective was to demonstrate that the individual is never helpless; there is always the possibility of rebelling and defending an idea one considers just, even in the most unfavourable and adverse conditions.

Téllez is survived by his partner, Harmonía, and a son. Stuart Christie

Antonio Téllez Solà, anarchist, guerrilla, historian, born January 18 1921; died March 27 2005.

An edited version of this obituary appeared in *The Guardian*, May 10, 2005.

Another obituary is available online at www.katesharpleylibrary.net

Antonio Téllez published work:

- 1) *Sabaté: the urban guerrilla in Spain (1945-1960)*
- 2) *Facerías: urban guerrilla (1939-1957). The anti-francoist struggle of the Spanish libertarian movement in Spain and exile.*
- 3) *The MIL and Puig Antich.*
- 4) *The Unsung Struggle: The Plot to Assassinate Franco from the Air, 1948.*
- 5) *The Anarchist Pimpernel: Francisco Ponzán Vidal (1936-1944). The anarchists in the Spanish Civil War and the escape and evasion networks in World War II.*
- 6) *Apuntes sobre Antonio García Lamolla y otras andares. Recuerdo* (with José Peirats)

He was one of the founders of the publication *Atalaya* (1957-1958), and contributed regularly to *Ruta, Solidaridad Obrera* (Paris), *CNT, Bicicleta, Cultura Libertaria, Polémica* and *Historia Libertaria*, to which he brought fresh evidence on the little-known anarchist maquis in Asturias

Unpublished works include:

- 1) *Guerrilla Warfare in Galicia : Mario Rodríguez Losada (O Pinche, O Langullo)*
- 2) *Atalaya.*
- 3) *Notas para una eventual ebozo biográfico de José García Tella*

And many monographs on individuals, publications from 1944 to the Iberian Liberation Council, Defensa Interior, the First of May Group, the MIL, GARI and the collapse of the Suarez trial in Paris in 1979. When he died, he was working on a number of projects including a history of the FIJL from 1935, an incomplete manuscript on Action Direct, the French anarchist action group, another incomplete manuscript on his personal relationships with the guerrilla, and an index of the names and personal histories of the urban and rural guerrillas. Harmonia, his partner, has indicated these will probably be loaned to the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam as part of a proposed Antonio Téllez Foundation.

Credit

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

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Thanks for books and pamphlets (as well as money) donated etc. Thanks to comrades who renewed their sub a year in advance! Feedback welcome.

New Pamphlet

Alan O'Toole

With The Poor People Of The Earth : A Biography Of Doctor John Creaghe of Sheffield & Buenos Aires
1-873605-78-1 £3 (£2 to subscribers)

This is the story of John (Juan) Creaghe (1841-1920) who turned his back on the chance of a prosperous medical career to spend an extraordinary lifetime struggling for anarchism. He's well known for fighting bailiffs ('the poker song') and establishing the scurrilous *Sheffield Anarchist*, as well as working in Argentina on *La Protesta*, (for years the main voice of the labour movement). But did you know he was actively supporting the Mexican anarchist Magon brothers at the time of the Mexican revolution? Alan O'Toole's biography rescues the story of this inspiring figure, assessing his worldwide agitation and his interactions with figures like William Morris and Edward Carpenter. Creaghe's story present a rich insight into Anarchism's "heroic years".

Feedback

"Good to see the flyer advising people how to collect and send out anarchist information. Such info on anarchist history/ present shows us the way and helps strengthen our resolve to act, especially for those who don't yet know they are among many." - *The Porkbolter*

"it's a great idea and a remarkable project. I think it could become the KSL's essential project, because it's really in the spirit of what you're doing." RC [Writing about our 'tell us a story' leaflet. Write if you've not seen it yet.]

"I am currently trying to research if there has been an organised anarchist presence in Hereford before 1999 ... Anything at all would be helpful. Can you suggest any documents that might worth looking at with regards to this? I have managed to find a couple of contacts locally, but I'm searching for all information possible."
Dan. [Contact us if you have any info to pass on]

NEW: Alexandre Skirda**Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack
The Struggle for Free Soviets in the Ukraine,
1917-1921**

The phenomenal life of Nestor Makhno (1888–1934) provides the framework for this breakneck account of the downfall of the tsarist empire and the civil war that convulsed and bloodied Russia between 1917 and 1921.

