



Number 120

two pounds

Apr. 2026

A Very Interesting Letter [Marie Le Compte on flags, Louise Michel, translating Bakunin and Jo Labadie]

Comrade Tucker :

The London mail has just brought me Liberty of June 9. That it was read over and over before anything else was looked at goes without saying. How good is the article on 'Memorial Day and its Mockeries,' and very timely it reaches here to-day, our National Buncombe day! Ah! what memories brings this day of my last (three years ago) Fourth of July in America – in Fall River – with its richness and poverty, pride and dirt, hard work and 'shavings,' saw-dust and whiskey, politicians! bunting! patriotism! and general vulgarity! The Republic of Switzerland is honoring the day by floating the 'Stars and Stripes' everywhere with her own 'White Cross' and with the 'Three Bars' of the French Republic. And fit companions the pair of them are for the flag of my country! The 'White Cross' which floated from the Bundes-Rathhaus across the way while the Federal Council issued its decrees of expulsion of Socialists from Switzerland, and the 'Three Bars' of the French Republic which floated from the court house in Paris where was just read the sentence committing Anarchists to prison. 'Birds of a feather flock together,' says the old rhyme, and ill-omened birds those republics are for us poor proletaires. They have not left us even the streets! I am feeling terribly the sentence of my dear Louise Michel.[1] It is owing to chance that I am not with her in prison, having been with her on the Esplanade. I was the 'Anglaise' who wore the red scarf, and 'led,' as they call it, the rioters to pillage the bake-shops and knock the heads off the 'St. Josephs,' 'Virgin Marys,' and 'Infant Jesuses' (horrible monstrosities in plaster that, as an artist, I would clear out of the streets anyway, even if I wasn't a revolutionist). But in truth I did no 'leading.' No one leads a Paris mob. It has its own way, like a tempest. Whoever goes before it gets pushed ahead or trampled down. I got *pushed ahead*, and the knocking down came when we met the police. I was the first that was wounded in the affray, and my companions bore me to a pharmacy, thence by detour to a place of safety (while the police were knocking down the others and making arrests), and finally I got off to Switzerland to escape arrest and to recover. But a requisition may be made for me any day by the French Republic, or the Swiss Republic may expel me as a dangerous character. Thus I am, poor American proletaire, between those two ruffians of republics

which to-day are floating 'the flag of my country' – and each other's flags – in honor of what they call 'Liberty.'

But I am taking my revenge! I am translating the '*Dieu et l'Etat*' of Bakounine here beside his grave, where are so many precious memories of his life, of his work, of his genius and audacity, and of his devotion to the cause of the social revolution. It is a great comfort, (now that I am hardly able to move) that I can still, through him, fight against *authority*, can still help to destroy *governments*; but be sure I long to get back to Paris, especially for the National Fête day, for my friends talk of making *their* demonstration in the midst of the flags and the fireworks.[2] *Their* demonstration! What can it be, though, but to hang out the black flag of starvation and – if they are very daring – the *red* flag of revolt, and have them both cut down by the police in five minutes, and the 'perpetrators' arrested, tried before a packed jury, witnessed against by police, and convicted of rioting and sentenced to prison for six or eight years, or, if they're very, very lucky, escape with their lives to a 'sister Republic,' which is ready to do the same justice to their crimes. Ah me! but the flag of the 'Great Republic of the West' is well supported to-day by the flag of the Republic of France and the flag of the Republic of Switzerland. Oh! those flags! those flags! those flags! When will the proletariat shoot them down from all the Sumters of the world?[3]

How good is the letter of Joseph A. Labadie![4] I hardly ever read a letter which so made me want to know the writer. The spirit of inquiry, so honest, so modest, and so fresh (when the natural result of such theoretical and practical acquaintance as he has with 'schools' and 'doctrines' is to make one at once arrogant and *blasé*): 'Almost an Anarchist' you style him; so I'll not take the trouble to write him on the questions he puts to you, for he will be an Anarchist before long as sure as he has a *head* on his shoulders, and will answer himself – and others too. Any way, I don't think his 'hypothetical cases of individual obstinacy' were 'idle suppositions,' as you do, but every way equal to your own implied question to 'Le Révolté:' 'What's to be done with such obstreperous individuals as may refuse to be thus summarily 'collected'?' But, any way, whether theoretically 'in order' just now or not, they'll be thrown at his head

Inside: Some Yorkshire Anarchist History

the first thing when he takes the platform for Anarchy – as I feel sure he will. They’ve been asked me a hundred times in working-men’s clubs in England, and many’s the hard fight we’ve had over them. Ah me! how well they fight for their masters, those English working-men!

