

## Pierre Monatte: no stripes, no rank

*We are left with a sombre pride ... We have managed to be the last Europeans of the splendid, intelligent Europe that the world has just lost forever, and the first men of a future International to come, and of which we are certain.*

Raymond Lefebvre 'L'Eponge du vinaigre' [1921]

Pierre Monatte has just died [1960]. In his little apartment in a block of working-class houses in a Parisian suburb, shelves and stacks of books, hundreds of files, thousands upon thousands of letters, draft articles and chapters of books in the making bear witness to a relentless activity interrupted only by physical collapse.

As late as yesterday, doffing the black beret covering his white hair, he was chatting with some activist or other who had dropped by in search of advice, in the cramped little room where he worked, read and wrote. The welcome was warm, unfussy and free of any sham mateyness. Set deep in his round face topped by a prominent forehead that curved into the hair-line, two lively little eyes looked his interlocutor straight in the face. And within seconds they had cut to the quick of matters, shunning all beating-about-the-bush and standing on ceremony. From Paris and the provinces and from abroad too, there was a constant file-past of young and old, all of them committed to the social struggle. By means of such direct connections, through his vast correspondence, by means of an ongoing delving into newspapers and books, 'Père (Father) Monatte', carrying no title and holding no office, found himself in the thick of things. To some he was – and I have heard this said – a 'living rebuke'. It was not easy thinking about him whenever one was pursuing a career, and the pretext of having 'left the working class behind' then turned into an indictment. To others, on the other hand, he exemplified human potential and was living proof that there is still a battle-station.

In his case, the word consciousness displayed its full meaning. It was never a philosophical consciousness, but the sort of consciousness that has to grapple with facts and events and people, a consciousness that is a method and a tool. Whilst Monatte did not come down hard on human failings, he was exceptionally rigorous with personal behaviour as it impacted on the workers' movement. Way back in 1922, he had told [Gaston] Monmousseau: 'You and I will never see eye to eye, for you are nothing but a coward.' And on the death of

[Léon] Jouhaux, the very symbol of a formal authority that he held in contempt, he lashed out vigorously when a trade unionist close to him had ventured to write a few lines about that labour leader, reminding people of the solidarity Jouhaux had displayed on various occasions. As far as Monatte was concerned, Jouhaux's legacy needed to be repudiated. Those who had sought his protection instead of fighting, those who had secured it in return for their silence and 'special affections' had made moves that were unacceptable.

In Monatte's view, the practice of the workers' movement represented the school of the possible. In 1917, when he and a handful of internationalists were standing up to nationalistic lies, betrayals and desertions, he wrote in his 'letters' to the school-teachers: 'When you say that there is nothing to do, it is because there is everything to do but nobody around to do it.' And in his view an immediate start had to be made from whichever point life's hazards had left us at.

Raging furies followed by prostration and vacuous tantrums were of little interest to him. But scrutiny of some milieu, some firm, some industry, some locality, for the purpose of acclimatising a team of militants to it and nurturing some organisation within it and injecting a workers' determination into it, that was his forte. Patiently building up worker strength, in unfavourable circumstances so that it might tilt the balance in the operation of social dependencies – this he regarded as the only useful social endeavour, one that steered clear of illusions and warded off despair. The real militant was no longer the revolutionary burnt out by his own excesses, but the fellow who knew how to lay the groundwork for action, wait for the right moment to arrive and then live up to all his responsibilities. Of Alexandre Jacob, the individualist anarchist whose courage and daring and fate as the lost child of revolt earned him the admiration of lots of young people, Monatte used to say: 'What a seamen's organiser he could have made!'

The Sisyphean task of continually making a new start on militant activity amounted, as far as Monatte was concerned, neither to a consolation nor to pig-headedness, but to the gauntlet that someone who feels exploited can throw down to an unfair world: to accepting that that world was a fact and changing it by means of the simple effort to understand and to work as part of a team.

Titles, personal ambitions, ribbons and honours

**Inside: Where are Tom Brown's memoirs?**

played no part in this game which is both thankless and terrifying. And location, the nature of the work, the type of society were the 'givens' of a problem which, when all is said and done, went beyond the classical approaches, the productivity figures, a problem that amounted to tailoring social structures to man-sized measurements.

