

K.S.L.

**BULLETIN OF THE
KATE SHARPLEY
LIBRARY** NO.4 50p

A REBEL SPIRIT

Leah (Leila) Feldman, who was cremated at East London in the presence of some fifty comrades from DAM, ABC, Black Flag and the feminist movement, on January 7th 1993, was a history lesson in herself. She merits more than a obituary.

She was born (she always said) in Warsaw around 1899. Her British passport says she was born in Odessa, but in view of her problems rthrough life, she must have had many occasions to "change" birthdays, names, birthplaces and nationalities. The problems faced by a woman just in travelling independently in the old days were immense, apart from her anarchist activities. While she was still a schoolgirl she became interested in anarchism (her mother used to hide her shoes so that she could not attend meetings, then illegal). Finally she ran away to her sister in London to earn her own living at the sewing machine.

Working in the sweatshops of the East End, she became active in the Yiddish-speaking anarchist movement that flourished at the time and vanished. She was possibly the last survivor of that Jewish workers movement. When the Russian Revolution was thought to have come about and the army was in rebellion the overwhelming majority of Russian Jewish male anarchists, who had resisted conscription up to then, joined up to return to Russia. The women Anarchists had a more difficult problem - many with husbands or companions who were able to go back arranged to follow later but that was the last they heard of their menfolk, overtaken by the triumph of Bolshevism. This Jewish (in the sense they used, neither racial nor religious but language) anarchist movement, gradually dwindled away in the years. A few remaining males survived until the early fifties, and the women, often married into English dockers' families, ended with Leah so far as this country is concerned.

Leah, however, independently made her own way back, a tremendous task. Viewing Russia from the train

a comrade jestingly remarked she was like Madam Butterfly watching for her lover (we played "One Fine Day" at her funeral, and also Paul Robeson singing the equally appropriate "Joe Hill"). Unfortunately it was no fine day and Leah, as a working woman, was one of the first to see what would be the effects of Bolshevism, something one of the intellectuals who visited could see.

She attended Kropotkin's funeral, the last permitted anarchist demonstration before the long dark night (they stole the flowers from Lenin's tribute in the House of the People, but all those paroled from prison for the day returned to jail).

Leah left Moscow to join Makhno's army in the Ukraine (perhaps that was when she decided she was born in Odessa), which fought into the last against Tsarism, Bolshevism, the Social Democratic oppression and foreign intervention. She was one of a number of Jewish Anarchists who were living testimony to the lie started by the Soviet historian Yaroslavsky and accepted by academics universally (including many encyclopaedists copying each other) about Makhno's pogroms. Though she did not actually fight, as a few women (who could ride horseback) did, she joined the train that followed the army and prepared clothes and food for the orphans and strays they picked up everywhere. For the rest of her life she was to follow the pattern of behind-the-lines support for revolutionary action.

When the army was defeated, Leah took advantage of one 'privilege' offered to women - she changed nationality by a formal marriage to a German anarchist, and left the country. They did not meet again. She made her way to Paris and then back to London. She still wanted to travel and was involved with the Anarchist movement in many countries. She was however tied by her German "mar-

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riage" once she had left Russia, but was later free to contract another formal marriage to a British ex-serviceman, named Downes. In a deprecating obituary in 'Freedom', which takes into account only her selling of 'Freedom' during and a few years after the war, it is said he was her lover. This is rubbish. He was a derelict, like many wounded old soldiers after 1918, found for her by Charles Lahr and paid £10 for his services, lent by the Workers Friend group and repaid by Leah over a period. (Typically, Charlie joked that to find a real husband would cost a lot more). They never met again until Leah found by official communication her "husband" was in a geriatric hospital and she used to visit with presents of tobacco. When she was abroad, Polly Witcop (sister of Milly Rocker and Rose Witcop) undertook the visits for her.