The combatants were drawn from several camps: Budyenny's Red cavalry, the Don and Kuban Cossacks (allied with the Whites), Ukrainian nationalists... Against these, Makhno, a formidable and daring strategist, headed an army of anarchist insurgents – a popular peasant movement which bore his name.

Makhno and his people were fighting for a society “without masters or slaves, with neither rich nor poor.” They acted towards that ideal by establishing “free soviets.” Unlike the soviets drained of all significance by the dictatorship of a one-party State, the “free soviets” became the grassroots organs of a direct democracy – a living embodiment of the free society. However, once the *Makhnovschina* had beaten the Whites of Denikin and Wrangel, they were betrayed and smashed by the Red Army.

Delving into a vast array of documentation to which few other historians have had access, this study illuminates a revolution that started out with the rosiest of prospects but ended up utterly confounded. *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack* brings to life this dramatic turning point in contemporary history.

Alexandre Skirda is a French historian and student of the Russian revolution. He has edited a selection of Nestor Makhno's writings *The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays* (AK Press, 1996). He is also the author of *Facing the Enemy: a history of Anarchist organization from Proudhon to May 1968* (AK Press, 2002). *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack* is the English translation of *Nestor Makhno: le cosaque de l'Anarchie* (1982, new editions in 1985 and 1999)

Comments on the French editions:

“Full and lively... enriched by lengthy quotations from contemporary documents, the use of rare materials published by exiled Russian Anarchists... interviews with contemporaries of Makhno, its uniquely detailed treatment of Makhno's life in exile and the inclusion of some interesting photographs.” *The Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917-21: An Annotated Bibliography*, Jonathan D. Smele.

“Alexandre Skirda's book reads like revenge for all of those written off in the official histories as the defeated.” *Le Monde diplomatique*

Published by AK Press and the Kate Sharpley Library. 414 pages, Illustrated. ISBN 1-902593-68-5 paperback £13 / \$21.95. Copies available now.

Skirda draws on memoirs of other Makhnovist insurgents like Viktor Belash and offers a critical assessment of Soviet, Anarchist and other sources on the Makhnovist movement. As well as an appendix of Makhnovist proclamations and mentioning some of Makhno's appearances in fiction, *Nestor Makhno Anarchy's Cossack* gives the story of Galina Kuzmenko, Makhno's wife. We will have a full review in our next bulletin.

Coming Soon**José Peirats, The CNT in the Spanish
Revolution, Volume Two.**

Christiebooks, 2005, £15. (KSL subscribers £12)

The second volume of Peirats' three volume work, effectively the ‘official’ CNT study of the revolution and civil war, heavily quoted by historians but not previously available in English.

This title is currently at the printers: copies will be available from us in a matter of weeks. Copies of volume one are still available.

Contents:

- 1: Spain and the World
- 2: Organisational life and Trade Union Unity
- 3: The Shadow of the Kremlin
- 4: The miracle of the war industries
- 5: The tide of counter-revolution
- 6: The bloody events of May
- 7: The crisis of the Caballero government
- 8: The political demise of the CNT
- 9: Ironies of a first anniversary
- 10: Destruction of the Council of Aragón
- 11: The crisis of the socialist movement

Index

Coming Soon**Chomsky On Anarchism****Noam Chomsky with Barry Pateman (Editor)**

A collection of essays and interviews. Some of the classics, and many previously unpublished, out of print, and hard to find. Worth getting for the wonderful hatchet job ‘Objectivity and Liberal scholarship’ alone and sure to spark debates!

Published by AK Press. 241 pages. ISBN: 1-904859-20-8 paperback £10 / \$16.95.

