

## Looking back at the back issues

It seemed a simple idea: look through back issues of the Kate Sharpley Library's bulletin to find some interesting articles, and then encourage people to read them and think about anarchist history. The stuff is there, it's just it got me thinking about history too.

I already knew I should mention tributes we printed to historians who influenced us like Antonio Téllez and Paul Avrich. [1] Then there's the profile of Andre Prudhommeaux, back when we thought we could number the unknown anarchists we were commemorating (and is this the first piece Paul Sharkey translated?) [2]

What really struck me, though, were the patterns. There are lots of loose threads: 'This pamphlet is coming soon,' and it never does, or ten years later. *John Creaghe of Sheffield & Buenos Aires* had to wait from 1993 to 2005. [3]

Another recurring thread is the idea of showing what the Kate Sharpley Library holds. At first the hope was 'for a partial list' to be printed in issue 2 of the bulletin. [4] Later (moving with the times, that's us) 'We do have a working catalogue. [...] We have toyed with the idea of putting it on the web.' But we were painfully aware of the downside of that: 'We haven't because we don't want to flatter to deceive. No one works full time in the KSL. It's all volunteer work. We are wary of advertising ourselves too strongly until that changes. We can just about deal with the requests for help we get now (and we would stress the just about). Any increase would tip us over and disappoint people.' [5] We know that failure is an option: Jessica Moran asked in her survey of anarchist libraries: 'What happens to these collections when those currently involved in the projects no longer have the time, energy, or ability to be part of them? In darker moments, I despair.' [6]

I think Stuart Christie's Cienfuegos Press has been an important influence on the Kate Sharpley Library. Firstly, it shows what's possible (and the *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* has influence long after it stops publishing). Secondly, the end of Cienfuegos shows that you can only do so much on a shoestring (no matter how much energy you have). Finally, and partly because the unpublished manuscripts of Cienfuegos formed an early part of the KSL, you're aware that there's always more to do.

Looking back at the back issues, I can feel the effort

going on to not just 'celebrate' anarchism and anarchists but to worry at the 'rough edges' of what we know (or think we know). Here's Barry Pateman talking about the dangers historians ('however anarchist they are') face: 'The rough edges of anarchism, as well as the apparently smooth and straightforward areas, should be their territory; the contradictions that initially puzzle and the anomalies that are too worrying to ignore. Historians should be the irritatingly sober person at the party warning you not to get too pissed on the historical correctness of your ideas. The awkward truth is that mining seams of anarchist history purely in the light of our own present pre-occupations is at best ahistorical and at worst potentially dangerous for the movement. Such methodologies can easily dismiss the complexities of anarchism in favour of comforting and rather one-dimensional interpretations. They can just as easily lead us to draw wrong conclusions about what we are doing now and how we go forward because we may have drawn erroneous or simplistic conclusions about both what people believed and how their actions reflected that belief.' [7]

So, if you think the next issue is late, thin, or it all starts to look a bit too 'work in progress'; dig out your back issues, or go and download them. You might find your own loose thread to pull at (gently).

### Notes

- 1, 'Antonio Téllez Solà, the Herodotus of the anti-Franco maquis' by Stuart Christie in *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* No. 42, (May 2005) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/m37qpw> and 'Paul Avrich 1931-2006: a historian who listened to anarchist voices' in *KSL* No. 46-47, (July 2006) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2z358c>
- 2, Andre Prudhommeaux - Profile By Charles Jacquier (Forgotten anarchists No.1) in *KSL* No. 6, (September 1996) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/w6mb32>
- 3, Mentioned as 'planned' in *KSL* No. 4 (1993) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/s1rpcs>
- 4, 'Library news' in *KSL* No. 1 [1991] <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/59zwr2>
- 5, 'Twenty-Five Years of the Kate Sharpley Library!' in *KSL* No. 40, (November 2004) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/wm38tp>
- 6, 'To Spread the Revolution: Anarchist Archives and

Libraries' in *KSL* No. 86-87, May 2016  
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/7sqwg0>.  
Originally published in *Informed Agitation: Library and Information Skills in Social Justice Movements and Beyond*, edited by Melissa Morrone. (pages 173-184) Sacramento, California : Library Juice Press, 2014. ISBN 9781936117871.  
7, 'Anarchist History: confessions of an awkward pupil' by Barry Pateman in *KSL* No. 84, October 2015 <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/02v7v0> ■

## December 2019 message from the Kate Sharpley Library

We'd like to thank you, our friends, subscribers, readers and supporters of the Kate Sharpley Library for your support in 2019. Particular thanks have to go to the comrade who sent us historic copies of *War Commentary* and *Freedom*. We've put a handful of articles from these issues up for you to read:

Spain – Commemoration of the 19th July  
[London, 1941]

'Although five years have passed since the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain, very few people, even now, appreciate the issues which were at stake in the Spanish struggle.'

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/s7h5w0>

Books: The Russian Terror (Herbert Read reviews The Guillotine at Work)

'There are heroes in all sections of the revolutionary struggle, but in Russia, as more recently in Spain, the martyrdom of our comrades is an undying inspiration to all those who still work for a true socialism based on freedom, equality and brotherhood.'

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/98sgnf>

The Internationale by Tom Brown [1942]

On the abuse of the working class anthem of revolt during the Second World War.

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2rbq46>

Death of a good comrade [Daniel Mullen] From the First World War to the Spanish Revolution (via the fight for Irish independence) (On page 3)

### Bulletin

We haven't managed to get a bulletin out before the new year. That's really because we have too much stuff rather than not enough. You can get a sense of what that does to you in 'Looking back at the back issues' [On the front page]

### Books

As always we have been thinking about books (not all of them new). Here are a handful of recent reviews from our website:

Half A Million Tramps (by Bill Gape) (on page 12)

### 2 Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library

Something should be done (by Peter Good) (On page 5-6)

Our Masters Are Helpless: The Essays of George Barrett edited by Iain McKay (on page 13)

### Help!

Finally, two requests: In 2020 it will be 100 years since the birth of Albert Meltzer (British anarchist and major influence on the construction of the Kate Sharpley Library). If any of you have letters/postcards/pictures from or about Albert we would love to hear from you.

Then, if the new year sees you dissatisfied with how many solid gold reindeer are cluttering your mantelpiece, there is a page on our website for how to send donations to help the work of the KSL:

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/doc/donations>

We wish you all the best for 2020

Kate Sharpley Library collective ■

## Mini-reviews: Biographies

*The J. Abrams Book: the life and work of an exceptional personality*

Jack Abrams was part of the New York Frayhayt group (with Mollie Steimer and others) and deported to Soviet Russia for protesting against intervention. The bulk of the book (and of great value) are his autobiographical writings. They cover his childhood and first years in the revolutionary movement in Russia, and his disillusion with the bolshevik system after his forced return. A series of tributes throw light on his life in exile in Mexico. Abrams was generous enough to help even Leon Trotsky after his fall from power, but also willing to point out where they differed 'Comrade Trotsky[...] I agree with what you say about your former comrades when you condemn them. However, here's where we part ways. I don't agree that if you were in Stalin's place, you would be better. Dictatorship has its own logic; perhaps you would be even worse.' [p63]

First published just after his death, Ruth Murphy's translation from the Yiddish means this can (and should) be much more widely read.

301 pages ISBN 9780997819007

D. Hunter *Chav solidarity*

Parts of it are hard to read (because they're grim, not because they're incomprehensible): 'We found ways to make it clear that, if we were gonna be fucked with, we would not provide the lubricant.' [p28] But it's as thoughtful as it is angry: 'All of this book, all of these essays are an attempt to communicate the idea that the people I grew up with are complicated and contradictory fuckers, with rich inner lives, as human as any other.' [p239] It's also a (self-)criticism of political movements: 'All the criticism that I have of these movements and all the vitriol that might pour out, I also aim at myself'. But there's no

holding back: movements aiming at liberation and transformation 'are as diverse as an E.ON executives meeting, and as strategically coherent as a year 5 trip to Cabury's World.' [p106-7] That's from the chapter 'Movements with false teeth' which isn't, as I was expecting, about making room for older comrades. No ISBN, Buy from <https://www.chavsolidarity.com/>

*On the way to Magadan* by Ihar Alinevich is a first-person account of the repression of the anarchist movement in Belarus. In part, it stands in the tradition of prison literature ('Magadan' is a reference to the Stalinist Gulag). Yet it's also completely modern, containing among the prison stories an account of working on a cruise ship and the 'caste system' used to control the workers there. Anarchist Black Cross Belarus, 2014 (188 pages, no ISBN)

### **Guy Bowman**

We have recently received Mal Function's pamphlet *Who is Guy Bowman, this Frenchman with an English name? : a modest report on the problems encountered when answering a seemingly simple question*. He's on record, mainly for his syndicalist activities, only from 1906-1916. As Mal says 'the search continues.'

