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Book Review – The Tragic Procession: Alexander Berkman and Russian Prisoner Aid, 1923-1931 (KSL/ABSC, 2010)

Every recruit to the SWP (if they still get recruits) should read this book before they pay their membership fees. It demolishes the illusion that the "Bolshevist Leninism" advocated in exile by Trotsky was somehow different from the murderous totalitarianism practised by Stalin.

Aptly titled, *The Tragic Procession* is a fascinating and heartbreaking chronicle of the repression meted out to revolutionaries in Russia by the Bolshevik government, refracted through the pages of the Bulletin edited in exile by Alexander Berkman - issued first by his own Joint Committee for the Defense of Revolutionists Imprisoned in Russia, and from 1926 by the IWMA's Relief Fund for Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists Imprisoned or Exiled in Russia.

Between February 1917 and the spring of 1918, Russian Anarchism enjoyed a legal existence for the first, and only, time in its history (prior to the collapse of the USSR). Though split on the question of support for the Bolsheviks, anarchists of all tendencies had taken part in the overthrow of Kerensky. They worked enthusiastically in the Soviets, and were represented in the All Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK). Many of them were captivated by Lenin's writings after April, 1917, particularly his famous work "The State and Revolution", which had re-examined Marx's theory of the state and concluded that the existing bourgeois state must be abolished (along with the standing army, police and courts) and replaced with a society modelled on the Paris Commune. Believing the Bolsheviks to be sincerely dedicated to this task, Soviet Anarchists were even prepared to temporarily bend their anti-statist principles, in the cause of seeing the revolution triumph, by supporting the dictatorship of the proletariat.

As the Soviet state grew stronger, the contradictions between Bolshevik and anarchist aims became more irreconcilable. On the night of 12 April, 1918, Lenin's Cheka supported by Latvian riflemen, launched an offensive against the Moscow anarchists, with raids against twenty-six anarchist centres in the city, and closed down the printing presses of the Moscow Anarchist Federation and its paper "Anarkhiya". Caught by surprise, some of the anarchists were captured without a shot being fired, or put up only a

token resistance. Elsewhere, the well armed Black Guard detachments were only overcome by full-scale military assault. Those who still dreamed of seeing Anarchy in their lifetime pinned their hopes on a "third revolution" against Communist dictatorship, based on the Makhnovist insurgency in Ukraine and the Kronstadt revolt of 1921, but by the end of the 1920s the anarchist movement in Russia was completely outlawed.

Alexander Berkman arrived in Russia with Emma Goldman in 1919, after being deported from the USA. At first they were inclined to give Lenin the benefit of the doubt. But the massacre at Kronstadt finally convinced them of the true nature of Lenin's new autocracy. They were expelled to Germany in 1922, among the last of the Russian anarchists allowed to leave. From then on anarchists in Russia were subject to a continual cycle of repression, imprisonment and exile to remote provinces, where they were forced to survive as best they could. Berkman dedicated the remainder of his life to bringing practical aid and solidarity to the comrades he left behind. This book stands as testimony to his efforts.

It would be difficult to do justice to the wealth of detailed information which the Bulletin published about persecuted Russian revolutionists (not only anarchists) - please, read the book yourself - while fellowtravelling intellectuals outside Russia were so besotted with the fatal attraction of Leninism. But a few gems beg to be mentioned in passing, if only because they are news to me. I didn't know for instance (despite having written a book about Latvian anarchists) that the Latvian anarchist group in New York remained active. sending contributions to Berkman, as late as the end of 1930. Or that the London branch of the Anarchist Red Cross (Secretary E. Michaels) was still supporting Berkman's work until at least 1931. An honourable mention (page 77) as another contributor, also in 1931, goes to Leah Feldman – a veteran of the anarchist underground in Russia and the Makhno movement in Ukraine, who in 1936 passed on the flame to our own Albert Meltzer (co-founder of the Anarchist Black Cross), and was still supporting anarchist action groups (First of May Group, Murray Defence Campaign) well into the 1960s and 70s. And it's

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Tragic procession review

interesting to note that Nestor Makhno himself is listed (page 27) as receiving financial support (\$76) from Berkman's fund in 1926.