Leah visited both Poland and mandated Palestine once she was a British citizen, working her way to both places. In Palestine she organised a federation of Anarchists, mostly old friends from the old country. One surprise was her old friend Paula Green, who had been pressurised into marriage in Russia, so had decided on an atheistic Socialist-Zionist with whom she was in love. Forced into exile he had obviously chosen (Ottoman) Palestine. Paula knew he was into active Socialist politics but thought it as impossible he would ever be in government as he thought her ideas impossible. Green changed his name to Ben Gurion, and after 1945 became Prime Minister. His wife did not leave him but did not take part in any public activities, and the whisper in Socialist-Zionist circles was that she was mad and could not be taken on an official platform. ("Be-



Giovanna Berneri, editor of Naples anarchist paper
with Leah Feldman 1955

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cause he becomes the baker do you have to be the baker's wife?" Leah asked her back in 1935, ten years before Paula faced the final humiliation as Premier's wife though a still believing if passive anarchist, getting the reply, with a shrug, "So what do I get but the smell of the bakery?").

Eventually Leah decided there was nothing she could do in Palestine and returned to London at the end of 1935 when I met her for the first time. She helped raise finance for the German sailors who organised a resistance group in the thirties, and took a tremendous part in activities for the Spanish movement when the civil war broke out. I used to go to her flat in Lordship Park (Stoke Newington) and hump great parcels of food and clothing which she had collected from her fellow fur machinists. She could never understand why I could "only raise pennies among my friends when she raised pounds" and never appreciated I was still at school, which for some obscure reason I was somewhat abashed at mentioning in then mostly ageing anarchist circles.

She took part in the selling of "Freedom" after the war and still thought of it as Kropotkin's paper until her death, but a lot of people made that mistake. She could never understand in later years why they persistently ignored her except when she gave them money, and never visited her when she was ill, but the truth was they resented her criticism that Kropotkin intended it for the Anarchist movement not for a few cronies of one man who had seized control. When "Black Flag" came along she supported it equally always saying to me, "How is it that the people in this group are so different from the Freedom Group?" - I always answered "Because they're Anarchists" but I fear she didn't want to hear that.

Leah was associated with Spanish women anarchists in a joint working collective of different Anarchist women in Holborn (London) with Marie Goldberg, Sucedo Portales and others, ever since 1939. How, with the confusion of tongues, broken English, Yiddish, Polish, bits of French, Spanish and Catalan, Indian-English of one and broad Scots of another, plus the total lack of verbal communication of two Cypriot women, one Greek and the other Turkish, they could ever have understood each other was a mystery to many, but they made up for it in volume, and maybe that's how new languages are born. (The postman once said to me on the stairs, "I can never work out what nationality those ladies are - they told me they come from somewhere in Anarchy but Christ knows where that is.") Leah had to give up work when her eyesight went after an operation (she was blind in one eye thereafter and increasingly so in the other),

She wanted to give aid to the Spanish Resistance in

spite of all, and during the turbulent sixties, with the International First of May Movement, helped in taking care of the armoury, even taking it with her luggage into Spain. She was known affectionately by Catalans, always prone to giving nicknames, as "la yaya (granny) makhnowista".

In her seventies she revisited Warsaw in a vain attempt to find her relatives. A Polish journalist took her round as she refused to believe everything and everybody in the ghetto had vanished. "Maybe the neighbours know something," she said and they had to show her visual proof that the neighbourhood had been flattened, the Polish inhabitants dispersed and scarcely one of the Jewish residents remaining anywhere in Poland other than those who had come in after the war. Presumably this episode appeared on local TV or radio as the journalist took enormous trouble in convincing her of the reality.

Her last years were sad. Not only were all her family and early friends dead, there was nobody left to whom she could even talk in her own language. She still supported anarchist meetings and went on holiday independently but in the last years of her life accompanied by Margaret, Jessica, Peter, Terry from Black Flag. One of us used to take her to the annual Anarchist Book Fair whenever her health permitted - she always sat at the Freedom Press stall in the hope of meeting some of the people she knew in Freedom who only appeared on the scene that day of the year, if at all, stubbornly refusing to admit it was now quite a different ball game.