### **And from the postbag**

... I have delayed replying to you because I wanted to finish reading the May Picqueray book – wow! To say I thoroughly enjoyed it, is an understatement. It was so vibrant I almost felt she was sat in the same room as me. An absolutely fascinating life & I think it is a credit to the translator, Paul Sharkey on his marvellous work. Often the translators are forgotten or remain in the shadows.

The book was *never* dull. It was full of fascination & cast light on the numerous personalities that she encountered in a very full and tremendously active life.

The appendix was particularly useful. After reading the final page, my senses were overwhelmed with a flood of admiration for May herself, for the translator & for AK/KSL for publishing it. What a wonderful, wonderful book. It absolutely held your attention & it has centrally enriched me...

Rick Shaw

See <https://www.akpress.org/my-eighty-one-years-of-anarchy.html>

### **Credit**

This issue of the bulletin produced in January 2020. Issue 100! Forty years of the Kate Sharpley Library! 100 years since Albert Meltzer was born!

It's been a long while coming and could have had even more pages. We hope you find it interesting. Please write in with your feedback.

KSL collective ■

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## **Death of a good comrade [Daniel Mullen]**

We regret to report the death, on April 31st, of Dan Mullen, one of our most militant comrades. Although only 48, Dan Mullen had a long record of anarchist revolutionary activity. After serving in the last war, he soon came under the influence of libertarian ideas and went to Ireland to become a member of the I.R.A., but when he found that the army was being used as a means of enforcing governmental tyranny, he revolted and was imprisoned under the threat of the death sentence. He managed, however, to escape, and went to Scotland where he soon joined the anarchist movement in Glasgow and Blantyre.

The depression forced him, like many others, to come south and he settled at Welwyn Garden City. In this typically middle-class town and with very little help he carried on a lone campaign, so intensely and uncompromisingly that he was constantly being thrown out of work on account of his propaganda among his fellow wage slaves.

The outbreak of the Spanish struggle saw him at once eager to join the fight for the social revolution, and he at last managed to get to Spain as a technician. To his bitter disappointment he was immediately wounded however, receiving injuries to both legs, an arm and his head. He spent three months in hospital in Barcelona and was disabled for a long time after his return to England.

When he recovered it was to return to the same cycle of temporary work and persecution. Since the outbreak of war he had ceaselessly carried on revolutionary anti-militarist propaganda. At the beginning of this year, however, he fell ill and after a short illness, died. He was buried at Hatfield Hyde on May 5th.

Always irrevocably opposed to tyranny and oppression from whatever quarter it came and whatever guise it assumed; tirelessly and selflessly devoted to his anarchist and anti-war principles; ceaselessly, and in spite of ill-health, working for the anarchist movement, his life remains an example of revolutionary morality for those of us who remain to carry on his work.

We extend our sympathy to his widow who loses a very brave and noble husband, and to his children who lose a kind and devoted father. Our only pledge to them must be that Dan Mullen's sacrifice has not been in vain, and that we will do all in our power to build that society of which he dreamed and fought for so valiantly.

J.W. [Jack Wade]

*War Commentary for Anarchism* v.3, n.15 (July 1942) page 12

From a recent anonymous donation (thanks!)■

# The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism by Ruth Kinna

## [Book review]

'The aim of this book is to explain anarchist thought and practice' it begins. (p7) 'Being anarchist means challenging the status quo to realize egalitarian principles and foster co-operative, non-dominating behaviours.' (p2) This is a book devoted to ideas, rather than a history. I found it thought-provoking: some is good, in some places I disagree with the analysis and in others I think 'oh dear me, don't go there'. Which shows *The Government of No One* is probably not a bad reflection of the current state of the English-speaking anarchist movement.

I was pleased to see the varying forms of Spanish revolutionary collectives used in the discussion of anarchist decision-making (p195 on). Perhaps it could have done with a brief mention of the years spreading anarchist ideas beforehand? Also, I was glad Kinna doesn't 'believe that anarchism is endlessly porous' (p8) and can ignore 'anarcho-capitalist' and 'nationalist-anarchist' foolishness. It's good that Kinna emphasises the role of the Paris Commune and Chicago's Haymarket Martyrs in the creation of the anarchist movement. I wonder if she might have poked a bit harder at media myths of 'the anarchist beast' (to use Nhat Hong's phrase) – especially since she uses an 'anarchist' Bond villain in her introduction.

### **Violence (but only some of it)**

Kinna discusses the actual origins of 'propaganda by the deed' in exemplary acts of revolt (think of the Matese band burning official paperwork). It did turn into a 'wave of killings and high-profile assassinations' (p116). But I felt to leave the story there comes close to repeating the polished narrative about anarchist political violence: 'because of propaganda by the deed the anarchists killed  $x$  kings and  $y$  presidents' (with the implication that there was a plan to get rid of the ruling class one by one). That ignores the fact that political violence was used by anarchists in different ways, at different times, and sometimes for different reasons. One of those reasons was revenge. Mike Davis says the massacre of the Paris communards is a 'necessary condition' for late-nineteenth century terrorism. [1] Gaetano Bresci killed a king. Would that have happened if Umberto *hadn't* given a medal to a general for massacring working people in the street? Emile Henry did not say 'there are no innocents' (as it says on p119) but 'No bourgeois can possibly be an innocent person.' [2] I found it hard to see that as 'a foretaste of Martin Luther King's "there comes a time when silence is betrayal"'. Kinna also talks about assassinations in

Spain peaking in 1904-5 (p118 – a typo? Morral's attempt on Alfonso XIII was 1906). That ignores the (later) Spanish anarchist response to employer terrorism (*pistolerismo*). If legitimate self-defence doesn't count as 'propaganda by the deed', is that a reason to ignore it?

### **Class (and struggles about it)**

Anarchists often talk at cross purposes about class. Economic relationships are connected to social identity, but are not the same thing: 'what's your relationship to the means of production?' is a different question to 'where's my soup with croutons?' [3]

Kinna talks about 'class-struggle anarchism' as a trend, but says 'the origins of the term are difficult to pin down.' (p136) Kinna is writing a 'big picture' book, and can't be expected to dig up details like this. Back in 1974, *Black Flag* said that the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists 'remains within the same concept of class struggle anarchism as we do'. [4] But the need to distinguish between revolutionary and 'liberal' currents of anarchism can be seen earlier, in the *Black Flag* statement issued in 1968. [5] In my opinion the term was increasingly used by militants in the UK from the 1980s and '90s onwards. The umbrella term allowed anarcho-syndicalists, anarchist communists and comrades like Class War to work together. It was also meant to distinguish them from the 'liberalism' of Freedom Press more than from (as Kinna says) the 'feminist, ecological and other movements perceived to sideline class in their analysis of oppression.' (p136)