In November and December 1930 the Bulletin printed reports of a new generation of "politicals" appearing in the prisons: 'mostly young persons... who we, the "old guard", do not know. Many of them call themselves Anarchists, and one wonders in what manner they have learned of our ideas. For you must consider that there is no Anarchist literature in Russia, none that the average person can get hold of. And there are but few organizations or groups of our comrades, and all underground, at that. Often this new element is merely a rebellious contingent, whom the GPU simply designates as Anarchists. In prison, fortunately, some of them actually become enlightened Anarchists, with a clear and intelligent conception of our ideals. Thus at a certain transfer point I came upon a young man who belonged to a student organization of Anarchists-Syndicalists. He seemed a man of an entirely new type that is growing in Russia. Not an Anarchist by temperament, but one whom actual conditions and an independent and critical mind have led to new conceptions of life and society. [...] their militant spirit was not the determining factor in their Anarchist viewpoint. On the contrary... social conditions of dictatorship have developed in them a clear and logical tendency to seek for other, more practical and rational ways of making and living the Revolution.' (p. 62)

Thus it was, inside and outside of the Gulag system, that against all odds anarchists survived in Russia until emerging in 1989 – not just despite, but in part precisely because of the repression of all who questioned the moral authority of a dictatorial state. The Tragic Procession of Russian Anarchism after 1918 was ultimately vindicated (thanks in no small part to people like Alexander Berkman) by outliving the dictatorship which sought to consign it, as Trotsky claimed, to the "dustbin of history".

Philip Ruff

[Philip Ruff is the author of Pa stavu liesmu debesis: Nenotverama latviešu anarhista Petera Maldera laiks un dzive [A towering flame: the life & times of 'Peter the painter'] which was reviewed in our last issue.

The Tragic Procession: Alexander Berkman and Russian Prisoner Aid. Published by The Alexander Berkman Social Club and Kate Sharpley Library: 2010. 9781873605905 \$12/£8

Helping Freedom

The historic Freedom building in East London is the best-known public space of the British anarchist movement. Home to Freedom newspaper (long running and much improved), the building's also used for office space (including both the Anarchist Federation and



Solidarity Federation) and social space like after bookfair parties. It also houses Freedom Bookshop, a major outlet for anarchist publications from Freedom Press and other publishers (including us).

In the early hours of Friday 1 February 2013 fire fighters were called to a blaze which damaged about 15% of the shop, destroying books and knocking out the building's electrics (it took about two hours to put out). The cause was an arson attack: a shutter had been forced, flammable liquid poured in and lit. Luckily no-one was in the building, and the building itself still stands. Shortage of money (the curse of radical projects) meant that the insurance premiums hadn't been paid, leaving the cost of the clean-up on the shoulders of Freedom – and their friends.

In the days straight after the attack, friends and supporters of Freedom descended on the building to clear and clean it. Already the bookshop has reopened. Freedom have been offered new books by anarchist publishers. Other fundraising plans are taking shape, from music and poetry collections to fundraising feasts. Cash donations have come in from comrades across the country and in fact the world.

If you're able to send Freedom a donation, UK cheques and postal orders made payable to Freedom Press can be sent to Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

News updates, links to photos and other ways to help can be found on the Freedom website:

http://www.freedompress.org.uk/

Source of melted phone photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/29712186@N05/84468 23785. Additional info from http://libcom.org/news/freedom-bookshop-firebombed-01022013

Book Reviews and Obituary

Books for cooks (and other workers)

Abolish Restaurants is an excellent discussion of capitalism and how it works. It reads well because it comes from first-hand experience in the 'hospitality industry' – which means it describes the world as it is. There's no 'look at me I've got clean hands' here. Not only do they know what they're talking about, they want to communicate it, not sound clever. It's a quick read, partly because it's illustrated. It's stylish – in a good way – once you get used to the fact that no-one in the pictures has eyes. Either the illustrator is paying homage to the great Gerd Arntz, or it's a metaphor about capitalism being so dehumanising that some people don't even have noses.