Is it ‘Le Révolté’ of Geneva that you are breaking a lance with now, or have you an American contemporary of the same name? I have not seen our ‘Révolté’ since Kropotkin was imprisoned, but will be at the office in a few days and will look over the files.[5] Since the arrest of Kropotkin, and Reclus having so much to do for the prisoners of Lyons and the prisoners of Paris, I can believe that different shades of thought have taken a fling in its columns. I am glad you made the challenge, because the question is *fundamental*; otherwise, I wouldn’t like to see just now an engagement between ‘Liberty’ and ‘Le Révolté.’ But I can answer for Kropotkin, who will not see Liberty (no papers being allowed in prison), that *he* would never want to ‘erect barriers between A. B., the shoemaker, and C. D., the tailor, to prevent the exchange of the shoes made by the one for the coats made by the other.’ How *could* he make such a mistake as that? Impossible! He knows too well his ‘*Qu’est-ce que la propriété?*’ and, besides knowing it too well to begin with, is ever reading it anew. In a private letter telling how he spends his time, he writes: ‘At 10 I read Proudhon half an hour, then take five minutes’ exercise by whirling my chair over my head, then read Proudhon... At 2 the guard comes to say promenade in the court. I promenade half an hour, then write on my ‘Prisons of Siberia’ for two hours (all I am ever able), then read Proudhon.’ Kropotkin must have read Proudhon through at least a dozen times in his life, but reads it still, – I should say, *therefore* reads it still, – for Proudhon’s pages are like the very eyes of Liberty, into whose depths of light the fascinated gazer looks, and looks, and looks, and finds *new depths of light*.

The prison authorities take great credit to themselves that they allow prisoners to read what ‘books’ they please, knowing that in a few months their poor victims will be too weak to read any; but they do not allow any copying or discussion of what they read with any one outside, for that would be ‘politics.’

Now I want to consult you particularly about my Bakounine.[6] I am translating it for the benefit of the Red Cross Society (English branch).[7] The secretary writes me: ‘There is but one chance to get it – here, The Free Thought Publishing Company. All the others are too shy to touch such strong stuff.’ From my knowledge of Free Thought in England I am not very hopeful of the ‘Company’ taking hold of Bakounine who knocks the very ground from under its feet. So I ask you to see what you can do about publishing it in America. For it must be published. There is a demand in England for such a book, but it

is a demand so out of the usual line that the publishers don’t know it; and I think from the letter of Joseph A. Labadie, and from other indications, that there must be a demand for such a book in America. It might be well to give it the title, ‘Anarchy, or, God and the State,’ as the inquiry now is directly about Anarchy. When that is in the market, I’m sure we’ll not hear any more of a man like Joseph A. Labadie stuffing his pockets – and his fellow creatures – with the gingerbread of Henry George. For Mr. George furnishes simply gingerbread, which excites, but does not nourish, while Bakounine gives us wheat from the virgin uplands of the world, which makes us strong, bold, rugged, and qualified to do the work that this century is called on to do, – destroy *absolutely* the old order of society and lay the foundations of the new.

My address is always ‘London, care of Tchaikovsky,’ to whose fraternal thought of me I am indebted for Liberty.

Marie Le Compte, *Proletaire*
Berne, Switzerland, July 4, 1883.

Notes

1, Michel was given a six-year sentence for her part in the demonstration of 9 March 1883.

2, ‘Many of the flags displayed Saturday in honor of the national fete were draped with crepe for Louise Michel. After the unveiling of the statue of the republic two Anarchists stuck a black flag upon the statue. The people surrounding the statue immediately seized the flag and tore it to pieces. One arrest was made. Black flags were displayed in some of the more obscure streets of the city.’ ‘France at the Fete’ *Savannah morning news* (Savannah), July 17, 1883.

3, The Union flag was shot down during the attack on Fort Sumter in 1861 which began the American Civil War.

4, *Liberty*, 9 June 1883.

5, Kropotkin was imprisoned in 1883 for five years for belonging to the International Working Men’s Association. The book he was at work on was *In Russian and French Prisons*.

6, Le Compte’s translation of Bakounin’s *God and the State* was projected to be published by the International Publishing Company. The version serialised in *Truth* (San Francisco) was translated by ‘Miss K. [...] at Le Compte’s suggestion.’ See ‘Radical reading: Print culture and the San Francisco labor movement, 1880-1889’ by Marie Louise Silva. <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.ucxp-cm3h>

7, i.e the Red Cross of the Russian Revolutionary Party or Red Cross of the People’s Will (no connection to the International Committee of the Red Cross). Nikolai Tchaikovsky in London worked for this Red Cross, founded by Vera Zaslulich and Pyotr Lavrov.