Part of the UK anarchist movement completely rejected class analysis (or rather, saw nothing in the working class but a challenge to their own status). Tony Gibson sneered at the defeated National Union of Mineworkers as 'extra-thick thickies.' [6] In the 1960s *Freedom* (and *Anarchy* magazine in its first series) promoted a 'reinvented' form of anarchism which saw no chance of revolution (because of the atom bomb), had no interest in the working class (because of the welfare state) and saw the role of the intellectual as perpetual protest. [7] Much of the 'new' academic anarchism seems to have embraced and built on this strand of 'liberal' anarchism. I would have liked to have seen a little more critical analysis of it, even on its own terms. If we have left behind the days of 'proletarian anarchist catastrophism' (p146 – I can't tell if Kinna is only quoting or endorsing the sentiment) then what does success look like? To update our analysis of class as capitalism evolves makes sense. But does an anarchism with *no* class analysis help much now? The problem of how to relate to the anarchists of the past and their ideas reminded me of Spencer Sunshine's comments on recent (post-1960) anarchist thought in the United States: 'The problem with incorporating hot takes from other political traditions into an anarchist framework is they're usually based

in firmly authoritarian ontologies and epistemologies [ideas about being & knowing...] Our first instinct should be to ask “how have anarchists and other libertarian socialists approached this question in the past?” Because they are the ones who insisted that their formulations kept within an internally consistent existing framework that had a dual commitment to freedom and justice.’ [8]

### People

Kinna presents various charts which classify anarchist ideas: ‘Commitments to revolutionary and evolutionary principles complicate anarchist organizationist and anti-organizationist distinctions.’ (p128) and ‘Subdivisions created by the commitment to non-violence in social anarchist and individualist groups.’ (p147) These captions make them sound more complicated than they are, but I found them a bit too two-dimensional. I feel there’s a human dimension missing here. What about people’s lives and actions, as well as their theories, the ‘simple humanity’ that Albert Meltzer experienced in his dealings with the Spanish Resistance? [9] That said, I enjoyed the large section of biographies and was glad to see some familiar faces. But where are Luigi Galleani, Sam and Esther Dolgoff or Miguel Garcia? I could name many more; but Kinna is not trying to be comprehensive here.

*The Government of No One* is published by Penguin Books, which guarantees it will be widely read. It is much less self-serving and hostile to class-struggle anarchism than George Woodcock’s *Anarchism* (first edition: ‘the anarchist movement is dead’. Second edition: ‘my book brought anarchism back to life, but only as an idea.’) [10] It gives an up-to-date ‘big picture’ view of anarchist trends. I don’t agree with all of it, nor think it will be the last word on the subject. But see what you think.

Sonny Disposition

### Notes

- 1, ‘Mike Davis talks about the “Heroes of Hell”’ *Radical History Review*, Issue 85, Winter 2003 also at <https://slackbastard.anarchobase.com/?p=26944>
- 2, *Four patients of Dr. Deibler* by J.C. Longoni p160
- 3, Sean Mason’s slag-off of middle class CND members, *Bash the Rich* by Ian Bone p137
- 4, ‘Wildcat: New paper, established tendency’ *Black Flag*, v3, n14 (October 1974) p10
- 5, <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/5x6bpx>
- 6, ‘What the anarchist movement has taught me’ in *Freedom: A hundred years* (1986) p42
- 7, See (among others) John Pilgrim ‘Salvation by the working class: is it an outmoded myth?’ *Anarchy* 68, October 1966 p289-300; Albert Meltzer ‘Anarchism and the working class: a reply’ *Anarchy* 72, February 1967 p39-49
- 8, Spencer Sunshine Video: ‘Introductory Remarks’ at the Yiddish Anarchism Conference, January 20, 2019 via <https://yivo.org/Video>
- 9, Albert Meltzer: 1920-1996 in *KSL: Bulletin of the*

*Kate Sharpley Library* No. 6, September, 1996  
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/g4f5mw>  
10, See reviews by Sam Dolgoff (1963) and Frank Mintz, (1978) at  
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/sj3vsm>  
*The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism* by Ruth Kinna  
Penguin books, 2019. £20 ISBN 9780241396551 ■

## Beyond a footnote: ‘Class struggle anarchism’

When and why did the phrase ‘class-struggle anarchism’ come into use? In *The government of no-one*, (reviewed above) Ruth Kinna says ‘the origins of the term are difficult to pin down.’ She thinks it’s connected to something Murray Bookchin said in the sixties (I have my doubts). It probably did arise in the 1960s. The earliest reference I’ve seen comes from 1967. Maurice Brinton uses it in his introduction to Ida Mett’s *The Kronstadt Commune*. ‘Ida Mett writes from an anarchist viewpoint. Her writings however represent what is best in the revolutionary tradition of “class struggle” anarchism.’ [1] Brinton doesn’t have a lot of time for anarchism so presumably has picked up a term that others were using at that time.

In 1974, *Black Flag* said that the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists ‘remains within the same concept of class struggle anarchism as we do’. [2] Stuart Christie’s introduction to Albert Meltzer’s *The anarchists in London* (1976) points out its value to ‘libertarian revolutionaries, few of whom are aware of the tradition of class-struggle anarchism simply because it has not been presented to them before’. Interestingly, the ‘About ourselves’ in this pamphlet talks about *Black Flag* being ‘the organ of an international revolutionary fraction. It follows “classical” class war anarchism’. So, though the term existed, it was not the only way to describe that tendency. Has anyone seen earlier uses (or definitions) than these?

1, <http://archivesautonomies.org/IMG/pdf/nonfrenchpublications/english/solidarity60-77/pamphlets/solidarity-pamphlet-n27.pdf>

2, ‘Wildcat: New paper, established tendency’ *Black Flag*, v3, n14 (October 1974) p 10■

## Something should be done (or How to revolt) [book review]

*Something should be done: an anarchist’s adventures in trade unionism* by Peter Good tells how he and his workmates tried to improve things (for the workers and patients) at a large mental hospital back in the 1970s. And things could do with improving: as well

as being short-staffed, 'The pressure was on to achieve results with tasks rather than achieve something with the patients. Inevitably the nursing assistant ended up doing the job while the patient held his coat.'

There's not a lot of jargon here, and no grandstanding: our author admits he couldn't finesse his legal arguments when he had to walk off a 'grade nine hangover'. Elected as chair of his union branch, Good took on (politely and creatively) the management who were messing about both staff and patients. There's a telling note that 'NHS managers who prove themselves incompetent are rarely sacked. Instead they are promoted out of the way, or, if really bad, get moved sideways.'

Fighting for better staffing levels meant tactics other than striking were needed, the more imaginative the better. One (when things got serious) was stopping the managers' biscuits! The biggest was 'highjacking' a couple of the wards. 'The whole block had been allocated three staff to run from Friday to Monday lunchtime. We intended to man the place with what we say as adequate staffing levels until District agreed to remove their decision to cut back staff.' So, a 'good work' strike. But it wasn't easy: 'You need staying power and mule-like determination. Remember we were living, eating and sleeping [on the wards] 24 hours a day and caring for 46 patients. We were losing pay by the hour and pressure from partners and future career prospects played a part in some high-jackers calling it a day by Sunday. As it happened, five of us never left the block for the full 13 days of the occupation.'

All sorts of people helped out: 'For years at Calderstones we had an elderly lady who came to help patients to read. She would also play the church organ on Sundays. She said our actions were so sincere in the eyes of Christ that she had to share the burden with us – and promptly moved in. Full of everyday courage she set her room in the linen room cupboard.' I know what you're thinking – an organist! Surely our revolution is ukuleles or nothing? But creative strike action takes all sorts.

Good sings the praises of imaginative tactics, rightly, but in this case they didn't defeat the grim bureaucrats. The essence of the imaginative tactics was to put pressure on the bosses without making the patients or staff suffer. They weren't just about appearing in the newspapers (though it can't have hurt that 'The media prefer spokespeople to give short snappily heavily biased comments off the cuff. Such a spokesperson was I.')

The union hierarchy were not much help, such that Good now thinks the workers should've had a go at making their own union. Union management and Hospital management were both glad to see the back of our author, it seems!

*Something should be done* is a story of hope defeated, and better ways of doing things left

undone. But it isn't downbeat. After the 'high-jacking' Good has to go back to shovelling gravel. 'Once I had tasted total control over my work – which was what the hijack was – the drab routines of everyday work seemed unpalatable.' Freedom is its own reward, and is exhilarating. And even when you lose, you know that freedom is possible. That's why you should read this little book.