Abolish Restaurants is a hard book to review because there are so many bits to quote. This will have to do as a flavour:

"Our fight isn't against the act of chopping vegetables or washing dishes or pouring beer or even serving food to other people. It is with the way all these acts are brought together in a restaurant, separated from other acts, become part of the economy, and are used to expand capital. The starting and ending point of this process is a society of capitalists and people forced to work for them. We want an end to this. We want to destroy the production process, as something outside and against us. We're fighting for a world where our productive activity fulfils a need and is an expression of our lives, not forced on us in exchange for a wage – a world where we produce for each other directly and not in order to sell to each other. The struggle of restaurant workers is ultimately for a world without restaurants or workers."

Abolish Restaurants is published by and available at www.prole.info

Dare to be a Daniel (the story of the French Cooks' Syndicate) is a classic account of class struggle in the catering trade. If you've read the earlier Kate Sharpley Library edition, you'll not notice a huge difference here. If you haven't, you've missed a treat. I bet even the Abolish Restaurants crew who aren't fans of unions would have some interesting discussions with the French Cooks' Syndicate. Dare to be a Daniel by Wilf McCartney is published by the Kate Sharpley Library.

Peace, Love and Petrol Bombs is a fictionalisation of recent anarchist history from the days of summit protests. The bulk of the action is closer to home, though, following the loves and struggles of the disgruntled fast food workers of 'Benny's Resistance Army'. Whether you see the ending as a little downbeat or just a pause before further adventures depends on your personality I guess. I read this straight through when I was under the weather, so I didn't mark any bits to quote. But I did like how the

Socialist Worker's Party 'broad front' technique got rumbled: invite liberal speakers to your meetings to make you look radical; like only going clubbing with ugly friends. *Peace, Love and Petrol Bombs* by D.D. Johnstone is published by AK Press.

Mrs Beeton

Confronting Dostoevsky's Demons: Anarchism and the Specter of Bakunin in Twentieth-century Russia by James Goodwin [Book Review]

Goodwin examines different responses to Bakunin after the Russian revolution: celebration as revolutionary precursor; demonisation as the Anti-Marx; studied as the only way to even mention anarchist ideas. Chapter four (In defense of Bakunin: Aleksei Borovoi and the anarchist conception of Demons) covers the manoeuvres of anarchists in 1920s Russia. It disproves the idea that they simply disappeared, and provides information on exactly what they did do. 'Arguably the highest point in the anarchists' transition from anti-Soviet agitation to more subtle propaganda, Voice of Labor [Golos Truda] became the most significant and enduring producer of anarchist literature in the 1920s, publishing more than sixty titles between 1919 and 1926. One of its first and most important achievements was a five-volume publication of Bakunin's works from 1919 to 1922 that featured some of Bakunin's sharpest criticism of "state socialism," most of which were not printed in Russia again before the *perestroika* period of the late 1980s.' (p103)

The 50th anniversary of Bakunin's death (the Bakunin jubilee of 1926) sparked new anarchist plans.

'Borovoi's elaborate plans for the Bakunin Committee reflect the great hopes and ambition which the Bakunin jubilee inspired in the minds of some surviving anarchists. With its provisions for a Bakunin museum, permanent commissions, and regular publishing activity, it is likely that Borovoi envisioned the Bakunin Committee as a genuine institution within Soviet culture, one that provided a more purely "anarchist" alternative to the Kropotkin Museum, from which the original anarchist contingent had become all but completely estranged by 1926.' (p120-1) '[T]he anarchists' subtle but obvious strategy of self-vindication ... was deployed most extensively in a collection of anarchist writings edited by Borovoi and published by Voice of Labor in honour of Bakunin that summer. Consisting of eighteen articles by fourteen different authors, the collection represented by far the largest and most diverse compilation of anarchist texts to emerge throughout the entire Soviet period. Its format reflected the need to subordinate its principal aim of outlining a history of anarchism, as acknowledge in the preface, to the

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purpose of commemoration. Its title, *Sketches on the History of the Anarchist Movement in Russia*, therefore included the dedication *To Mikhail Bakunin*, 1876-1926.' (p123)

Interestingly, it was not only inside Russia that Bakunin was being invoked: '[A]s anarchists and Bolsheviks observed Bakunin's 1926 jubilee in Moscow, Maksimov prepared four installments of Bakunin's "teachings," as he called them, in the form of fictitious "conversations" between a modern enquirer – represented by Maksimov himself – and the revived Bakunin, whom Maksimov returned to the living after a fifty-year slumber. Eliciting classic utterances by Bakunin on the need for a sweeping, anarchist revolution and the way to realize it, Maksimov offered a creative and original alternative to the scholarly paraphrase of Soviet Marxist studies.' (p127)

Confronting Dostoevsky's Demons is a specialised but intelligent and valuable contribution to the history of anarchism in Russia.