As she got increasingly deaf and almost totally blind, she had to surrender some of her cherished independence and allow people to do things for her. She became paranoiac, argumentative and even aggressive in her nineties, after a series of horrendous street accidents, feeling her best friends were trying to

Continued over



Leah on leaving Russia

ALDRED OF GLASGOW

Recalling the history of the soapbox in our last issue, mention was made of Guy Aldred, and the fact it was high time a biography of him was published. In fact it was published in 1988.

John Taylor Caldwell, *Come Dungeons Dark: The life and times of Guy Aldred, Glasgow Anarchist*. Luath Press, Barr, Ayrshire, 290 pp. £6 95. Available from Bob Jones c/o Northern Herald Books, 6 Lillian Street, Bradford BD4 9LP, Yks. +£1 for postage. Approx. cost USA 13 dollars)

Guy Aldred was one of Glasgow's most enduring rebels. He was a master debater and orator on the street corner, in the large public hall or on the hustings. At one time a household name, he is now, some 25 years after his death, in danger of being forgotten. If he is remembered at all, it is as the "knickerbocker politician" and as one of the "last great socialist characters of Clydeside". Little is known of the man behind such

hackneyed phrases. But now John Caldwell has given us a fuller picture of this remarkable man in a well-written narrative accompanied by some rarely seen photographs.

Caldwell was a long time associate and sometime election agent for Aldred and is well qualified for the task of writing the biography of this "Minister of the Gospel of Revolt". It is his devotion to keeping Aldred's memory alive that has been largely responsible for preserving the Aldred Collection in Glasgow's Mitchell Library. After a twelve year struggle to get the book published he brought out this excellent, highly readable biography.

The book chronicles the many causes Aldred fought for - war resistance in both world wars, Indian independence, free speech on Glasgow Green and the anti-fascist struggle in Spain. These were often the lonely struggles of the pioneer and sometimes resulted in spells of imprisonment. How many were campaigning for Indian independence in 1909 or for birth control

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kill her by driving cars or motorbikes straight at her. The fact that these dedicated young people still persevered week after week looking after her, being fond of her, and remembering all she had done in the past, says a lot for them especially, in addition to those already named, the feminists Ann and Cathy, and DAM people like Ken and Helen.

George Cores said that "most of the work that was done (in building the Anarchist movement) was due to the activities of working men and women, most of whom did not appear as orators or writers in printed papers". Cathy and Margaret, and our late comrade Leo Rosser, obtained in a series of interviews, and a video, notes of her life which have been transcribed but are voluminous though chronologically jumbled. We hope that these can be edited into a coherent volume, which will be well worth publishing, far more so than the oft-repeated hagiographies of the 'secular saints' of the movement in the past.

Albert Meltzer

Leah Feldman in her last years



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ALDRED OF GLASGOW

in the 1920s?

- Besides tackling the big issues of the day, Aldred was willing to offer help and advice to those in trouble. As the poor man's lawyer he led many crusades for the underdog, serving the people Glasgow well from his office on Queen Street or later from the Strickland Press on George Street.

Where did Aldred get the strength to continue for so long, and largely alone? We learn from Caldwell that it wasn't from belief in the Almighty, for Aldred was an atheist from an early age. The answer lies in Aldred's passionately held belief in "anti-parliamentary communism". This was a particular form of self-governing socialism or anarchism rather than any form of State control. Such ideas may sound strange, but they can be summed up in the simple yet far-reaching philosophy of "think for yourself" - accept nothing on trust from any central authority. RJ