*Something should be done: an anarchist's adventures in trade unionism* by Peter Good  
Active Distribution 2019 ISBN 9781909798700 (A6 booklet, 56 pages, three pounds).  
<https://www.activedistributionshop.org/shop/pamphlets-booklets/4840-something-should-be-done.html> ■

## Miguel Garcia: a personal appreciation

The first time I met Miguel was in June, 1975, in the Centro Ibérico which was then situated in Haverstock Hill, Camden Town. Miguel had made a paella and told me that we Germans always took everything seriously. I agreed, because I suddenly realised that he was right: we do take everything seriously.

So my first memory of Miguel is that I just had to agree with him because he was right. I had the same impression again and again over the six years I knew him. There were others in the Centro who had been fighting in the Spanish Civil War and the Resistance and who had been suffering in prison, like Miguel. Although I was full of admiration for what he had suffered and what I had read in his book, I felt attracted to him not because of his past, but because of his presence, the full force of reality that was in him and with which he was talking to me.

It was impossible to be absent-minded in his presence; he actually wouldn't allow it. He wanted to be understood. So I used to go to the Centro to have a paella or a fried rice he had prepared ('prison food', as he used to call it) and to listen to him. In this short article I just want to render some of the remarks he made in order to give a picture of Miguel as he appeared to me and to pass on some of his principles.

One day he told me that he couldn't see anybody suffer. He said a man couldn't pass by another man, lying helpless on the road, without having a guilty conscience. Man needed to help his fellowmen – here Miguel hesitated, thinking of the right word, and then said with a smile, in English: '...for the soul.'

Sometimes I argued with him, trying to prove that his political ideas wouldn't work. He said that I was taking things too seriously. Life shouldn't be taken seriously, but rather like a theatre play, a comedy; when I'd be old, I'd understand what he wanted to say by that. In his opinion, in every ideology there was something that was right, otherwise it couldn't work. The important thing was that a man is sincere

and believes in his cause instead of seeking only to gain his own advantage.

He asked me whether I was ready to make sacrifices; without being prepared to make sacrifices, we wouldn't achieve anything. He was disappointed about men because he had realised that the majority were just trying to save their own skins. Regarding his own life, he said he felt satisfaction to have always acted according to his principles. He told me that nobody could live without an 'ilusión', which is not 'illusion' in the English sense, but a 'hopeful anticipation', a dream that may become true.

One day I realised what his life had been like. He wanted to move a printing machine from the Centro to his home. The machine was as heavy as a rock, so I was wondering how on earth it would be possible to lug it up the narrow steep staircase without a pulley. I thought I'd have to help; I didn't really feel enthusiastic about it. To my relief Miguel told me to go because they were enough to do the job. The four or five chaps around him were looking depressed because of the enormous task awaiting them. But Miguel was full of will-power, strength and decision, and I knew he would have it move. When I saw him again a couple of days later, he had a dangerous looking lacerated wound on his right hand, caused by pulling up the machine. I thought it must have caused him awful pain, but Miguel told me that he had suffered so much in his life that this was a matter of no importance.

In 1976 I lived in Edinburgh where Miguel came together with his friend and comrade Albert Meltzer to give a speech at the university. He was talking about his life and about anarchism, both being in fact one and the same thing on which, as he said, he had to speak and to write, 'because I need it.' I realised what a good speaker he was, capturing his audience by speaking from his heart. To their hearts, not about abstract theories, but about concepts derived from his own life and sufferings. Therefore his concepts were true; I believe the people were getting the feeling that this man Miguel Garcia was himself true. In this way he told or rather, he taught his audience: 'Be free yourselves before pretending to fight for the freedom of others', and secondly: 'Don't give the power to nobody'. These are the two points he mentioned in his speech as being the most important.

He told me that he didn't like the word 'enemy'. The only enemy he accepted was the majority: If the majority outvoted him, he had to put up with it. If their decision was wrong, all would have to suffer the consequences of it and revise the decision. The important thing was that they would have to suffer the consequences of their action themselves. A ruling minority like the communists, Miguel said, wouldn't themselves suffer the consequences of the mistakes they made. They'd perhaps correct their mistakes, but they'd not admit to having been mistaken in order not to lose their authority.

Later in 1976 I stayed three weeks at his home in Finsbury Park, a simple basement flat he said he didn't want to exchange for a palace because it suited him so well. He was a bit ill, so at one time I suggested to him to stay in bed one more day in order to recover completely. He refused and said in his usual vehement way that he knew best himself what was good for him. I argued that he didn't seem to have known this when on a previous occasion he went to a meeting in Cambridge in spite of being very ill. He admitted that then he had felt so bad that he believed that was the end. However, he had wanted to go to Cambridge because it was an important meeting; his reason was that one must give one's life for the sake of life, 'dar la vida por la vida.' There I heard him say this for the first time; he said it some more times later on when he was fighting for 'La Fragua' in Barcelona and I told him to mind his health.

Miguel's insistent way of talking to people and the effect this caused on his interlocutor has best been described by Hans-Dieter Hambrech who lived with him for half a year in 1978 and who wrote to me: 'As you know, Miguel sometimes starts speaking with you, talking to you. I went out with him today, and again it was excellent, these two hours of brainwashing have once again convinced me of him completely. I'm back on the right track, I know again what's good and what's bad... But the crucial point isn't to what extent Miguel is right in an "objective" way; it's rather his way of explaining things with a persuasive power that just doesn't admit contradiction. I'd like to go further, it's a sort of bodily well-being that befalls me when I'm drawn in this way to assenting to him. Everything appears to be agreeable, clear and right.'

When I saw Miguel for the last time in September, 1981, in Barcelona, we agreed that he would come and visit me in Hamburg the next year. Three months later he was dead. Although I knew that he was 73 years old, that he didn't mind his health and that his principle was 'dar la vida por la vida', it had never occurred to me that he could die. He was so much alive. When I heard the news of his death, I felt the same as Albert who told me on the phone: 'I couldn't believe it.'

This man Miguel was free. He was true. He was a fighter. He was kind-hearted. He was my best friend. He was alive. His life was full of sufferings that now have come to an end. He has died as everybody must die, but he himself gave his death its meaning: he gave his life for the sake of life. That's how he led his life up to the end; that was his 'ilusión'. He was right.

So in a way I still can't believe that he's dead. I believe that there's something of Miguel, of his truth, that lives wherever people are suffering, wherever men are helping their fellowmen, wherever they want to be free. Miguel, my friend, I'll be alive to you

forever. This extraordinary great man Miguel Garcia will never be forgotten.

Gerfried Horst, Hamburg, W. Germany  
From *Miguel Garcia's Story* edited by Albert Meltzer  
(1982) p63-66

### Footnote

Miguel's involvement with Centro Iberico brought him into contact with the anarcho-punk world. He's mentioned several times on the website devoted to the zine *Kill Your Pet Puppy*.

'Miguel used to love hanging about the punk gigs when we moved downstairs. He used to love watching it all set up and the soundchecks, but when it got busy he'd vanish.' [Tony Puppy]

'I remember [Tony] saying he had a conversation at the Centro Iberico with Miguel about Spain in 1936 and asking why the Spanish anarchists were successful then – and the reply being

"Everyone was an anarchist" [alistairliv]

Source: <https://killyourpetpuppy.co.uk/news/red-and-black-flags-flying/> ■

## Dialogue in the form of soliloquy

Anarchism is the workers' socialist movement in the full bloom of youth. And that is why so many young people embrace it, placing their trust in a movement and a doctrine that make *tabula rasa* of all prejudices, all conventions, all idols and which appeal to creative energies in order to smash the chains of exploitation, laws and hypocrisies.

But on contact with anarchist groups and anarchist circles, that youthful fire very soon feels dampened for want of air and room. They had expected to find Malatestas and Cafieros and Bakunins and Recluses and Makhnos and Ascascos, and instead they often stumble across oldsters paralysed by rheumatic brains and awash with theoretical obsessions.

Following a literary entrée in which their appetites were whetted by accounts of the feats of men of action and sparkling polemicists, the young find naught but museum pieces or embittered types entrenched in their arrogance. They had thought they might be taking part in a surging social tide and find themselves in a stagnant pool where the most bizarre fauna and flora grow.