Contents

- Introduction by Barry Pateman
- Objectivity and Liberal scholarship
- Language and Freedom
- Notes on Anarchism
- The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism (BBC Interview)
- Preface to *Antologija Anarhizma*
- Containing the Threat of Democracy
- Anarchism, Marxism and Hope for the Future
- Goals and Visions
- Anarchism, Intellectuals and the State (Interview)
- Interview with Barry Pateman
- Interview with Ziga Vodovnik

Next Pamphlet

The next KSL pamphlet (July) will be:

Miguel Garcia *Unknown Heroes: Biographies of Anarchist Resistance Fighters*
ISBN 1873605838, £3

Miguel Garcia (1908-1981) was himself a veteran of the fight against Franco's fascist regime. Here he tells the stories of some of the anarchist militants who – from the end of the Spanish Civil War to the 1960s – never surrendered to dictatorship. This is a tribute to fallen comrades from one who very nearly joined them.

Francisco Ponzán Vidal

Remembering Francisco Ponzán Vidal on the 60th Anniversary of His Death

The summer of 2004 saw a tentative effort by variety of individuals in the media in Aragon to commemorate Ponzán. Thus the letters-to-the-editor pages of several bourgeois newspapers carried long letters from CNT-Huesca and J.A. Pina, there was an article in the magazine *Criterio Aragonés* by the teacher and writer Víctor Juan Barroy and reviews and news items in the October 2004 edition (No 8 in a series) of Javier Díaz's *Cuadernos de Cazabaret* in Mas de las Matas (Teruel), as well as a short TV item of several minutes' duration in the August schedules of the Aragon Television Channel, including an interview with, among others, the Aragonese Floreal Samitier, living in exile in France. Plus the second edition (December 2003) of the counter-information bulletin *Huesca-Info* published by the Ateneo Libertario Ramón Acín in Huesca carried a biography of Ponzán. But in his native city, Ponzán has yet to receive a simple tribute, public meeting or commemorative event. So here goes with a brief outline of his life.

Francisco Ponzán Vidal. Born in Oviedo, 30 January 1911 – died in Buzet (France) 17 August 1944.

Known simply as Paco, Gurriato or (because of his short-sightedness) *El Gafas* (Specky), this denizen of Huesca who, as it happened, was born in Oviedo, lived in No 9, Calle Costanilla de Arnedo with his widowed mother Tomasa Vidal Bellostas and his sisters Pilar, Susana and Carmen. He attended the Salesian College in Huesca; at the age of 14 he began training as a teacher at the Teacher Training School in Huesca, having won a free scholarship as a penniless orphan. It was there that he came upon his much-admired mentor and comrade Ramón Acín, quickly becoming one of his disciples.

At the age of 18 he qualified as a teacher and worked in the villages of Ipás near Jaca and Sabiñánigo and was involved with the CNT unions there. He also worked in Castejon de Monegros and eventually found a teaching post of his own in Baos-Corzán, in the Mazaricos townland in La Coruña. He also taught in places in Upper Aragon such as Borrés, Noves and Berdún. He served on the board of the Ateneo Cultural Libertario in Huesca and was an active and leading militant of the Huesca CNT.

The course of history was to make this surprising anarchist, possessed of a great moral presence and a lively sense of solidarity, a lover of freedom, culture and world peace, into an outlaw and battle-hardened fighter.

In 1930 he was arrested in the wake of a revolt in Jaca and was jailed on 29 December 1932 for his support for striking chemical workers in Sabiñánigo who had been arrested and charged with blowing up the home of the company's director. He was tried on charges of having threatened Señor Berges, the director of the Aragonese Power and Industrial Company, with the following anonymous missive:

"We know that you are quietly beavering away to ensure that a number of young people who are just starting out in life are dumped into the cells (...) we'll be frank with you. Our word is our bond (...) unless the prisoners from

Sabiñánigo are acquitted, make your peace with your God (..) before many days have passed someone will call to require of payment of your bill which is, to say the least, astronomical (...) Don't forget that an anarchist never goes back on his word (...) Either the prisoners go free or we'll put a bullet in you (...) You choose. Signed: *An anarchist.*"

All twelve members of the jury also received anonymous messages signed by the "friends of death" and reading:

"... your life depends upon this, for, should the Sabiñánigo accused be convicted (...) the sentence that we too will be delivering and which we must implement without hesitation is death."