Comment by FAC: The reviewer and to some extent the author fall into the very hero worship Aldred himself warned against. Aldred was the pioneer or prototype of today's "grass roots movement" with its emphasis on community work and help, and it is for this he should be remembered, rather than for his knowledge of what socialism or anarchism was about. He constantly attacked individuals who changed positions or did not live up to principles regardless of their importance or insignificance. (He once brought out the entire issue of a newspaper - "Hyde Park" - devoted to attacking the private life of his brother-in-law). He ignored the industrial struggle completely. He had an enormous memory or archival collection of speeches made by Socialists and others and denounced them for changing their views or altering their tactics, considering these denunciations to be "wiping them off the face of the earth" (though they still prospered) "If they were right then they must be wrong now and vice versa," he often wrote, as if they did not know that. He himself however had many inconsistencies: he twice stood as an "Anti-Parliamentary" candidate for Parliament, and in his poverty-stricken old age turned to aristocrats like Sir Walter Strickland and even the Marquis of Tavistock (later the Duke of Bedford) to finance an "anti-war" struggle. While denouncing "Socialists" for uniting with Conservatives in the war time government, he associated with known fascists like the British People's Party, which Bedford led and (Mosley being interned) the remaining unfettered Mosleyites joined. This led to his total estrangement from his earlier comrades and he was left with a faithful few. The war ended and the Bedford pack dropped him. He turned to eulogistic press hand outs from the Communist embassies for an increasingly dreary newspaper. It was a King Lear-ish ending but one should think of him at his best, and this book shows this side of him.

SPANISH RESISTANCE: THE PEOPLE NAMED

"El Quico" - whose name is Sabater in Spanish and Sabate in his native Catalan - was the prime Resistance fighter against the conquest of Franco after the civil war.

For years he was regarded as a criminal, even by respectable libertarians. Now, like others whose illegal activities were in the past, they may be viewed dispassionately. In October and November 1991 there was an exhibition in Barcelona called "Amnesia/Memoria" at the Centre d'Art Santa Monica de Barcelona, sponsored by the official Generalitat no less. (We are trying to get permission to show it in England but the exhibits have gone to New York).

It celebrated the many Resistance fighters (known in this country chiefly through Miguel Garcia, a participant in that resistance and after 20 years imprisonment, an indefatigable worker for anarchism here and abroad). Now a new generation of Catalan youth may learn about a previous generation, and one which was anarchist, not nationalist. This will be the subject of a future pamphlet in the KSL series with Virus Editorial of Barcelona (the first is now published under the title "The Unsung Struggle" title) following that on Cerrada (not yet "rehabilitated" by the Generalitat!)

The KSL has been fortunate enough to get a video cassette of the film "Behold a Pale Horse". Starring Gregory Peck as the "bandit", Anthony Quinn as the head of the Guardia Civil and Omar Sharif as the priest, Anarchists will have missed it when it was shown as a film, with no A. mag then appearing to call attention to it. It is a portrayal of the Spanish resistance (though it only refers to Republicans and Nationalists and you could be forgiven for not realising it was a picture of the CNT struggle against fascism, if you didn't know too much about Spain). The Gregory Peck character is based on (and at times vividly resembles Sabater) though he has grown old (which Sabater alas never did) and calls to mind Cerrada in his old age or many old fighters since. While Quinn is absolutely lifelike as Quintinella (apart from the coincidence of names) there are not many worthy priests around like Omar Sharif's outside Hollywood.

Can anyone locate the book by Emeric Pressburger? It would be a valuable addition to our library.

DIRECT ACTION

THE VOICE OF ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

Paper of the Direct

TRANSPORT WORKER

Price 40p

ISSUE 4/SPRING 93

FREE

EDUCATION CHAMBERS

The General Assembly

The Bulletin of the Education Workers Network

Spring 1993

The Education Workers Network:

An introduction from a member at the University of Salford.

Direct Action Movement (see page 8)

COMING SOON

The publications of KSL on anarchist history complemented one another with the essays in the bulletin. We will follow this up with other pamphlets which will round out the picture. In many of the incidents related the same, often otherwise little known or unknown people, re-appear.

In "Dare to be a Daniel!" it states on the cover the French Cooks' Syndicate was one of the earliest syndicalist unions in England. There were others (and trade unions adopting syndicalism appeared in Scotland and Wales). The earliest of all was the Horse Transport Union (founded about 1897), which incorporated another club, the Radical Draymen. As this too vanished during WWI, the number of people who know anything at all about it is fast dwindling. Even sons and daughters of members would now be in their 80s. We are now trying to collate memories of it. Can anyone help?