Now the drama begins, because no matter how little the youngster wants to come up with a vision of the movement and unearth its treasures, he realises that all too often the absolutism of the doctrine is a cover for inaction. Like those soldiers of whom magnificent theoretical advances are expected and who learn their military tactics from maps on a scale of 1:10,000, they amass a solid but useless education. When it comes to inspiring action, there is always some circumstance, some occasion not quite right.

After a few months of such purely formal gymnastics, the youngster will be able to say his piece about the timeless antagonism between freedom and authority, but if he tries to dip his toe into the social mix, it will be in a kindred movement and his memory will be besmirched in our right-thinking quarters with the irrevocable condemnation "he's a political dabbler!"

He will be well aware that his workmates and school pals who have signed on with the political parties are not political dabblers and that their aspirations are the very same as his own. Because he knows that anarchism could make use of their belief and their hunger for freedom, he would like his movement to be active enough, vigorous enough, combative enough that no campaign needs to be mounted behind the political mask of authoritarian movements and the ardent actions of their organisations. The campaign, however, is not fought out only at the level of theory. There is the manpower, the watchwords and action as well. And on that turf, he knows that he is, and feels, weak.

Today, now that the libertarian current is undergoing a rebirth, we find the same antagonism and there is a sensible need to come up with a practical solution to the painful contradiction between the dynamism of the young and the slightly amorphous wisdom of the old. The anarchist seed which is our young folk ought to be brought into contact with reality and planted in the popular humus made up of thousands of substances in-the-making and in the process of decomposition, substances that are fertile and filled with promise. If our seed is sound, it will draw from the mixed and dangerous soil everything that it needs for its growth and it will feed on a hundred products which in themselves are neither seed nor plant. The legacy from the "elders" will evaporate and will very soon crumble away to nothing unless upcoming generations can exploit it as seed capital.

True, over the course of twenty or thirty years of struggles and reflections, the old hands have amassed a solid experience, but that experience will have no value other than if it is applied to life, in the social struggle, in contact with the worker and peasant masses. A strike, an act of sabotage, a trade union meeting, a workers' committee, a co-operative commission will provide the anarchist with the place and means to pass on his practical lessons to the young searching to make their own way. The real gap between the young and the old is the tension between action and inaction.

Looked upon by the young as an old man and by the oldsters as a youngster, I am trying to strike a balance between my hopes and my delusions and I cannot find any positivity in any but a few of the strike movements in which I have had a hand, the clandestine papers passed on to those who languished under totalitarian regimes or in the camps in the



democracies, the clandestine border crossings, the rifle shots fired in Spain, the rallies where the message rang out and was understood by the audience, the money sent off to outlawed comrades and, finally, the joy of having, in certain settings, uncovered from the masses of official propaganda and self-interested lies, the precise measure of a situation and of having been able to react to facts with the requisite action.

Then again, how many pointless meetings, how much meaningless palaver, how many massaged motions, how many sterile polemics designed to come out on top and in self-justification, rather than to see clearly, how many little committees disconnected from real life?

On the one hand, the battle against everything that cried out for youthfulness and action, and on the other, the codification of a rough truth distorted by the personal foibles of whoever was uttering it.

The role of anarchist youth is, right now, to bring its first-hand experience into the anarchist movement – for it does have some experience of its own – so as to bring it back to its mission in the social movement as the conscience of the working class and the driver of its every initiative.

Apart from the obvious power, the power of ministerial portfolios and official signatures, uniforms and the esteem of imbeciles, we can stake a claim, if we have it in us to win it, the real power manifested over events and things. Our role has validity to the extent that it can bring influence to bear on reality in order to amend the social. The great lesson that springs, not from the words, but from anarchist thought, is that the individual does not really exist and leaves no trace behind – not in the school history handbooks – other than in the life of peoples, to the extent that he gave to, loved and was active within it. In the French CGT, forty years of reformism, state control and communist infiltration have not managed to erase the imprint left by a militant whose name is unknown even to those who were, unwittingly, his disciples – Tortelier, the cooper who spread the idea of the general strike. Phenomena as important as social banditry, revolutionary violence, factory occupations, the birth of the first soviet in Russia, have no official authors and it would require patient investigation to uncover their inventors or creators. Therein lies our power, our power that no official seal, and no government certificate can ever confer, a power that nothing can ever cancel because it is part and parcel of the anonymous thinking of the hopeful masses.

Not by denying the young their right to act and therefore to make the mistakes will we be able to temper them and turn them into real anarchists. On the contrary, it is by leaving to them the full responsibility of carrying the name of anarchist into the revolutionary cyclone that they will acquire the patina of old steel, that they will try to carry on the

tradition of those whose examples and names first drew them into our camp. Patience! if the capacities and limitations of each of them should founder against the wall of real life and impossibility. We shall meet the splendour of their fire and the echo of their words in the recesses of the souls of the masses. There were only a handful of anarchists in Belgium, in the Borinage area, a land of miners and poverty, yet, when the hope invested in Parliament, in the workers' parties and in the reformist unions died out and when hunger drove thousands of women and men to demonstrate, it was the black flag that sprang up from within the depths of days long gone, from the fierce battles back in 1883, when the first anarchists declared social war.

It is high time for the libertarian ideas kept in the shade by the euphoria of state socialism to burst back into the daylight of popular hopes. From every quarter, from every setting spring the theses, the thought and the notions that are reminiscent of our own. The time is coming when we shall reap the fruits of nearly a century of hard work and propaganda. If words no longer have any meaning to most people, we still have personnel. Those personnel cannot but be the young. The elders can pass judgment on their performance, as long as they managed to mould them. If they make mistakes and go astray, that will be because their elders will have failed to get them used to fighting and all of their wisdom will have served no purpose other than to glorify their own failures.

DAMASHKI [Louis Mercier Vega] Trans PS  
*Volontà* Year 1, No 6, 1 December 1946, pp. 11-13 ■

## Extras on the website

Camillo Berneri in the Fascist Archives: Political Police Briefing for the Attention of the Leader of the Government [of Italy].

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/37pws6>

An old Comrade dies: Sam Mainwaring by Mat Kavanagh

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/m907c3>

Stratford Dialectical and Radical Club: Free lectures on the Sunday evenings in March and April [1882]

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/s4mz0s>

George Woodcock: a muddled history of anarchism [Book review] by Sam Dolgoff 'Self-imprisoned in the "ivory tower" of fictitious "pure" Anarchism, Woodcock consoles himself with a semi-religious mystique of personal salvation.'

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/pc87z2>

An Historic Injustice, written by Nestor Makhno (against the slandering of the Karetnik brothers)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/573pfz>

Telegram from Pertominsk (1923)

Anarchist and socialist exiles protest

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/xpnxrs> ■

# Speaking and Writing (Comment)

[This article of Albert Meltzer's from 1952 is not a timeless classic, ready to be stuck in an anthology. Anarchist publications also need pieces which, even if they're rushed or of the moment, are ready now. Barry Pateman's piece on Mat Kavanagh and the history of anarchism (<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vdnf0f>) explores that workaday writing a bit. This piece sheds a little light on how Albert's style of discussion was formed in a movement where dealing with hecklers was a necessary skill, one where humour could be used for defence or attack. It's funnier if you know that the 'Internationalist' who he damns with faint praise is Albert himself. Finally, it reminds us that nothing is ever simple: people don't always respond in the same paper!]

In *Freedom* (Nov. 8th, 1952) Philip Sansom discusses the reasons why it is difficult to persuade workers to write. I know full well how qualified he is to speak of the difficulties entailed and the recurrence of the under-inscribed initials in the columns of *The Syndicalist* is one more mute testimony to the powers of persuasion he brings to bear upon the subject.

However, I would suggest the reason "workers refuse to commit themselves on paper" is not so much because of the way such points are seized upon by the State in prosecutions. In any case, these attacks usually fall upon editors rather than contributors and it is most frequent that editors of revolutionary newspapers have faced prosecutions on charges relating to articles they had not even seen before their appearance in print, and occasionally even in relation to articles they did not print. The reason is rather more the difference between what is accepted heckling of a speaker and that attaching to a writer.