Source: https://archive.org/details/sim_liberty-1881_1883-08-25_2_13 ■

Looking for Marie Le Compte

Le Compte belonged to the Socialist Labor Party in the USA and was a delegate to the International Social Revolutionary Congress held in London in 1881. She was in Paris in 1883 when Louise Michel raised the black flag at the hunger march that turned into a riot. Her mention of ‘the black flag of starvation’ and ‘the red flag of revolt’ suggests that anarchists in the 1880s were drawing on the black flag as part of a tradition of working class protest.[1] The letter showed some of her connections and demonstrated that she could write readable radical prose. It made me go looking for more about her. She’s mentioned on the page of the Kate Sharpley Library Wiki devoted to the 1881 Congress.[2] It didn’t take long before I read Paul Avrich’s mention of her in *The Haymarket Tragedy* as ‘an exotic and somewhat mysterious figure’ who ‘styled herself “Miss Le Compte, Prolétaire.”’ [3] I thought it was understandable that Le Compte remained mysterious to as good a historian as Avrich when his focus was elsewhere. But it seems that plenty of mystery remains.

The American years

Mari Jo Buhle mentioned that Le Compte was ‘secretary of Manhattan’s “American” branch and later acted as assistant editor of the Socialists’ English-language paper the *Labor Standard*.’ [4] In July 1879 Le Compte addressed striking weavers in Fall River, Massachusetts: ‘if there should not be a strike on this particular point of wages, there should be a strike against homes that are hog-pens.’ The British secularist Holyoake described her as ‘a real Nihilist lady’ and was shocked by her ‘brilliant readiness of invective’. [5] In Fall River she worked on the *Labor Standard* with George Gunton. Historian Mary Blewett described Le Compte’s involvement in the radical press: ‘M. P. Le Compte, a Nihilist from New York City who had been associate editor of the *Labor Standard* for two years and had written for Swinton’s *New York Sun*. She had also lived in New Bedford for a while as a correspondent for Gunton, signed her many articles as “proletaire” and had managed the paper when Gunton was on speaking tours. Gunton’s oldest children knew her well, helping her set type by hand and getting out the weekly editions.’ [6]

1881, London

Le Compte’s mandate for the 1881 Congress recorded that her ‘tongue and pen’ had been ‘devoted to the revolutionary movement’.[7] The report raises many questions. Were there really connections between Molly Maguires and Russian Nihilists in New York? Le Compte was in a position to know, but also in a position where she might think it a good idea to invent such connections. Did she get her

confidence in the revolutionary potential of those who’d previously been involved in agitation against Chinese workers in California from Burnette Haskell?[8]

Max Nettlau said ‘Miss Le Compte was a very well-meaning, but intellectually unsophisticated, young American of French descent who always took what she considered the most revolutionary stance.’ [9] Which is damning with faint praise but he continued ‘More precisely, when I look through the English text, it drew attention to the terrorist-revolutionary tendencies of left-wing elements present in the Irish Land League, among the Pennsylvania miners (the Molly Maguires), etc., and to much extra-legal activity in American working-class life, especially in the West, direct action tendencies, etc., which really existed and temporarily shaped the IWW twenty years later. These tendencies, still present in American workers at that time, to assert their personal independence by all means, were historically probably a remnant of similar tendencies among European artisans in earlier centuries; to present them to the average European worker accustomed to obedience was not in the least inappropriate’.[10]

While in London, Le Compte placed ads in *The Radical* ‘To the Secretaries of the Working Men’s Clubs and Associations of London. Miss Le Compte, Of the Socialistic Party in America, will have great pleasure in addressing the WORKING CLASSES of this country during her stay here.’ [11] On 4 September 1881 she spoke on ‘the International Association of Working Men’ to the Battersea Liberal Club. In October Christian Socialist (and future Liberal MP) J.C. Durant responded with the gradualist view. ‘That lady suggested that the working classes should meet force by force, and that they should avail themselves of Science in order to procure the most deadly weapons. To talk of meeting force by force was misleading. She supposed that force was already employed to subjugate the working classes. That was not true. The force of the police was exercised for the benefit alike of all honest men’. ‘Working men must be better informed and more unselfish, then they might procure for their children those reforms which were so much needed.’[12]