Confronting Dostoevsky's Demons: Anarchism and the Specter of Bakunin in Twentieth-century Russia by James Goodwin Peter Lang, 2010. ISBN: 9781433108839 £55/\$90.

The Role of the Anarchists in the Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917-1921: A Case Study in Conspiratorial Party Behavior during Revolution. John W. Copp. Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1992. [Review]

Copp's work on the activities (and ultimate defeat) of anarchists during the Russian revolution throws up some interesting ideas. Examining who the anarchists were, he concludes that they weren't very different from rank-and-file Bolsheviks: 'the anarchists themselves, like the Bolsheviks, were largely products of the urban working class. [...] There is strong evidence that anarchism was popular among the working class and some evidence that it appealed to the peasantry. [...] [T]he largely urban background of the anarchists' activists would suggest that they most probably were concerned with urban issues and urban problems and therefore would concentrate their efforts in the large cities until forced to turn more towards the peasants by high levels of government suppression.'

Ultimately, he blames division among the anarchists for their failure to organise successfully: 'While their individual responses were nearly always principled and often even heroic, the failure of their attempt to develop a national umbrella organisation and the contradictory responses of the anarchocommunists and the anarcho-syndicalists to the

establishment of class institutions demonstrate the futility of the anarchists' efforts to band together to produce their dream of revolution. Instead of seizing the revolutionary initiative or even responding to Bolshevik designs as a whole they were forced to battle piecemeal against whichever Bolshevik policies struck the members of a particular faction as wrong.' (p212) This criticism was certainly repeated by some anarchists – Makhno for example.

One of Copp's most interesting points is about how anarchists came to cooperate with the Bolsheviks: 'The key philosophical element which made it possible for many anarchists to alter their perception of the Bolsheviks seems to have been the centrality of the concept of revolution in the anarchist belief system. [...] [T]he need for cooperation between the two if the anarchists' fundamental goal of a social revolution was to be accomplished, allowed the anarchists to focus on the Bolsheviks' "good" side and work together with their "revolutionary brethren" and ignore the rivalry of the past.' (p136)

As we know (with hindsight) this cooperation led to both revolution and the Bolshevik seizure of power. Anarchists thereafter were divided on how to respond. Despite (because of?) their popularity the anarchist movement was eventually absorbed or repressed and sidelined. Copp's account of the conflict anarchists had to face (loyalty to anarchism or to the revolution) is not just of historical interest. How do we stop revolution turning into its opposite? If there isn't a single key to success, what combination of popularity, organisation, principle, ferocity and luck do we need?

Siberian Makhnovshchina : Siberian Anarchists in the Russian Civil War (1918-1924) by Igor Podshivalov [Book Review]

The Makhnovist rebellion against Whites and Reds in the Russian Civil War is well known to anarchists. This small book deals with the unknown anarchist partisans in the Kuzbas (Kuznetsk Basin) of southwestern Siberia. Originally an anarchist peasant revolt against the White forces of Admiral Kolchak, their independent attitude is summed up by Grigori Rogov's address to Kutznetsk's "Revolutionary Committee": "Even though I'm here, that doesn't mean I'm your servant. I've been mercilessly slaughtering the enemies of the toilers, and I will continue to slaughter them. I will also struggle against Lenin and Trotsky... Any kind of government is a burden for the workers... Let's extend the Revolution, let's not let it be stifled; we'll set the world on fire under the black banner of anarchy!" (p13)

The anarchist and peasant partisans played an important part in Kolchak's defeat but inevitably came into conflict with the new Bolshevik rulers.