The speaker faced with a hostile or only indifferent audience can always answer his heckler, and feel the satisfaction entailed in finally silencing the objection. The advantage is entirely with him, because if the heckler wants to persist in his objections he is finally driven to making a speech himself (which is usually the last thing he intends to do). The old platform technique – "Come up here for five minutes" – is one way of doing the trick; but in any case the impossibility of keeping up a sustained barrage of objection soon daunts the most persevering heckler, who is at least beyond the "So's your old man" stage. It is impossible for him, as a rule, to trip up the speaker on minor passing errors of argument, for to be able to do so he must think with the same rapidity – in short, be as capable a speaker himself.

How different with writing! The carping criticism

one gets for articles from opponents or the lukewarm can never be silenced in so easy a fashion, and the article one dashed off on the typewriter to catch the paper going to press may soon be coldly dissected by many who have no necessity to think with the same rapidity or to measure their wits with yours. The stray expression used daily at work seems different in cold print. (Once having used the expression "Thank Christ", a letter asks pointedly if the writer does, therefore, accept the divinity of Christ after all – as if the upper classes accepted the divinity of Jove when they swear by him.) If you write regularly on one subject which you happen to know something about, you will find that an occasional hostile reader regards you as a fanatic on that subject; if you write regularly on a subject which you consider important, though not necessarily having a specialised knowledge, you will be denounced as a "self-styled expert"; if you write about different subjects, you will be a dilettante, and you can only really escape criticism by not writing at all!

I have read in some other journals articles denouncing the anarchists because "they" preferred this novelist to that – basing it on a book review by a competent enough writer in *Freedom* who might well be right, but I had just not read either of the two novelists in question. Once, on the other hand, an indignant letter in another paper complained bitterly that in an article in *Freedom* I had only "spoken for myself", as if there was anything else I could do.

No, so far as the militant worker is concerned, I do not think it is the natural reluctance to writing that is altogether responsible. The reluctance to self-expression based on compulsory sausage-machine education inhibits many from writing or from speaking, but there is another reason for the particular reluctance to writing too, namely that we never know how to squash the heckler, unless he is so rash as to commit himself to a letter to the editor of the same paper as that for which one has written.

However, I do not want to discourage any anarchists who are determined to spread their views by the written word, but then, nothing could. I can only suggest they take heart at the undaunted example of "Internationalist", the brilliance of whose comments on foreign affairs might well silence the most captious critic who had not seen him gazing across from the end of Southend Pier under the impression that he was studying the coast of France.

A.M. [Albert Meltzer]

*Freedom* : the anarchist weekly 29 November 1952 (v.13, no.48) From <https://freedomnews.org.uk/archive/> [and thanks to the Sparrows' Nest]. ■

## Albert Grace

With the tragic death of Albert Grace on April 14 at Swindon at the age of 56, the anarcho-syndicalist

movement has lost one of its longest serving propagandists in the industrial field. He died following an unsuccessful operation on December 20, 1967. His funeral and cremation took place on April 20 and was attended by a large number of fellow trades unionists from the Electrical Trades Union and other building unions.

He leaves a widow, Mrs. J. E. M. Grace, 37 Boscombe Road, Moredon, Swindon. Wilts., and several grown-up sons. His youngest son, Keith, is due to leave school in the summer. We extend to Mrs. Grace and her family our deepest sympathy in their bereavement.

Albert Grace was born on the South Side of the River Thames, London, and at an early age became a docker, working mainly in and around the cold stores. Due to ill-health he left the docks in the mid-1950's and took up a second trade as a skilled electrician, first working in London and then as a result of constant victimisation, moved to the West Country where he worked in Bristol for a time and subsequently in various other parts of West and Southern England on various large contracting jobs. For a time he lived at Farnborough, near Bath, subsequently moving to Swindon, where he died.

He joined the anarcho-syndicalist movement in the late 1920's as a young man and was actively associated with the late Mat Kavanagh and with McCartney in the unemployed movement.

He was also closely associated with Albert Meltzer in action in support of the CNT and FAI in Spain from 1936. He was also active in the production and distribution of *The Syndicalist* in 1952-53 and was a member of the committee which included Albert Meltzer and Philip Sansom and other militants. He was a regular supporter of the anarchist open-air platform at Hyde Park on Sundays and was ever ready to lend his help in any propaganda activities, particularly where this was conducted in the docks or in other industries, where he always felt the major anarcho-syndicalist propaganda and activity should be carried out.

The writer of this personal appreciation first met Albert Grace in the course of the series of dock workers' strikes and militant struggles in the immediate postwar period 1945 to 1951. During this period Albert Grace was extremely active and was associated with the unofficial committees which came into existence. He was on close personal terms with such prominent militant dockers and stevedores as Bert Aylward, Fred Morel, Harry Constable and many others too numerous to mention. During this whole period he was a member of the white union, the T&GWU.[1]

He played an outstanding part in the mass strike movement associated with the defence of the dockers put on trial at the Old Bailey at the beginning of the 1950's and brought a contingent of dockers from his sector to the daily mass demonstrations outside the

Old Bailey.

I have a vivid recollection of being rescued by Albert Grace in the course of having an 'altercation' with a mounted policeman. Thanks to Albert Grace's quickness of thought and action on this occasion I was able to 'escape' uninjured.

A family man himself, Albert Grace was particularly solicitous for the welfare of the wives of the dockers on trial and every day that the trial lasted he and a group of dockers mounted guard over them in order to keep at bay the many 'sob' sisters and other reporters from Fleet Street who were assigned to get stories out of them.

Thanks to Albert Grace and his fellow workers, the Labour Government were forced to drop the charges against the dockers from Birkenhead, Liverpool and London who were on trial, and as a direct result of this daily strike and mass mobilisation of dockers and sympathetic workers from other industries, the wartime special legislation against strike action was also dropped.

Albert Grace was greatly respected by his fellow dockworkers and his prestige as the lone anarchist docker in London over many years brought many into sympathetic contact with the anarchist movement, whether they agreed with its philosophy or not.

Mike Walsh who worked very closely with Albert Grace in the electrical contracting industry in Bristol and the West Country warmly recalls the consistent militancy and the help and advice that he gave the up-and-coming generation of 'sparks' in the day to day struggle and his help in general propaganda activity.

He particularly recalls the activities of Albert Grace when he was the 'sparks' job steward, when a contracting company was installing the electrical work on the reactor core at Hinckley Point around 1960. During the course of long battles and bitterly fought negotiations with the management, Albert Grace was mainly responsible for achieving some of the highest pay and best working conditions on a major construction job.

All this intensive industrial activity in two major industries over a long period of time was often carried out, particularly in later years, despite constant ill-health. This handicap, however, did not prevent Albert Grace from playing a very full part in the militant activities of his class and with a cheerfulness that won him many close friends.

Like many working class militants, Albert Grace was shy of writing or speaking on general public propaganda platforms. He was not a 'weekend' anarchist but carried his anarchist propaganda and activity into his daily working life. He made many friends outside the anarchist movement among militant trade unionists and introduced them for the first time to anarchist papers and other publications.

Your movement has lost a very fine exponent of

anarchism in action. I have lost a very great personal friend.

J. Thomas. [Joe Thomas]  
*Freedom* 25 May 1968

### Notes

1, The Transport and General Workers' Union was known as the 'White union' because of the colour of the union card. See *Waterfront Revolts: New York and London Dockworkers, 1946-61* by Colin John Davis.

Biography by Nick Heath (with photos) at:  
<https://libcom.org/history/albert-grace-c1912-1968> ■

## W. A. Gape Half A Million Tramps London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1936 [Review]

Bill Gape became a tramp in 1914 when he ran away from home as a fourteen-year old. He was on the road in Britain, Canada, the USA and South America from 1914 until about 1930 when he returned to England where was instrumental, that year, in forming the "Hoboes Union" which later became the "National League for the Abolition of Vagrancy". The idea of a creating a union owed much to his experiences riding the rails with Industrial Workers of the World members in Canada. For some time afterwards Gape became somewhat of a London celebrity. He was dubbed "The Tramps Q.C" and even had his own cigarette card in the Churchmans' "In Town Tonight" cigarette card series. He was a member of the second Anarchist Federation (founded in 1940) until he resigned in 1942/43.