In July 1933 he was sentenced to two months in custody. In the libertarian uprising in December 1933 he was arrested and tortured by the police from Zaragoza: in 1934 he was rearrested and charged with aiding and abetting the escape from Huesca jail of 10 prisoners from Alcalá de Gurrea and Tormos, among them Máximo Franco.

Faced with the army revolt in 1936 and the inaction of the republican authorities, CNT personnel demanded weapons and stormed an armoury before taking on the army columns in Cuatro Esquinas and El Coso. With tensions running high in the Civil Government building, the impulsive fire-brand Ponzán was called to order by Ramón Acín who shouted "Paco, you're going to be the death of us all", but Acín got it wrong and he himself was to be arrested and shot by the rebels on 6 August 1936. Outnumbered and with the resistance exhausted, Ponzán escaped to the loyalist zone. His sister Pilar Ponzán, a teacher in Jaca, was arrested and jailed in the Rápita fortress for a year, whilst upwards of 350 from the loyalist side in Jaca were shot, as recorded in Esteban C. Gómez's impressive book *El Eco de las Descargas*.

Ponzán served on the County Committee of the Angües Collective and was appointed Transport and Communications councillor on the very first Aragon Defence Council and was Under-Secretary for Information and Propaganda in its second line-up. The head of that department was his friend, the anarchist teacher Evaristo Viñuales. After three months they both resigned and Paco rejoined the Roja y Negra Confederal Column (which had by then become the heroic 28th Ascaso Division) manning the front in El Vedado de Zuera. He refused to wear military uniform and joined the "Los Libertadores" guerrilla unit attached to the anarchist Máximo Franco's 127th Brigade. It operated behind the enemy lines, gathering intelligence, liberating antifascist escapees and carrying out sabotage raids. On the basis of his record he was made a lieutenant of the 10th Corps of the Army of the East, serving with the SIEP (Special Border Intelligence Service) over CNT personnel Faustino and Manuel Barrabés Asun (whose sisters Violeta and Rafaela, members of the Libertarian Youth, had been murdered in Huesca on 23 August 1936 along with a hundred others from Huesca in Huesca's bloodiest night of fascist terror), Benito Lasvascas Coronas, Eduardo Santolaria Ferrer, Pascual and Eusebio López Lagarta, Prudencio Iguacel Pedrafitá, Manuel Sus Dieste and the socialists Angel Beltrán Calvo, Angel Cabrero Callau and Lorenzo Otal Biela.

Francisco Ponzán Vidal

After the republic lost the war, he withdrew to France, but not before he had stashed some weapons dumps in Andorra and left behind contacts and support bases with an eye to carrying on with the fight. He was interned in the Vernet concentration camp in France, from where he escaped and, helped by some libertarian exiles, in 1939 he set up the very first wide-ranging anti-Francoist network straddling the Pyrenees. In 1940 he was wounded in Boltaña while on a raid to liberate CNT prisoners who included his friend and comrade Manuel Lozano Guillén from Belver de Cinca (who had served as commissar with the 127th Mixed Brigade of the 28th Division) who would be shot dead in Zaragoza in 1945.

Come the German invasion of France, the Ponzán Group placed its organisational resources at the disposal of the nascent Pat O'Leary network, the most extensive and significant escape, intelligence-gathering and communications line serving the resistance from 1940 to 1944. Ponzán thereby established connections with the allied secret services, British and French alike, as part of his plan of action against Franco, although the General Council of the Libertarian Movement-in-Exile disagreed with this, so he was disowned by his organisation.

Thanks to his network of smugglers and mountain guides, prominent among them Joan Catalá, hundreds of antifascists' lives were saved; they included allied airmen, European Jews and high-ranking military officers who made it out to Gibraltar and Portugal.

In 1942 Ponzán was arrested and returned to the Vernet camp, only to escape a second time and in April 1943 he was jailed by French authorities working for the German Reich. He stood trial and was handed over to the Gestapo and was jailed in Toulouse. From there he was taken with a convoy of 50 other antifascists and they were all executed and their bodies set on fire in Bouzet, just two days before the maquis liberated Toulouse.