In October 1881 Le Compte spoke at the Stratford Dialectical & Radical Club on ‘The Revolters of the Seas’. Paul Avrich thought this was ‘a paean to pirates’. [13] Her report suggests that this actually was a discussion of (unless it was an appeal for) ‘a secret society’ to send ‘its members among the steerage passengers of ships to teach them to rebel against the close quarters, the bad air, the bad food and the bad treatment of the ships officials.’[14]

In November 1881 she was on the platform of Henry George meeting on ‘Land and Labour’ in Dublin. *Life* attacked the ‘shrieking sisterhood’ and lamented their sympathy with the Irish Land League:

‘Few persons, perhaps, ever heard of the American Miss Le Compte; and no one can have regarded with any serious consideration the wild lectures she delivered in London, advocating the use of dynamite as a political weapon. But every one knows what good service, in the service of education Miss Helen Taylor has rendered from her position as a member of the School Board; and her numerous friends and admirers must regret that she should have thought fit to transfer her practical knowledge and experience from a worthy sphere of usefulness to go and help in fostering an unhealthy and lawless agitation in Ireland.’ [15]

1883, Paris, Berne and translating Bakunin

‘I am feeling terribly the sentence of my dear Louise Michel. It is owing to chance that I am not with her in prison, having been with her on the Esplanade. I was the “Anglaise” who wore the red scarf, and “led,” as they call it, the rioters to pillage the bake-shops and knock the heads off the “St. Josephs,” “Virgin Marys,” and “Infant Jesuses” (horrible monstrosities in plaster that, as an artist, I would clear out of the streets anyway, even if I wasn’t a revolutionist).’ [16]

In Switzerland Le Compte plugged into anarchist networks and began translating Bakunin’s *God and the State*, aiming to raise funds for Red Cross of the Russian Revolutionary Party (or Red Cross of the People’s Will). Le Compte’s translation was projected to be published by the International Publishing Company. One manuscript went to Nikolai Tchaikovsky in London ‘but still lies in my portfolio without any use on account of want of a courageous publisher in this country’.[17] Another copy was seized by the French police in 1885.[18] In the end, the version serialised in *Truth* (San Francisco) was translated by ‘Miss K. [...] at Le Compte’s suggestion.’ [19] Le Compte did translate Kropotkin’s *Appeal to the Young*; it was serialised in *Truth* (San Francisco) and then reprinted in *The Labor Enquirer* (Denver, Colorado) in January and February 1884.

1884-6, Marseilles

‘Towards the end of 1884, she went to Marseilles at the insistence of Justin Mazade, who had met her in Geneva. Her knowledge of several languages – including Italian, Spanish, English, German, and probably Russian – allowed her to maintain regular correspondence with people all over the world and to facilitate contact between anarchists of different nationalities then living in Marseilles. In 1885, she was a member, alongside Justin Mazade, J. Torrens, and Ugo Parrini, of the editorial staff of the newspaper *Le Droit Social* (Marseilles, two issues in May and June), whose manager was Alphonse Lauze.’ [20]

In early 1885 she was arrested and books and

manuscripts taken. ‘Her home, a boarding house on Rue Molière, was searched twice, and on February 14, 1885, a large quantity of documents in various languages (books, pamphlets, newspapers, and letters) were seized and handed over to the public prosecutor. This search followed a denunciation by her landlady, who had called her a “thief.”’ [21] Le Compte reported being out of prison (but still trying to get her documents back) in June.[22]

In August 1885 Le Compte translated Severin Feraud’s letter about the Barcelona congress for Henry Seymour’s *The Anarchist*. Le Compte was part of Marseilles’ ‘Union of Peoples’ group.[23] In February 1886 Le Compte reported for *The Anarchist* from a mass meeting in Marseilles. [24]

Final and first mysteries

Le Compte’s biography on Militants-Anarchistes states ‘In 1888, she settled in Aix-en-Provence for a few months, then left the department. Her trail is then lost.’ [25] Her last appearance in *The Anarchist* was an acknowledgement of her New Year greetings for 1888.[26]

In 1893 a brief, mocking piece reprinted in several British papers reported her reappearance in London. ‘Mademoiselle le Compte, the Yankee-French Anarchist, prophetess and agitator, is again in London. The last time the Sibyl was there she rose in a meeting held in the Tottenham Court Road to “say a few words,” and spoke for nearly two hours. Whenever the chairman moved to stop her she pushed him back into his chair. Mademoiselle is “petite, dark-eyed and dark-haired.”’ [27]

More questions are thrown up by a much earlier piece. In 1867 Bennet Burleigh produced a long account of the adventures of the ‘bohemian’ journalist Minnie Le Compte.[28] Some of Le Compte’s stories there may need to be taken with a pinch of salt.