Our publications to date have been Dare to be a Daniel! The Unsung Struggle (1) First Flight, Life in English Prisons, Personal Recollections (Cores) and The Italian Glass Blowers. We have had some problems with printing (we envisaged a couple of hundred copies per pamphlet which was grossly inadequate, though with quantities above that there are other problems),

Anyway the next to come (don't tie us to a date) will be "The Divisions of the 'Left' - a guide to the perplexed"; A Visit to the Kremlin, Makhno; The Unsung Struggle (2) - (the extent of Spanish Resistance); and the History of the Japanese Movement, all queueing up to be typeset. Horse Transport Union research is in the research state. There are a lot of others waiting to join the queue and some which may jump it. The catalogue has had to wait for sheer volume of work.

CATALOGUE NOTE

We were too optimistic in saying we could produce a catalogue for £2. Sorry! It has grown too vast. We are trying to complete it but it will be much bulkier than we anticipated and come at a higher price.

We have a bottleneck with printing in that the pamphlets we advertise in this issue are ready, and beyond them we have a dozen new pamphlets all typeset and laid out, and can easily prepare another dozen, but the machine we have the loan of can only do about 100 at a time and have it spasmodically. If we have the printing done professionally we have to run up large debts and charge more. At present our available dosh is going on building up the library and archive, but we hope to overcome these problems.

The lucky few who have seen the library and archive are very impressed. We are always looking out for archive material (send us those trial records!)

TO CONTACT THE KSL WRITE TO;

KSL, BM HURRICANE, LONDON WC1 3XX

BEFORE SENDING ANY ARCHIVE MATERIAL ETC IF POSSIBLE CONTACT US FIRST FOR FURTHER DETAILS

KSL PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE FROM AK DISTRIBUTION. SEE ADDRESS ELSEWHERE IN BULLETIN.

The 50p for the KSL bulletin represents the sole income for the library at present

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PUBLICATIONS OF THE KSL 1993

George Cores

RECOLLECTIONS OF ANARCHISTS IN THE PAST
Personal Reminiscences of British Anarchists 1883-1939

Albert Meltzer

FIRST FLIGHT

The Origins of Anarcho-Syndicalism in Britain

David Nicoll

LIFE IN ENGLISH PRISONS (One Hundred Years Ago)
The case of the Walsall Anarchists (1892)

Antonio Tellez

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE Resistance to Franco 1939-1951 (first in a series)

The plot to assassinate Franco from the air

Wilf McCartney

DARE TO BE A DANIEL! The life and struggle of an agitator and the fight to free the catering slaves in London's West End.

THE ITALIAN GLASSBLOWERS TAKEOVER OF 1910:

Syndicalism in Action

Odon Por (with an epilogue - what happened after)

MY VISIT TO THE KREMLIN Nestor Makhno
(Next)

THE DIVISIONS OF THE "LEFT": A guide to the perplexed

Albert Meltzer (Soon)

WHAT IS THE CNT? Syndicalism in Action

Jose Peirats, intro. Miguel Garcia

LOOKING BACK AFTER TWENTY YEARS

Miguel Garcia (written after his release from prison)

Both reprinted in one pamphlet (Soon)

RACE AND CLASS

A classical statement by Brixton DAM, reprinted with a further chapter (Soon)

Then:

The Unsung Struggle (2): a commemoration of the Spanish Resistance after 1939

in connection with Virus Editorial Barcelona

The Anarchist Movement in Japan

We hope to maintain the price, £1 each (plus post outside GB)

Planned ahead

John Creaghe of Sheffield and Buenos Aires; The syndicalist Horse Transport Union of East London 1900; and loads of others new and from our archives

KSL BULLETIN Notes on the Kate Sharpley Library and research into real anarchism, 50p (four issues so far)

Catalogue of Books (English language) currently held by KSL to be followed by pamphlets; newspapers; other languages, archives - price not yet fixed

KSL BM \ Hurricane London W.C.1. 3XX

All our publications are available through AK Distribution, 3 Balmoral Place, Stirling, Scotland (to whom all bulk orders should be sent)



David Kogan

(Known as the „Little Christ“)

In 1917 secretary of the Anarchist Federation of Samara and editor of an Anarchist Weekly. Arrested in 1918 by Kolchak; made miraculous escape. Active in the Ukraina Anarchist publications. Unprisoned by Denikin. Since 1920 member of the Nabat secretariat (confederation of Anarchist organisations in the Ukraina). Arrested by the Bolsheviks end of 1920. Escaped Ryazan prison 1921. Rearrested in Moscow. Together with his comrade Akhtirsky mysteriously lost in the Bolshevik prisons.