That approach brings us back to the thinking of [Fernand] Pelloutier, for whom Monatte had a high regard and whom he claimed as his own. He had had plans to write a book about the founding father of the Federation of Bourses du Travail. With monkish care, he has gathered together his materials and documents. Anybody other than Monatte would have reckoned that he had more than enough there upon which to base an original and sound work. But Monatte was as pernickety about his own efforts as he was those of other people. And then again there was the age factor, 'obsolescence', as he used to say by way of an excuse.

A pity, because Monatte was a fine writer. He had a simple, blunt style that stuck to events and situations and faithfully revived them. Many a novelist envied his powers of description and explanation. Back in days of *Faux Passeports*, Charles Plisnier told me: 'I'd love to write the way Monatte does.' In fact, one has only to read the reportage from Pierre Monatte covering the Courrières mining disaster back in 1906. It would make a great model for high-class journalism, steering clear of excesses and phraseology: we get the facts, the details, the timbering procedure, the technology of extraction, the arguments put by the Company and finally the hundreds who died get the chance to speak. Yes, Monatte had been to Courrières and not for a stroll. He was living up to his responsibilities, after taking over from an organiser, Broutchoux, who was the *bête noire* of the companies in the Nord department; Broutchoux, who was the driving force behind a tiny union nipping at the ankles of the huge reformist unions of the day. A big strike had followed the Courrières disaster and Clemenceau, the quiet-life socialists in the Pas-de-Calais, the radical bigwigs and the regional barons had come to an arrangement to restore order, jail the agitator, silence the eye-witness and bury them all under a purpose-made conspiracy.

Not that this was his first time in the fray. He had worked alongside Charles Guieysse on *Pages libres*, made the acquaintance of [Charles] Péguy, been active in various labour organisations and been a contributor to Jean Grave's *Les Temps nouveaux*. This son of a blacksmith father and a lace-maker mother from the Upper Loire, this native of the Auvergne who might have been mistaken for a man of the soil, had stunned the Parisians with his thirst for knowledge, the way he devoured books. At the age of 15 he was working with little local socialist publications and devouring Dreyfusard writings.[1] He had to start out in his working life as a labourer and give up education after playing truant to attend an anti-militarist talk.

In 1907 – he was then 25 – he was one of the delegates to the Amsterdam Congress which brought libertarian theorists and activists together. It was there that he argued his syndicalist case against Errico Malatesta, the Italian revolutionary steeped in insurrectionist battles, who looked upon unions as merely the primary schools of socialism and reserved the leading role exclusively for the anarchist movement. Despite their clash of ideas, there was an enduring friendship between the two men and Malatesta bumped into Monatte while passing through Paris, between prison terms and insurrectionist campaigning. In Monatte's eyes, Malatesta was someone whose words and deeds matched: the golden rule.

In Monatte, there were no pipe-dreams about the determination to act and the need to build. In his memoirs – published in *La Révolution prolétarienne* of October, November and December 1959 – he recalled the conditions in which *La Vie ouvrière*, one of his creations, came into being: 'Instead of the great upsurge that ought to have followed the victory in Amiens, the trade union movement was afflicted by an obscure and lamentable crisis.' He detected a 'crisis of thinking' among militants. And therefore had to respond to it. A trial syndicalist daily paper *Révolution*, launched by Émile Pouget with funding from Charles Malato, Francisco Ferrer and Robert Louzon, failed. Monatte took over the baton, with support from James Guillaume, Charles Guieysse, [Amedée]Dunois, Fuss-Amoré and, again, Louzon. Albeit always beset with difficulties, this would lead to *La Vie ouvrière*, a bi-monthly review, one of the finest publications working class France had ever known; it was crammed with studies, news, movement analyses, monographs and international correspondence. A review whose subscribers were all militants and whose foreign readers included such as the Russian Zinoviev, the Bulgarian Andreytchine, the American Foster and the Englishman Tom Mann ...

And whilst *La Vie ouvrière* vanished with the first cannon-fire of the Great War as the movement fell apart, it was nevertheless around some of the review's die-hards that those who went on to offer internationalism a fleeting boost as bright as a flash of lightning: Zimmerwald.[2] 'Extraordinary times,' as Romain Rolland was to say in *L'Âme enchantée*.

Monatte was to experience many such extraordinary times, remaining clear of thought and unwearying as the tides rose and fell away. In face of the decadence of the Russian revolution and stalinism, as well as in the face of defection, on the part of parties or individuals, such as in 1939 and 1945.