The book begins in 1914 with the narrator running away from home. Within hours he enters the world of the dispossessed – a world of dirt, exhaustion, hunger, perpetual physical discomfort and casual and deliberate cruelty on the part of officials in casual wards where the tramp stays. It is a world he will be part of for some time and the book does not shirk in describing with graphic detail – both the people he meets and the circumstances he finds himself in. At times it reads as much a historical documentary on tramping and vagrancy as it does an autobiography. An old tramp gives Bill a history of English vagrancy laws and numerous statutes concerning vagrancy are reprinted in the text. Such an approach though does not hide the emotional and physical challenges of Bill's life but serves as a convenient comparison between official charity and the incidental kindness of ordinary people. It is the latter who provide real charity as far as Bill is concerned. They are "the many men who do such kindly acts without publicity" (52) – cooks and waiters returning home

late at night who have bundled up food to give out or printers in Fleet Street offering sandwiches to the starving tramps. Bill also experiences the kindness of other young boys who have been tramping longer than he has. A kindness that often mitigates the horrors of tramp life as well as anything can.

There is no such kindness in any of the casual wards Bill experiences. In them is thoughtless cruelty, disgusting food, flea- and rat-ridden blankets and demeaning and pointless work. It is a relentless rhythm of misery with the occasional glimmer of humour thrown in. Two women bring Bill comfort and solace during these years. The first, Kate, he meets early on in his days on the street. She looks after him employing him as a collector of the money as she works as a "chanter" (street singer). She offers him kindness and a domesticity missing from his own family. Her arrest, as a result of mean-spiritedness on the part of her neighbours, removes any safety net between Bill and a life of tramping. The second woman, Alice, becomes his partner and companion who introduces him to sex and, very importantly, the understanding of what a free woman is. She says to the confused Bill, "Don't you see that even if you were legally tied to me I would not let you have relations with me unless I was willing, so it isn't a matter of legality but of inclination." (167) Alice educates him about life and people and he is the richer for that experience.

The world of the tramp, however, is not a world conducive to permanent relationships. Acquaintances come and go, moving in different directions on the road. People are regularly arrested or die through a potent mixture of poverty and illness. The life of the tramp is essentially a solitary one. Eventually Bill stowaways to Canada and there meets an organization that cares about and supports the tramps and hoboes that ride the Canadian rails. Bill joins the Industrial Workers of the World. Of the IWW Songbook he writes, "I enjoyed reading the songs, for they expressed in verse the same feelings that moved me. Every line of these songs shouted revolt against tyranny and oppression." (306) For a time his loneliness is eased as he recognizes that others have had similar experiences and feelings to himself. He is part of something bigger.

This is a book well worth reading. There are some powerful scenes – apple picking in Wisbech, laying under a deluge at night in the New Forest or the tension of being a stowaway on a passenger ship to Canada – that grip the reader emotionally and, if the writing is often jerky and awkward it is always worth persevering with. There can be no doubting the authenticity of what you are reading – an authenticity created by the use of contemporary slang that was used in everyday tramp interaction. The casual use of words such as "funkum", "jake" and "skilly" signal that we are entering a closed world rich with its own language and culture with a complexity that is still

disturbing and challenging eighty years or so after it was written. “Half A Million Tramps” constantly articulates the tension between what an individual tramp may feel to be their rights and what charity, religion and the state decide these rights actually are. In his world, Gape suggests, organized charity can prove to be a cruel and mean thing that suits the power of the giver more than the rights of the receiver.

Barry Pateman

[The W. A. Gape cigarette card can be seen at <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/zcrmb6>] ■

## **Our Masters Are Helpless: The Essays of George Barrett edited by Iain McKay [book review]**

George Ballard (1888-1917), who wrote under the name George Barrett, was a prolific speaker and writer whose death from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine was a severe loss to anarchist thought and propaganda in the United Kingdom. This small but essential book contains the three long essays he is most known for – “The Anarchist Revolution” (Freedom Press: London, 1915), “The Last War” (Workers’ Freedom Group: Bristol, 1915) and “Objections to Anarchism” (Freedom Press: London, 1921). The first and third pamphlet were initially serialized in the anarchist paper “Freedom,” the latter posthumously. The volume also includes all the articles from “Freedom” written by Barrett as well as more organizational reports and summaries Barrett sent to the paper.

The three essays are a pleasure to read. They are aimed at people who are not anarchists and are all the better for that. He writes in a clear and concise way that does not speak down to the reader and he has that rare ability to express ideas that might be thought of as complicated in a clarifying rather than confusing way. At its best his writing style is reminiscent of Alexander Berkman’s “Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism.” (Vanguard Press: New York, 1929) and his aim appears to be similar – to express the ideas of anarchism in a straightforward way to those who may never have considered them in any way beyond an instinctively negative one. For Barrett, like Berkman, anarchism is common sense. There’s nothing complicated about it. Look around, think about what you see and it becomes obvious that anarchism makes perfect sense. His “Objections to Anarchism” clearly reflects this way of seeing the world and also reflects the fact that Barrett spent considerable time as a public speaker (he appears to

have been an effective presence on the soapbox) as well as talking about anarchism with people who were not anarchists and who asked the awkward questions that needed answering. You can see a similar approach in Tony Gibson’s “But Mr. Speaker in an anarchist society, Who Will Do the Dirty Work?” (Freedom Press: London, 1952) and Albert Meltzer’s “Anarchism: Arguments For and Against” (AK Press: Edinburgh and San Francisco, 1996).

Barrett’s articles for “Freedom” between 1910-1913 reflect the optimism that is found in the pamphlets but his writing is, at times, more lyrical and metaphorical. They reflect a knowledge of literature, philosophy and science as well as the importance of atheism to anarchist ideas. His “Night and Morning” (April 1911) is a wonderful piece of writing that is both lyrical and optimistic urging us to recognize that “In some near future more of us will see the beauty of the days we let slip so uselessly”. He is, though, a realist. In “The Curse of Compromise” (October 1913) he argues that “It is doubtful if propaganda ever makes rebels. They are created by wider causes.” All propaganda can do is to try and draw out the spirit of revolt that lies within people. Anarchism won’t be built book by book or article by article. A lot more will be needed.

His reports and letters to “Freedom”, often written while traveling, reflect a different Barrett. In them he is querulous and urgent, chafing at the inability of some comrades to get moving. He senses the time to organize is now and his not above publicly criticizing anarchists in certain cities and towns. To call oneself an anarchist yet do nothing, practically, to help bring anarchism about is not acceptable to him. His final piece in this section “A New Venture” announces the “Voice of Labour Bulletin” and ends with the words “Let us be comrades in our anarchism, for it is the whole of life”. Words, one feels after reading this selection, that he lived by.

The book is ably edited by Iain McKay and comes with a useful introduction (one quibble – the original “Voice of Labour” ran for nine months not six) and there is a helpful glossary of contemporary Socialist and Marxist groupings. “Our Masters Are Helpless” leaves us in no doubt as to the ability of Barrett as a writer and thinker and we can only mourn his early loss to British anarchism. This is essential reading. You might disagree with him at times but his striving to reach those who are not anarchists, using language that is clear and effective, is important and impressive. In a time of apparent madness his assertion that anarchism is common sense remains an important message for us all.

“Our Masters Are Helpless: The Essays of George Barrett” edited by Iain McKay; Freedom Press: London, 2019. ISBN: 9781904491309, 140p., £7.50 [https://freedompress.org.uk/product/our\\_masters\\_are\\_helpless/](https://freedompress.org.uk/product/our_masters_are_helpless/) ■

# The Trouble with National Action [Book Review]

More than an obituary of a banned Nazi group, Hayes argues that 'National Action may have articulated a genuinely nasty Nazi ideology, but it was largely ineffective, and the idea that State legislation is the best way to deal with the threat is an error.' (page 71) This is not a book which is particularly concerned with government policy, nor with maintaining 'business as usual'. Hayes takes the threat seriously: 'fascism may not always be seen as the most unattractive and least credible product in the market place of political ideas.' (page 56) But he is equally convinced of the threat from the 'creeping coercive state' (what you might call the 'extremists of the centre').