After years of underground struggle and weakened by repression, his comrades were unable to free Ponzán from the Nazi barbarians.

In a will written in the military prison in Fourgolle (Toulouse) in December 1943, Ponzán wrote: "I want my remains removed some day to Spanish soil and laid to rest in Huesca alongside my teacher, lecturer Ramón Acín and my friend Evaristo Viñuales."

He was posthumously recognised and decorated by the armies of France, Britain, Belgium and the USA. But in his homeland he has met only with the most dismal silence and oblivion.

In confidence that some day we may be able to roll away the great stone that fascism, the transition and the compromising left had placed over this country's social history, the memory of comrade Ponzán lives on in the hearts of us libertarians.

Raúl Mateo Otal in *CNT* (November 2004)

For more information, see Antonio Telléz's biography of Ponzán: *The Anarchist Pimpernel: Francisco Ponzán Vidal (1936-1944). The anarchists in the Spanish Civil War and the escape and evasion networks in World War II.*

Obituary: Marie-Christine Mikhaïlo (1916-2004)

One of the leading lights of contemporary anarchism, Marie-Christine Mikhaïlo Soederhjelm died in Lausanne on 8 November 2004 in her home in Beaumont. She was 88 years of age.

Marie-Christine was born in 1916 in what was then a Russian Grand Duchy (later, Finland) at the time of the Russian revolution. She grew up there and then spent her adolescent years in Lausanne, Switzerland, in that house in Beaumont. On her return to Finland she married a young diplomat with whom she was to have five children during the war years.

In 1948, by which time she had divorced, she returned to Lausanne and to that Beaumont house where she was to run a student guest-house up until the 1970s. In 1954 she discovered anarchism thanks to an Italian conscientious objector who had fled to Switzerland - Pietro Ferrua. She never looked back again. For almost half a century she was to be the driving force behind the CIRA which she set up and maintained along with her daughter Marianne Enckell, after Ferrua had been expelled from Switzerland.

For anybody who met her there the CIRA meant Marie-Christine. Thanks to her presence, her culture and her human warmth, her smile and her kindness, Marie-Christine made the CIRA always a lively and a welcoming place. By making part of her home available to it, in a way she offered us the library that has become a sort of family room for the anarchists who have dropped in in their hundreds and who come and go to this day.

Marie-Christine has left us with memories of an ideal lived to the full and of a day to day existence consonant with her beliefs. In addition to the CIRA, Marie-Christine was a longtime member of Amnesty International which she regarded as a useful avenue for the denunciation of injustices at the hands of the powerful everywhere.

Marie-Christine may have left us now but her personality has left a deep impression upon us all and will forever remain a source of inspiration in our lives.

Ismaël and Cédric.

Pamphlet news

For those of you who like to keep an eye on these things, the following pamphlets have been reprinted (with new covers)

Prisoners and Partisans: Italian Anarchists in the struggle against Fascism

British Syndicalism: Pages from Labour History (Five essays on beating the bosses)

Wrong Steps: Errors in the Spanish revolution
Life in English Prisons (one hundred years ago)

There's always other stuff that might appear/ reappear. One thing is sure: Umberto Marzocchi's *Remembering Spain: Italian Anarchist Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* is due to come out in a second edition with a timeline of Marzocchi's life. Watch this space (as they say) ...

Book Reviews

Review: *Misfit* by Jack White

Jack White is a fascinating figure. Born into the Northern Irish Protestant ascendancy, he could have had a great career pacifying the ‘natives’ at home or abroad. But, despite getting to Captain in the British army, he went to the bad (or the good depending on how you look at it), turning to the Irish labour movement, Republicanism and later, Anarchism.

His autobiography, *Misfit*, first published in 1930 is aptly titled: he always hoed his own row, combining a kind of ‘primitive Christianity’ with a concern for social justice, and trying to put it into action. He is best described as pro-Jesus but anti-religion. He had no time for Catholicism in particular, but he was no bigot.