Has he been murdered?

Joint Committee for the Defense of Revolutionists Imprisoned in Russia

(F. Kater, Kopernikus Strasse 25II, Berlin 034)

The Direct Action Movement

The DAM (British section of the International Workers Association) was founded in 1979. The founders of the DAM, which including the Manchester Syndicalist Workers Federation, rump of what had been since the 40s a national organisation, recognised the need for better organisation and for Anarchists to address working class issues in a more coherent way than the existing Anarchist Federation (last of many such attempts) which was grounded in disorganisation and with too many interested only in pacifism and the punk scene. In a way, the DAM could be said to have fulfilled part of its original aims. The DAM's early years were spent in finding its feet and consolidating the organisation as well as intervening in industrial disputes wherever possible.

The big break for the DAM came with the miners strike. This had a twofold effect. Firstly it shook a lot of the anarchist movement out of its life-stylist torpor and into activity. More importantly for the DAM it showed the relevance of syndicalist ideas for the British working class. The sterling work done by DAM members and other anarchists won them the respect of many of the most militant miners.

The middle to late fifties saw a number of other disputes which the DAM supported, including the Kent Messenger, Silent Night, Traders, Meathouse and the printers' dispute at Wapping. Particular mention must be made of the Ardbride workers. DAM members mounted a consumer boycott of Laura Ashley, Ardbride's chief customer, which was later mounted internationally through the IWA. This forced Laura Ashley to threaten Ardbride and force them into making concessions. Unfortunately, the union (for recognition of which the workers had been fighting) called off the strike at a critical moment and the strikers failed to get their jobs back.

Experience of these disputes led the DAM to develop a new industrial strategy. This broke decisively with the previous syndicalist tactic of working within the unions. The unions were seen by the DAM as beyond reform and to have failed the working class. New strategies are needed, based on direct action,

workplace assemblies, and strike committees. The first step is to form 'industrial networks' of militants in the service industry whose long-term aim is to form an anarcho-syndicalist union. (The change of direction was not unanimous and a number of people left the DAM, some of whom went on to set up the short-lived Anarchist Workers Group).

The DAM tried to implement this strategy over the last few years, with mixed success. Workplace groups, which would be the basic building block of any union, have yet to be established. Nor is the DAM able to develop the ideas much further than at present. This is in part due to the nature of the DAM - a political group with its own share of dogmatism. But it is also because

any further development must come from the practice of workers organising rather than the theory of those who aren't.

This lack of progression on the industrial front is linked to the DAM's high turnover of members, and stagnation over the last few years. However, the DAM was never going to be perfect and it's easy to criticise such things as the poor internal education, but it doesn't look so bad compared to other anarchist groups.

The DAM has been involved in a number of campaigns where it had a disproportionate influence to its numbers. In the anti-Poll Tax movement, the only organised challenge to the dead hand of Militant came from the DAM. Needless to say, others who hadn't even heard of the Poll Tax before Trafalgar Square were quick to claim responsibility. Nor will it surprise us when the

historians say these organised it!

DAM played a capital role in the re-launching of Anti-Fascist Action, the organisation which actually fights fascists rather than just talking about fascism (or shouting at fascists, like the SWP-organised Anti-Nazi League).

Whatever the future of the the DAM, it has certainly made a great impression on the anarchist movement in Britain. Anarchists are now far better organised than they were in 1979. The task now is not to organise the anarchists, but for the workers to organise.

M.H

For a detailed explanation of the DAM's industrial strategy, see "Winning the Class War" (DAM, £1)



Nestor Makhno seen in a documentary of suppressed newsreel "The Russian Civil War" (W.H.Smith) just released.