It’s curious how far back it feels to read about things before the Haymarket affair of 1886-7. Le Compte made a mark as a speaker, journalist and translator and operated in various radical networks (socialist, anarchist, Irish nationalist, Russian Nihilist). I can’t claim that at the time she was unknown. Nor that she should be pulled out of her time as someone to celebrate uncritically. Newspapers that I have not looked at must contain more information on her remarkable life. At one time she was a key figure in anarchist networks. Without an obituary the end of her story remains a mystery.

Notes

1, ‘A Very Interesting Letter [Marie Le Compte on flags, Louise Michel, translating Bakunin and Jo Labadie]’

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/7sqx7x>

2,

<http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/w/page/6689>

[6462/International%20Revolutionary%20Socialist%20Conference%2C%20London%202014-19%20%20July%201881](https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/4qrhd0)

3, Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, p.56 (1984)

4, Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American socialism, 1870-1920*, p.21 (1981)

5, George Holyoake, *Among the Americans: And A Stranger in America*, p.146-8 (1881)

6, Mary H. Blewett, *Constant turmoil : the politics of industrial life in nineteenth-century New England*, p.290 (2000)

7, Marie Le Compte at the International Social Revolutionary Congress, mandate and report <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/4qrhd0>

8, See Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* 68-70

9, Max Nettlau, *Anarchisten und Sozialrevolutionäre* (volume 3 of his *Geschichte der Anarchie*) p.197 (1931), seen thanks to the Bibliothek der Freien.

10, Max Nettlau, *Anarchisten und Sozialrevolutionäre* p.205-6.

11, The contact address was 10, Conrad Street, Loddiges Road, Hackney. *The Radical* 15 Oct. 1881

12, 'A Reply to Miss Le Compte' *The Radical*, Oct.

15, 1881 <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/h18c89>

13, Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* p.56

14, Marie Le Compte at the International Social Revolutionary Congress, mandate and report

15, *Life*, Thursday 17 November 1881. Taylor (1831-1907) was a feminist and socialist.

16, 'A Very Interesting Letter'

17, *Liberty*, December 15, 1883

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/benjamin-tucker-liberty-vol-ii-no-15>

18, See 'Letter from Miss Le Compte [June 1885]' <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/g1jzwj>

19, See 'Radical reading: Print culture and the San Francisco labor movement, 1880-1889' by Marie Louise Silva. <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.ucxp-cm3h>

20, LECOMPTE, Marie, Paula "MINNIE" <https://militants-anarchistes.info/spip.php?article10730>

21, LECOMPTE, Marie, Paula "MINNIE"

22, See Letter from Miss Le Compte [June 1885]

23, Anarchism in Spain / Letter from Marie Le Compte [1885]

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

24, Revolutionary Mass Meeting in Marseilles [1886] <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/0001qr>

25, LECOMPTE, Marie, Paula "MINNIE"

26, 'To Correspondents', *The Anarchist*, February 1888.

27, *Glasgow Evening News*, Wednesday November 15, 1893

28, Our New York Letter [Minnie Le Compte in 1867] <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/x3fhtp>

Thanks go to everyone who helped. ■



New books on 'punk spaces'

Three new books look at places (in Britain) where punk and anarchism interacted.

Nick Soulsby's written about Centro Iberico (in both incarnations as anarchist club and squatted music venue). There's a lot of photos and scans of fliers and pieces from the anarchist press. He detours to discuss the failure of Autonomy Centre in Wapping. Money was an issue, but so was friction between critics of 'pathetic infantile graffiti' (103) and 'turgid anarchist tomes' (107). Soulsby's sympathies are with the punks but it made me wonder how, given that cultural and ideological gulf, other places like 121 could last so long. But they did.

David Insurrection lists punk places across London. It's a bit of blizzard 'who squatted where' but he pays as much attention to the politics as the music. The ill-fated benefit gig at the Conway Hall gets mentioned, which led to Crass's 'Bloody Revolutions, a pointed attack on the revolutionary left.' (64) Crass's 'punching nazis will turn you into Pol Pot' attitude was alien to many anarchists, punk or not (as the book shows). Insurrection has talked to lots of people who give an evocative picture of life in what seems, now, like another world. It's also bang up to date with revelations about spycops (in particular Bob Lambert, 247).