I can’t imagine he ever lost his ‘military bearing’, but he was no armchair general, and never ‘backwards about coming forwards’. His first claim to fame is drilling the Irish Citizen Army in 1913 with the aim of ‘putting manners on the police’, which they did. The ICA made White a footnote in Irish history, no more. Loyalists presumably regard him as a traitor. Republicans – even socialist ones – have little to say about him. Perhaps they see him as a ‘loose cannon’ for following his own political trajectory?

Misfit takes us to 1930, which leaves 16 years before White’s death. Is it a worse mistake to write your autobiography too soon, or not at all? Had his papers not been burnt by his family, we’d have a much better view of an even more interesting part of his life. Thankfully, Phil Meyler has drawn together the threads for a chapter titled ‘Misfit 2’ which sketches out some of the ‘what happened next’, including time with the Republican Congress group, the Spanish Civil War and involvement with the anarchist movement.

The book is concluded with some of White’s writings from the thirties, chiefly on anarchism and the Spanish revolution (and Communist counter-revolution). Less reflective and more urgent, they still clearly show White’s character and concerns, defying the scorched earth policy of his family.

White is such a partisan for social justice, so much his own man, that he’s almost non-partisan. Neither competing nationalism would want to claim him. Surely he’d make an epic subject for the film industry: passionate politics, passionate life not to mention plenty of exciting locations. Until then, Jack White will bang noisily from the historical cupboard in which he’s been shut up, inspiring Irish anarchists with a home-grown predecessor, but also noisily raising the social question, which is no more resolved now than when he died. *Misfit*’s reappearance in print is a welcome start on levering open that cupboard door.

Misfit, by Jack White. Livewire Publications, 2005.

ISBN 1-905225-20-2 £9.99 259 pages.

Livewire Publications

P.O. Box No 9902.

Dublin 6

Republic of Ireland

www.geocities.com/livewirepublications

livewirepublications@yahoo.ie

Review

A Wee Black Booke of Belfast Anarchism (1867-1973)

Máirtín Ó Catháin. £2.50

Down with the Fences! Battles for Commons in South

London: Past Tense Publications £1

Two pamphlets which came out last year and reflect a growing interest in history which the KSL can only applaud. *The Wee Black Booke* is an attempt to locate antecedents of the current anarchist movement in and around Belfast. That this is difficult comes as no surprise and the author acknowledges this in the context of explorations of the history of city’s labour movement barely touching on any anarchist or libertarian groups or individuals. The pamphlet focuses on individuals and deliberately stops before considering the groups that were established in the late 70s and in whom Organise can trace their roots.

Regular readers of the KSL Bulletin will almost certainly be aware of Captain Jack White who became an anarchist after seeing the Spanish revolution in practise. Two of the other lives explored, Bolton Hall and William Baillie were Ulstermen who emigrated to the US. Hall was involved in communal experiments, propaganda, legal defence and union organising. Baillie was more of an individualist, though still realised that “personal freedom was tied inexorably to collective and economic freedom.”

John McAra was a Scottish anarchist who came to speak in Belfast, where he was arrested and jailed. A group did form from his activity, but appears to have died away after the First World War.

“Slumdom” Jack McMullen was an independent, anarchist-inclined socialist and stump speaker, who spent much time organising around housing and unemployment in the 20s and 30s, as well as baiting organised religion.

The last character considered is John McGuffin, who was involved in Peoples Democracy and the civil rights movement and was a founder member of the Belfast Anarchist Group. The pamphlet traces his trajectory through interment and a growing sympathy with republicanism, together with how the anarchists in Belfast responded to the challenges of the time.

Down with the Fences takes a necessarily broader approach, concerned as it is with the struggle to save the commons from enclosure and, later, to save parks and other open land from development. This sort of activity, mainly between the 16th and 19th centuries when enclosure and then suburbanisation was going on, is local and outside the view of traditional politics.

Nonetheless, local peasants and later workers recognised what was going on and fought it. For those who depended on the commons for grazing or fuel, enclosure meant the end of their livelihood. The pamphlet makes no claims to completeness, but will hopefully inspire others to find out about those who tore down the fences in other parts of Britain.

Martin H

Organise!

PO Box 505, Belfast BT12 6BQ

Past Tense Publications,

c/o 56 Crampton St, London SE17