'If you want to talk genuine anti-fascism, you have to talk anti-capitalism. [...] In the age of austerity, where the attempt to reimpose neoliberalism after the financial crisis has exposed the naked class interests which underpin the capitalist economic system, nothing is more important than understanding the nature of the threat from the far right. We need to deal effectively with fascists, and this means replacing, once and for all, the predatory economic system that causes such misery and periodically vomits forth this vile ideology'. (page 76-77)

*The Trouble with National Action* by Mark Hayes.

Freedom Press, ISBN 9781904491347, £5

<https://freedompress.org.uk/product/the-trouble-with-national-action/> ■

## Liz Willis

Liz Willis (born Elizabeth Ann Smith) has died in hospital in London with family around her, age 72, following diagnosis of pancreatic cancer last year.

Liz was born in Stornoway, daughter of Margaret (Peggy Flett)[1] and Calum 'Safety' Smith,[2] joined four years later by sister Alison. Her early childhood[3] is recollected as a time of street games and unsupervised freedom on long summer days and it was this vision of Stornoway that stayed with her in later years. Her parents, large extended family, the wild landscape and stifling social mores[4] of the island provided an ongoing source of inspiration and rebellion. An outstanding and prize-winning student, she developed a facility for languages and history in particular. The family moved to Dingwall in 1959, where younger sister Marjory arrived just as Liz was preparing to go to Aberdeen University[5] to study history in 1964 at age 16.

It was in Aberdeen that her interest in politics crystallised, as she became an active member of Youth CND[6] and left-wing societies, attending regular meetings and hops. She developed her lifelong internationalist, libertarian socialist outlook,

joining Faslane protests, a peace march to Paris, and hitch-hiking across Europe to an anarchist camp in Italy[7] in the summer of 1967. After attaining her MA in History, she chose Belfast to pursue a course in library studies, because it "seemed like an interesting place to be in 1968" and found herself on her second day in the province helping Bernadette Devlin up during a civil rights march. It was in this heady atmosphere that she met her future husband, Roy Willis. They married in 1969 and Janetta was born in 1970.

As the political situation deteriorated, the young family moved to London, where Mark was born in 1972. Roy's social work course took them to Muirhouse housing scheme in Edinburgh,[8] where Liz found time to get involved with tenants' rights and demos in support of the miners and other causes. Returning to London in 1974, they settled in the borough of Ealing, where she spent the majority of her life. She found her political home in the shape of Solidarity for Workers' Power, remaining an active member until its demise in 1992. Amongst her many contributions was the pamphlet 'Women in the Spanish Revolution',[9] which remains a key text on the subject.

While looking after young children she stacked shelves in Sainsbury's before finding a position at the Medical Research Council library at Hammersmith Hospital. Some of her most treasured memories were family holidays in Europe, allowing her to practice her proficiency in several languages and absorb her interest in the history and culture of places that she could still recollect clearly 40 years later. Her thirst for knowledge continued as she collected four diplomas and her activism was undimmed as she took on new causes such as the Polish Solidarnosc movement and provided support to an Iranian refugee friend. In the 90s, divorce and grown-up children allowed her more time to concentrate on her writing, research and book reviews, joining Medact's *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* journal editorial board in 1991, which she served on until her final year, and for which she wrote well over 100 items. She also participated in the London Socialist historians' group, Anarchist Research Group and other radical history forums. As grandchildren appeared in the new century, she proved to be a devoted grandmother, from knitting baby clothes to excavating archive materials to help them in their studies.

She started the 'Smothpubs'[10] blogspot in 2011, (so named after a mix-up when helping police with their enquiries), with articles on a range of subjects including local and family history and including a mine of material on conscientious objectors. When diagnosed with cancer last year, she carried on through chemotherapy and a clinical trial, taking it as an opportunity to learn about the latest medical research and the state of the NHS, for which she was

always committed but for most of her life never had much cause to use. She was appreciative of the NHS staff's efforts to treat and support her in this time. Over the past year living in Walthamstow, she showed little sign of slowing down, continuing her trips to the British Library, Housmans bookshop and local libraries. She continued to collect material for her blog and the Radical History Network blogspot, and even found time to do translation work for an anarchist research project and take part in the E17 Art Trail. She managed regular trips to Scotland, including a flying visit to Stornoway to see her uncle Donald Smith's retrospective exhibition and retrace childhood footsteps. It was only in the last month or so that the disease took hold, but she remained a 'free rebel spirit' to the end.

Liz Willis (21.10.1947–10.11.2019)

### Notes

- 1, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2018/11/>
- 2, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2012/02/malcolm-calum-smith-centenary-29th-may.html>
- 3, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2019/04/>
- 4, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2017/11/all-sundays-were-long-days-in-isles.html>
- 5, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2018/02/>
- 6, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2016/03/ycnd-when-it-was-all-kicking-off-in.html>
- 7, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2017/09/prelude-to-1968-lake-como-italy-summer.html>
- 8, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2019/05/a-council-flat-in-edinburgh-1972-74.html>
- 9, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/2015/11/>
- 10, <http://smothpubs.blogspot.com/>

From

<https://radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.com/2019/11/liz-willis.html>

Our comrades at Past Tense add 'There's much more to the story... Someone out there knows the full story of Liz breaking into nuclear bunkers in Scotland in the mid-1960s (around the time of Spies for Peace?) and nearly getting expelled from university... Anyone with other memories of Liz please do get in touch. No-one who leaves their work behind them is truly gone.'

<https://pasttenseblog.wordpress.com/2019/12/05/in-memory-liz-willis/>

And thank you, Past Tense, for the (technicolour) London Rebel History Calendar 2020. ■

## Ken Williams

Ken Williams, who was a militant in East London DAM in the 1980s and '90s, has died. His family are planning to hold Ken's memorial service in Twickenham in mid February. We hope to have an obituary of Ken in a future issue of the KSL bulletin. ■

**15 Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library**

## Biographies by Sergei Ovsianikov

Leonid Aleksandrovich Alekseyev  
Mutineer in 1905, worked in Boston (Mass.), returned in 1917 and worked in the Bezhetsk Regional Soviet. "I was absorbed in organizational work for Soviet power, which I considered a transitional stage in moving towards anarchism." Later a film actor (photo from Eisenstein's *Strike*).

Dmitry Sergeyeovich Ganeshin  
Participated in publishing underground journals:  
Arrested in Moscow on April 23, 1926.

Sophia Moiseyevna Krasnoshchekova  
Member of the Commission for the Organization of the Funeral of P. A. Kropotkin. Until the end of her life she wrote on questionnaires and application forms: "member of the party of anarchists."

Alexandra Kvachevskaya  
During the night of November 3-4, 1924, she was arrested in Leningrad. Later a teacher.

Grigori Ilich Minaev  
In 1928 he was again sentenced for anarchist activity to three years in a corrective labour camp, later changed to exile in the city of Minusinsk.

Samuel Grigorievich Ryss  
He was one of the 29 anarchists arrested during the night of November 1 1922 in Petrograd. Others in the group included Senya Fleshin and Molly Steimer.

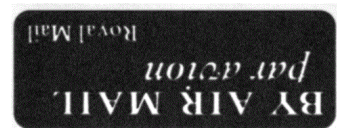
Fanya Josifovna Wolshtein-Rozhanskaya  
Member of the Odessa Group of Anarcho-Communists. Later a Bolshevik and member of the All-Russian Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles.

### **Anarchist Women in Maltsev Prison 1907–1908**

In the wake of the failed Russian revolution of 1905–1906, the tsarist government established a prison for women "terrorists" in eastern Siberia. Maltsev Prison, in a remote mining district near the border with China, already housed "common" women criminals, but from 1907 to 1911 also held dozens of women convicted of violent revolutionary acts, the most famous being Maria Spiridonova, assassin of a brutal tsarist official.

Biographies of the ten anarchist prisoners are by Sergei Ovsianikov, who also determined the date of the large group photo. Translation and notes by Malcolm Archibald. Supplementary biographical material in the notes is from Anatoly Dubovik.

All via [https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/fl\\_vjz4](https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/fl_vjz4):  
Thanks to Malcolm Archibald for his translations. ■



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