Bradford's 1 in 12 Club has doing punk and anarchism since 1981. *Not Just A Building* celebrates that history and energy in the words of its members. There are loads of photos and fliers. Top line: 'That's not Santa Claus. That's my dad!' (110)

Prank Sinatra

Born of Struggle, Living in Hope: The Anarcho-Punk Lives of the Centro Iberico, 1971-1983 by Nick Soulsby 9798887441221

https://pmpress.org/index.php?l=product_detail&p=1825

Anarcho-Punk: Music and Resistance in London 1977-1988 by David Insurrection 9781916864443

<https://www.earthislandbooks.com/product-page/anarcho-punk-music-and-resistance-in-london-1977-1988-by-david-insurrection>

Not Just A Building – At The 1 in 12

<https://1in12.bigcartel.com/product/not-just-a-building-at-the-1-in-12> (currently out of print but there's a link to the podcast the quotes come from.) [Graphic: Richard Warren from CPAR5 (1980)] ■

Tony Grogan

Tony Grogan, a founder member of the 1 in 12 Club passed away on 12 January 2026. He died peacefully after several days being cared for by the wonderful staff at the Marie Curie Hospice in Bradford. Chris, the love of his life was by his side to the end.

From everyone at the 1 in 12 Club we send our sincerest condolences to Chris and Tony's family.

His passing is a huge loss to Chris, family and of course everyone who knew him.

Tony was a huge influence on many of us who got to know him through our involvement with the 1 in 12 which he described as "family aside, the most important thing in his life." Despite his illness he continued to support the club and everyone who had its best interests at heart and endeavoured to help as much as he was able right to the end, attending meetings last year about the renovation and refurbishment of Albion Street last year.

Tony preferred to work quietly, and in the background. He absolutely hated the limelight and being subject to any public attention. He shaped the democracy of the 1 in 12, was responsible for the club constitution and negotiated the application for a registration certificate for Albion Street despite determined police opposition.

Tony was the driving force behind 1 in 12 Publications, *Knee Deep in Shit* magazine and the published investigations into Bradford Freemasons, The Economic League, and Eric Pickles, the then leader of the Council.[1] Everything he did was always impeccably researched and carefully presented and the impact on local (an on occasion national) politics was profound.

He was integral to coordinating the Clubs' solidarity and support for the Miners in 1984 and the 1 in 12 publications first book was *Striking Stuff*, a book of poetry by miners' wife Jean Gittins to raise money for the NUM Solidarity Fund.[2]

Tony was integral to the creation of the Club Library, the trip to Spain, Reclaiming May Day, numerous WEA evening classes, the club website. His influence is impossible to describe.

He demanded high standards from all of us and had high expectations of what we could all achieve together through the Club. And yet he was always encouraging and supportive of everyone who tried to make the club the best it could be. That approach and its ambition ensured we achieved mighty things. Albion Street will forever be a testament to his importance. I think it's fair to say that the club would not have started, developed, survived, and thrived without his influence, inspiration and example.

Tony Grogan – Thank you for what you gave all of us. You will be greatly missed.

Matt Hannam

KSL Notes

1, The comrades at The Sparrows' Nest have

digitised: An issue of *Knee Deep In Shit* (1985)

https://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/collections/public_archive/11879.pdf

Doing Business : A Mischief-Makers Handbook by Dirk Spig (1 in 12 Publications, 1987).

https://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/collections/public_archive/705.pdf

Against Democracy : The True Story of the Economic League – 1919-Present Day by Spig (1 in 12 Publications, 1988).

https://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/collections/public_archive/13106.pdf

2, See <https://libcom.org/article/striking-stuff-jean-gittins> ■

Matt Sollitt (1840-1915)

Son of the shoe maker Matthew Sollitt senior, and of Elizabeth nee Whincup, Matthew Sollitt was born on 9th May 1840 in Walmgate in York. He left church school at the age of 12 and worked for *The Yorkshireman* newspaper in York and later for a York solicitor. Still very young, he joined the Merchant Navy. Whilst on land in France he was trapped between two coal wagons on a railway track and laid out in the mortuary as dead, signs of life subsequently being discovered. He made a recovery and was mentioned in *The Gazeteer* which was the official paper for both Navies and other forces. It listed all those who had been killed in the services and remarked that Sollitt was the only person to be listed as killed who had made a recovery! He returned to sea and was again mentioned in newspapers. He served on board a ship in the Baltic which got into trouble. The ship was in danger of capsizing because its yard arms and masts were covered in ice, causing it to list dangerously. He single-handedly climbed the masts with an axe and chipped away the ice, saving the whole crew. He was subsequently invalidated out of the Merchant Navy.