Book Reviews and Obituary

Recording a vivid (and bloody) fragment of unknown anarchist history *Siberian Makhnovshchina* is recommended to anyone interested in Russian anarchist history, a worthy companion to Black Cat Press's *Atamansha*: *The Story of Maria Nikiforova* – the Anarchist Joan of Arc by Malcolm Archibald and Kontrrazvedka: the story of the Makhnovist Intelligence Service by Vyacheslav Azarov

Siberian Makhnovshchina: Siberian Anarchists in the Russian Civil War (1918-1924) by Igor Podshivalov, translated by Malcolm Archibald. ISBN 9781926878089 \$5.95 http://www.blackcatpress.ca/

March of the Anarchists

We sing our song under thunder and fury, Under bullets and shells, under blazing fires, Under the black banner of titanic struggle, Under the sound of the trumpet call!

We'll capture palaces and destroy idols, Cast off chains, smash marble tiles. An end to shame and base servitude, We will drown the people's sorrow in blood.

The People's Will has awakened and risen To the lament of the Commune, to the call of Rayachol.

To the cries for vengeance of people who died Under the weight of the bourgeoisie, under the weight of chains.

We wing of the uncounted, forgotten by fate, Tortured in prisons, killed on the block. They fought for truth, they fought for you, And fell in heroic, inequitable struggle.

Their cries resound under the Russian sky, Like the roar of some primordial force, They're heard in Siberia, mired in bondage, And urge us forward to the valiant fight.

from Siberian Makhnovshchina: Siberian Anarchists in the Russian Civil War (1918-1924) by Igor Podshivalov, translated by Malcolm Archibald.

Alan Woodward 1939-2012

The Tottenham working class activist/campaigner Alan Woodward passed away on Saturday 20th October.

Alan had a stroke and fall on Tuesday 16th October and was admitted to the North Middlesex Hospital the following day. His close family had rallied round during his hospital stay and were with him when he died peacefully. Alan Woodward was a lifelong working class revolutionary immersed in support for workplace struggles and other anti-capitalist movements. He started with the International Socialists (later the Socialist Workers Party). He was then very active in the Haringey Trades Union Council. In recent years he gravitated towards independent libertarian politics, including the Haringey Solidarity Group, believing it was necessary for workers to take direct control of all workplaces and through workers' coordination councils thereby create a new economy and society without capitalism or governments. In his writings he explained he was drawing on what he saw as the best traditions of revolutionary socialism and anarchism.

He actively supported and tried to attend every local workers picket line in Haringey, either as the organiser for the Trades Council or as part of local campaigns. In the last few years this included strikes by postal workers, local bakery workers, public sector pension disputes, railworkers picket lines and anti-cuts campaigning. When the Visteon Ford Car Parts factory in Enfield was due to be closed he joined in the workers' week-long occupation of the site and later wrote a pamphlet on the experience.

At the same time he helped set up the Radical History Network of NE London* and as the RaHN Convenor he organised and wrote up summaries of dozens of local talks and meetings on a whole range of past disputes and struggles to ensure that the voices of those who took part in them would continue to reverberate and help us all in our struggles and movements today. He took RaHN stalls to many local and national events.

He produced a huge body of agitational, campaigning and radical literature, leaflets, strike bulletins, newsletters, historical snapshots, pamphlets and recently an autobiography.** Yet he underplayed his own role as he preferred to promote the collective self-activity of those involved in industrial strikes, disputes and working class movements.

He is irreplaceable and will be sorely missed, but his influence will remain with us all as the struggle for a new society continues unabated.

Dave Morris (Tottenham, 21.10.2102) * Radical History of NE London -

http://www.radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.co.uk/
** Alan's autobiography 'Poor Boy's Tale' (Vol 1 –
'the first 60 years') is available from Housmans
Bookshop – as are some of his pamphlets on Workers
Councils, Shop Stewards movements, NHS history,
Visteon Factory Occupation, and on other London
working class activists like Joe Jacobs and Joe
Thomas. All were self-published by Alan under the
name of Gorter Press. Many can be found, summa-

rised or reviewed on the RAHN site (see above).