His reportage, his pamphlets explain, appeal, invite and incite. Not some mania but dogged questing after what might be and sometimes was. With no illusions and no regrets. He was too aware of the difficulties to under-estimate them: 'There are plenty of folk ready to mouth off, but few, very few to offer encouragement while holding nothing back.'

Having been ill for several years and undergone two operations within a short time of each other, he nevertheless hated looking after himself. He preferred to talk about his wife: 'My poor old woman, overloaded with chores and cares, has been teetering on the edge for so many months', he wrote. But he is the one who has not finished the lap.

In the working-class epic in which most episodes remain unknown and most of the heroes nameless, Monatte occupies a significant place. And the many men and women who flocked to the columbarium at the Père Lachaise[3] to bid him a final farewell knew that his legacy has already been added to what Maxime Leroy termed working-class mores.

Louis Mercier, in  
*CILO*,[4] No 12, June 1960, pp. 12-15

### Notes

1, Dreyfusard: supportive of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish French army officer charged with colluding with Germany. Opinion was divided. Support for Dreyfus was not for the man so much as for the republican principles defining what it meant to be French – a political/ideological identity with the principles of the Republic – versus the blood+soil+faith definition of the traditionalist Army, aristocracy and Church. People who despised Dreyfus as a wealthy officer saw past him to the forces by which he was being victimized. Sebastien Faure was an early Dreyfusard.

2, Zimmerwald: the conference of anti-war socialists held in Switzerland in 1915.

3, the columbarium is where cremated remains are housed

4, CILO: Commission Internationale de Liaison Ouvriere (International Workers' Liaison Commission) an anarcho-syndicalist platform covering all the continents at a time when anarcho-syndicalist organizations had seen their footholds shrink and themselves reduced basically to propaganda bodies. Its bulletin was *CILO* (see <http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?article2225>)■

## Revolution and the State: Anarchism and the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939 by Danny Evans [Review]

Evans' subject is the Spanish revolution and the opposing process of rebuilding the failed republican state. *Revolution and the State* examines fault-lines and failures within the anarchist movement. Collaboration was not only a question of the movement's 'leading lights', but it didn't go unchallenged by some mid-level and grassroots radicals. Evans, dealing with this tragic history, is neither simplistic nor doom-laden. And it is complex: look at the Congress of Zaragoza (May 1936) when the anarcho-syndicalist CNT[1] was gearing up for revolution by outlining the society they wanted to create:

'The vision of libertarian communism that emerged was a compromise between the purist and gradualist currents, and was criticised from the floor by the former for considering the union organisation to have a role in a post-revolutionary society and by the latter for not granting it a more prominent position. Historians have since wondered at the document's attention to such details at the expense of questions of armed conflict and wartime production. Yet the vision of libertarian communism that was produced by the Congress, and above all the multiple and varied discussions that it was the product of, demonstrate that a desire for libertarian communism and a collective effort to imagine its parameters were not the preserve of ideologues or deluded and isolated villagers, but was at the heart of this mass, working-class organisation. [...] It is worth noting that the principles that were affirmed here as integral to the revolutionary project would soon re-emerge as priorities for radical anarchists during the revolution. These included the arming of the populace, economic equality, assembly-based decision-making procedures, federalism, and the equality of the sexes.' [p25]

The military coup came in July 1936. The revolutionary response by anarchists and other workers was primarily responsible for holding the army back. Where revolutionary workers and peasants were in the ascendancy, they began to reorganise society without state or capitalism. Fatefully, leading militants in the CNT accepted collaboration with the republican state in the name of anti-fascism. Counter-revolutionary forces on the republican side kept pressing to roll back the gains of July.[2] This led to the Barcelona May days of 1937, which wasn't the spontaneous protest it's sometimes seen as:

'In Barcelona in the spring of 1937, recalcitrant *milicianos*, anarchist refugees, purist opponents of state collaboration, advocates of unity among authentic revolutionaries and women mobilising around the issue of scarcity could rely on a network of organisations and expropriated spaces in which to consolidate their burgeoning alliance. [...] To mobilise these strands in a joint effort, as happened in May, required a common organisational denominator. This would be provided by the Local Federation of affinity groups (the FAI[3] in Barcelona), under the stewardship of Julián Merino.' [p85]