He now joined the Royal Navy, faking his age to be admitted. However his skull was fractured when a piece of the iron work on a mast fell on him whilst on the sailing ship *HMS Armageddon*. (He was not shot in the head at Sevastopol during the Crimean War as alleged in Lipman's book *Memoirs of a Socialist Business Man*.) He was returned to England and received a pension from the Royal Hospital in London. Later on he received treatment for his injury in at the Leeds Royal Infirmary, in the course of his hospital confinement undergoing three operations.

According to Rudolf Rocker in *The London Years*, Sollitt 'was a different man after that. He had never shown any particular interest in reading; his intellectual capacity had seemed small. Now he became a voracious reader. He gave up the sea, and settled in Leeds and became a French polisher. He used to tell this story at all his public meetings, he said everybody ought to get a knock on the head to

make him think.’

In 1884 Matt was, along with Tom Maguire and others, to join the Leeds Socialist Club, which became a branch of the Social Democratic Federation. Later that year he accompanied Maguire and two others in leaving the SDF and setting up a branch of the Socialist League in Leeds. He became one of the League’s speakers, speaking indoors and outdoors, often at the Vicar’s Croft pitch (he is recorded as reading out *Misery and the Way Out* from a William Morris text at St. James Café on Briggate in Leeds on 18th May 1886). E. P. Thompson in his book on William Morris tells us that ‘Twice a month, four or five of the branch would mix propaganda and pleasure, tramping through the South Yorkshire coalfield or the Dales, holding meetings and selling literature on the way.’ In this way Sollitt and the others slowly built up the League in Leeds. He supported the League’s agitation around the building workers strike in 1889, which won a wage increase. The following year in June and July he was involved in League support for the gas workers’ strike which took on near-insurrectionary proportions.

Sollitt was always strongly anti-parliamentarian and gravitated towards the anarchist current in the League. Rocker, who met him when he was 67, describes him as a ‘delightful old man, full of vigour and vitality, more than many younger people’ and that he attended every meeting, and was always a ‘ready and lively speaker’. Rocker describes him as tall and lean, completely bald with an ‘impressive grey beard’. And that he had ‘fine features, and wise eyes’. Lipman says that he would ‘show us children his bare scalp, and the layer of skin that covered the wound could be seen pulsating’.

Rocker discovered that he had read an ‘amazing amount of philosophy and natural sciences’. As well as being active within the Socialist and Anarchist movements, he was also very active in the Freethought movement in Leeds.

Rocker says that ‘he had a gift of expressing himself clearly and briefly. His great fault was his quick temper. He always got furious when his opponent in an argument wandered away from his subject or didn’t follow his point logically. He was a first-class lecturer. If his audience showed any grasp of the subject he would develop it in a masterly way, like a trained university professor. But if his temper was roused he was a fighter. He was a stormy petrel.’

He served a jail sentence in Armley prison for addressing a large crowd in Victoria Square in front of Leeds Town Hall with the words ‘The laws passed within these walls are as black as the walls outside’.

During the years that were comparatively bad for the anarchist movement in Britain he carried on open air speaking with Billy MacQueen (see his biography at libcom).[1] ‘At the time of the Boer War, when no socialist in Leeds dared to speak against it in the

open air, he stood up and got a hearing. I think that he would have preferred to be stoned to death by an infuriated mob rather than be silent. Once McQueen (sic) had been badly knocked about, almost lynched at an open-air meeting; the following Sunday Mat Solid (sic) appeared at the same spot, and seemed to be by saying in his speech to be inviting the crowd to treat him as they had treated McQueen (sic). Yet nothing happened. They listened to him. Sometimes an angry murmur ran through the crowd. But they heard him to the end, and they let him go without making a move against him’.

He died in Leeds General Infirmary after an accident on 13th November 1915 after falling from a step ladder at his home in Portland Place. A screwdriver he was holding went through his ear into his brain. He is buried in Holbeck Cemetery, in Beeston in Leeds. *Freedom* reported in its December 1915 issue that ‘We regret to have to record the death of an old and valued worker in the Anarchist movement. Matt Sollitt, who had spent some forty-six years of his life in Leeds, was known amongst all classes of advanced thinkers. He had many friends in the Freethought and Anarchist movements to whom his death will come as a distinct personal loss. He will be missed in many circles but no more so than in Victoria Square in front of the Leeds Town Hall, where, in spite of his seventy six years, he was to be found nightly assisting the cause of Freedom.’