Anarchist Lives

Georgette Kokoczinski (la mimosa)

The anarchist militant Georgete Léontine Roberte Kokoczynski aka Mimosa was shot dead on 17 October 1936. She had been born on 16 August 1907 in Versailles (Ile de France) into a middle class family. She carried the surname Brivadis from her mother Léontine Brivadis and in 1908, after she was acknowledged by her father, Robert Ango, had a claim to his name as well. At the age of 16, unable to get on with her parents any longer, she left for Paris where she was taken in by André Colomer and his partner Magdalena who introduced her to libertarian ideas. She frequented the cabarets in Montmartre and was attracted to show business and poetry. In 1925 she set up home with the anarchist Fernand Fortin and belonged to the "Éducation Sociale" group set up by Fortin in Loches, [in the area around Tours] which is where she began taking part in rallies and festivals. In 1928 she returned to Paris and using the stage name Mimosa was part of a theatre group that added colour to libertarian meetings and festivals in the area through singing, poetry readings and staging dramas. She also attended the libertarian meetings of the La Revue Anarchiste, [which produced a supplement called "Matters Spanish", her partner Fortin being its manager. At around this point she qualified as a nurse. On 7 November 1931 she married the French socialist journalist Miecsejlaw Kokoczinski who was a member of the XIV Parisian branch of the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO) and took his name.

On 28 August 1936 she attended a rally in the Salle Wagram in Paris in support of the Spanish Revolution and made up her mind to get more directly involved. On 18 September 1936, she set off to fight in the Spanish civil war and enlisted in the Durruti Column's International Group. Dispatched to the Aragon front, she and the German anarchists Augusta Marx and Madeleine Gierth looked after the infirmary and the kitchens. Georgette Kokoczynski died on 17 October 1936 in the battle of Perdiguera (near Zaragoza in Aragon) alongside other nurses and dozens of foreign volunteers, [including the French activists Roger and Juiette Baudard, Yves Vitrac, Bernard Meller, Jean Delalain, Suzanne Girbe, Louis Recoulis, Rene Galissot, Jean Albertini, Jean Giralt, Raymond Berge and Henri Delaruelle.] The details of her death are not known, but it appears she was captured by the Francoist troops, then shot with some male comrades and, certain witnesses maintain, her corpse was burned in a barn. According to Antoine Gimenez's recollection, she had been captured along with Augusta Marx and both women, naked and disembowelled, but still alive, had been thrown into the front lines where a comrade put them out of their misery. In May 1937, in a tribute to her, a

French-speaking group from the FAI in the Gracia barrio of Barcelona (Fortin was a member) took the name Mimosa. [On 19 July 1937, a tribute to Mimosa was handed out: it was, written by Mujeres Libres member



Kyralina (aka Lola Iturbe).] In her article about Mimosa, [Iturbe wrote, concerning the battle of Perdiguera in which the Durruti Column's International Group sustained heavy losses: "Among the international fighters was Georgette. Initially the attack was a success, our militians reaching the outlying houses in the town by surprise; but after that they were completely encircled. Durruti issued orders for them to withdraw but these could only be partly implemented for some very substantial rebel cavalry forces were deployed. Fifty fighters who would not be coming back were left on the streets of Perdiguera. One bunch, made up of French, Italians and a few Germans ensconced itself in a house and resisted. For as long as they had any grenades and ammunition they held the rebel attacks at bay. When these ran out, the rebels closed in on the house and called upon those under siege to surrender; otherwise the building would be torched. No one agreed to come out. Every single one of these heroes was burnt to death, Georgette among them. She was 27." Iturbe also wrote in 1937 about the manner of Mimosa's death: "There are several versions of what happened. According to certain prisoners [...] she was shot by the fascists along with three other comrades from the expedition. According to the War Health Committee's version she was shot and her corpse tossed into a barn that was then set on fire by Franco's men. We may never know the precise details of her death, for the nearest witnesses were far from the scene of the tragedy. One thing is certain: she was murdered by fascists in an atrocious fashion. Such was the end of Mimosa [...]"] Georgette Kokocyznski kept a diary during her time in Spain and it was discovered after her death. It was copied by Fortin and is preserved at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam.

Translator's note

The bits in square brackets have been added by me, lifted from an outline on the website of the publishers of Antoine Gimenez's memoirs of the war in Aragon and from the notes to that book, *Les Fils de la Nuit: Souvenirs de la guerre d'Espagne* (2006)

Translated by: Paul Sharkey. From: http://puertoreal.cnt.es/es/bilbiografias-anarquistas/26 98-georgette-kokoczinski-la-mimosa.html

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