Evans that argues that being within the movement made the mobilisation possible and also allowed it to be defused by the 'higher committees'. 'The CNT was converted into a hierarchical body, its *comités superiores* effectively remaining state functionaries even after their ejection from government, as they carried out the essential task of imposing discipline on recalcitrant elements of their membership'. [p201]

The logic of sacrificing the revolution to win the war failed. Julián Merino, one of the key figures in the May days, ended up in the Executive Committee of the Libertarian Movement 'the culmination of every-

thing that everything that Merino had fought against for over a year previously. Days before the fall of Barcelona, he was charged (or more likely tasked himself) with organising remaining anarchists or anarchist sympathisers into defence battalions in the name of the FAI. In the event, however, a suicidal, last-ditch defence of the city was not attempted, and he crossed the border into France with thousands of his fellow defeated comrades. As Merino must have understood better than most, the possibility of such ‘Numantian’ resistance, regardless of the wing of the Republican state that advocated it, depended on the mobilising potential of the revolutionary energies and alliances that all wings of the state had collaborated in extinguishing and dismantling over the course of the war. However, while state repression was the principal cause of the breakdown of these revolutionary alliances, they also had been weakened by contradictions internal to the revolutionary movement. [p174]

Evans approaches history with questions to ask, rather than ready-made answers to bludgeon us with. He aims ‘not to provide a retrospective moral judgement on the ideological imperfections of anarchist activists, but rather to show how the recession of revolutionary horizons brought with it a turning inwards of revolutionary forces and a fracturing of the solidarities generated by the revolution’s expansive phase.’ [p183]

It’s not a happy book. ‘While the *comités superiores* of the CNT had done what they could to hold back their members, their opponents had taken advantage of what opportunities they had to strengthen their position. [...] The corpses of twelve members of the Catalan JJLL[4] from the Sant Andreu neighbourhood were dumped in the cemetery at Cerdanyola. They had been tortured to death on 4 May. Important anarchist critics of the Communist Party and its policy had been murdered. The most famous case was that of Camilo Berneri, shot on 5 May along with his comrade and compatriot, Francesco Barbieri.’ [p115] The ‘complacency and ingenuity of the leading stratum of the CNT-FAI’ [p117] reminds me both of José Peirats’ verdict that the CNT was caught ‘not being able to politick nor yet being able to walk away from it’[5] and of Malatesta’s warning from another time and place that ‘the bourgeoisie sooner or later will make us pay with tears of blood for the fear that we have instilled in them today.’[6]

Evans has drawn on Spanish-language sources which makes this an especially valuable work for those of us who would have to wait for them to be translated. But on the topic of language, I’m not sure about using ‘deserter’ for revolutionaries who left the front, not in search of safety, but to confront the republican counter-revolution. Why not just use ‘uncontrollables’?

This is an important contribution to the history of

the Spanish Civil War and of the anarchist movement. I also think this is a book all radicals could benefit from reading (and I say that knowing how expensive it is). It’s based on his thesis [7], so you could go and read that but it has been worked on since then. We must hope that our friends with the power to get books into libraries do so, and that a paperback appears soon.

### Notes

1 CNT: Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour)

2 For a critical view of how this conflict has been reflected in historical writings, see ‘The Fight for History: a Manifesto’ In *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* No. 20, October 1999

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/wm38sh>

3 FAI: Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation)

4 JJLL: Juventudes Libertarias (Libertarian Youth)

5 José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, Vol.2, p144

6 Errico Malatesta, ‘Per la prossima riscossa’ [1923, talking about the Italian factory occupations of 1920] quoted in Nunzio Pernicone *Italian anarchism, 1864-1892* p294

7 Daniel Evans, *The Conscience of the Spanish Revolution: Anarchist Opposition to State Collaboration in 1937*. [2016]

<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/15278/>

*Revolution and the state : anarchism in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* Danny Evans  
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## The missing memoirs of Tom Brown, Tyneside syndicalist

Tom Brown was a lifelong syndicalist, promoting ‘the grassroots organisation of the workers in action, bending employers, union bosses and the State to its will’.[1] Born in Newcastle, the search for work took him to the West Midlands and London. Eventually, he retired to Gateshead with his wife Lily and wrote his memoirs. Unfortunately, the manuscript was borrowed by ‘two visiting female American academics whom he had met either at or in connection with the Durham Miners Gala’ – and never returned.[2]

Brown’s surviving articles frequently draw on his own experiences. ‘School for syndicalism’ recalls his earliest memories of factory work; ‘Into battle with the bazooka bands’ mentions moving back to County Durham after the defeat of the 1926 General Strike.[3] He wrote a pamphlet on the strike: ‘Lions led by rats’ sums up his view of what went wrong.[4] At least one American student interviewed him about the General Strike.[5] Might that be what the Mysterious Americans were interested in?