Nick Heath

Sources:

Lipman, M. I. *Memoirs of a Socialist Businessman*
Quail, John. *The Slow Burning Fuse*
Rocker, Rudolf. *The London Years*.
Thompson, E. P. *William Morris*
Page created by descendant of Matt, with copy of his birth certificate etc:

http://zarzaruk.tripod.com/new_page_2.htm

Note

1, <https://libcom.org/article/macqueen-william-billy-1875-1908>

Source: <https://libcom.org/article/sollitt-matt-1840-1915> [March 2026] ■

Leeds Anarchist History

The Ford Maguire Society is dedicated to the socialist, feminist and radical history of Leeds. Shaun Cohen from the Society has written an essay looking at the early history of anarchism in Leeds (to the 1920s) and its relationship to the labour movement. It has an appendix on Northern Collaboration among anarchists. It will give you an idea of what Leeds’ anarchists were interested in, and more names to follow up. Read it at:

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/cc2hr6> ■

Cologne FAU hosted miners kids from Blyth

It has been completely forgotten that the Cologne local federation of the anarcho-syndicalist FAU in October 84 invited 21 miners' kids from Bates colliery (Blyth) led by Ronnie Campbell, then president of the local NUM and later MP and his wife Deidre, for a fortnight's holiday in Cologne and the countryside near by. Transport in England to and from Dover was covered by the Direct Action Movement. All other costs from picking up the group in Ostend until taking them back there were covered by the FAU and minor donations from sympathetic local people.

The kids were treated to an interesting programme with ice skating, going to the football ground, visiting Cologne cathedral and the old part of the city etc. Even taxi drivers gave the kids a free ride or the entrance fees of certain places were not taken as a token of solidarity from ordinary people. The local federation of the Spanish CNT in exile contributed as well and came to Cologne to meet the kids. [The kids stayed for 2 weeks.]

Ralph Aurand

From comment at

<https://anarchistnews.org/content/invisible-or-just-underrated#comments> (A Response to 'Invisible or just underrated? Thoughts on anarchist solidarity with the Miners' Strike of 1984-85'
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/6q58vk>)

Library update [March 2026]

New treasures on the website:

Spain

José Peirats Why I Was Expelled From the CNT
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/nvx2tk>

Imanol Some of the Libertarian Guerrilla Bands Operating in the Cádiz-To-Málaga Area
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/9kd6zc>

Agustín Guillamón In Opposition to the Historiographer's Dismissal of 'Homage to Catalonia' and Rewriting Civil War-Time Cerdana : A Critical Comparison of Pous/Solé and Gascón/Guillamón
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/r4xk66>
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/z34x3t>

Maruja Lara, militia-woman with the Maroto Column <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/qrfmhn>

Miners' Strike: Texts from 1984-85

Syndicalism rediscovered / Civil War in the Coalfields: Coal Convoys Preparing to Outflank Pickets; Government Intends to Bankrupt NUM / Editorial on resistance in the mining communities [1985] / [Report on return to work at Kellingly Colliery]

All via <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/93207x>

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Lives

Frank Fernández (1932-2026) Historian of Cuban Anarchism, Libertarian Activist and Exiled Intellectual by Daniel Pinós

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

A Few Words About **Martial Desmoulin's**

Pierre Célestin LENTENGRE, aka Pierre LENTENTE by Jean Maitron updated by Rolf Dupuy

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/prr759>

Deborah and Sam Frydman portraits and biographies by Anatoly Dubovik are available at

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/5qfvsc> and

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/mcvg5r> (See

Dubovik's bios of her siblings Fanya and Yanish Yankel via

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/flvjb1>).

George Cores

The text of his pamphlet *Personal Recollections of the Anarchist Past* is now up:

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vq84bd>

Growth of the Modern Anarchist Movement in Great Britain <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/x69rr3>

A Glimpse of Life on New Earth, Year 2040

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/ht78pf>

Digitised

Anarchist Communism Second Edition 1895 by Peter Kropotkin www.katesharpleylibrary.net/jwszw4

Anarchism In the May Movement, France '68 by

Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit

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

Christiebooks (website rescue) [gradual]

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/25494r>.

Our 'feathered friends'

Our comrades at the Sparrows' Nest in Nottingham plan to get to grips with posters in 2026. They ask for donations to support their work and, in particular, help cover rent for storage space. Pictures and details at <https://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/index.php/14-news-and-events/289-nest-update-feb-2026>

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