If you know the current location of his memoirs, or you can tell us something that would help to track

them down, we'd be glad to hear from you.

#### Notes

- 1, 'Story of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation: Born in Struggle' From: *Direct Action* February 1968, at <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/wdbt17>
- 2, Details from Mark Hendy
- 3, See <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/xsj4tv>
- 4, *The British General Strike, 1926* (1943, Reprinted in *Tom Brown's syndicalism*, 1990)
- 5, See 'British Labor's Divided Ranks In the General Strike' By Haldan Christensen (1965) at <https://cache.kzoo.edu/bitstream/handle/10920/8038/3/dimension1965.pdf> ■

## Juan Busquets (former Maquis) on Ramón Vila Capdevila, his comrade

*'Freedom has to be won, day by day,  
in a ceaseless, uncompromising struggle'*

Ramón Vila Capdevila (Peguera, 02/03/1908 – Casatellnou del Bages, 07/08/1963)

The years slip by and for some time I have been meaning to write something about Ramón Vila Capdevila and about his stunning activity within the French resistance, which is none too well known in Spain.

Ramón Vila Capdevila's record as a fighter is without equal. From a very young age, he was active in the CNT and was jailed after the uprising in Figols in 1932. During the Spanish civil war he enlisted as a volunteer with the Iron Column in Valencia and later served in the Tierra y Libertad Column where he was part of the guerrilla teams whose task it was to infiltrate behind enemy lines, with very specific assignments to carry out. When the war ended he left for exile in France at the time of the *Retirada* and like every other refugee knew hard times in the concentration camps (Saint Cyprien) and then in Argelès-sur-Mer from where he escaped in 1940 to go back to Spain to organize passage across the Pyrenees for wanted comrades and fugitives from the Nazis. In 1942, on one of his trips into France, he was arrested for possession of phoney papers and jailed in the 'citadel' in Perpignan; months after that he was conscripted into the Todt Organization and sent to work in a bauxite mine in the Hérault department. In 1944 he joined the Secret Army (AS). He came into contact with the 'Irregulars and Partisans' (Francs-Tireurs et Partisans, FTP), where Commandant Bernard put him in charge of a company of Spaniards, with the rank of captain. This caused some rumbles of discontent among the communists, who could not agree to be under the orders of an anarchist, although Ramón was by far the man best qualified for the post; the quibblers had no option but to go along with Commandant Bernard's decision.

In the Haute Vienne, the fiefdom of the renowned Rochedouart maquis, Ramón Vila, or 'Captaine

Raymond' commanded a company made up almost exclusively of libertarians and showed the Germans no mercy. A specialist in explosives, his daring and fearlessness led to his pulling off some real feats. In the entire resistance, Ramón's unit was certainly the one that inflicted most losses on the occupation army in terms of personnel and materials.

Near Angoulême, they attacked a train filled with soldiers and equipment. Some time after that, the unit, made up of about two hundred men, repeated this, and on this occasion took hundreds of prisoners and recovered a significant batch of war materials. A third large-scale operation had a dramatic finale. This was the blowing of a bridge near Saint-Junien (Haute Vienne) when a train loaded with troops from the SS 'Das Reich' Panzer Division, one of the most fanatical and brutal black-shirted divisions, was destroyed. The retaliation decided by SS General Heinz Lammerding were chilling: the populace of Oradour-sur-Glane was massacred (the original village targeted, Oradour-sur-Vayres, having been spared due to a mix-up of the two Oradours). Some 642 civilians were murdered – 190 men, 245 women and 207 children – burnt alive in the church; 24 of these were Spaniards.

When news broke of the massacre in Oradour, Ramón and his men with the assent of former Captain Marc of the AS mounted a reprisal attack on the Das Reich division stationed in Oradour-sur-Vayres, which was wiped out.[1]

Once France had been liberated, the French government offered Ramón the medal of the Legion of Honour in recognition of his outstanding actions in the resistance, but Ramón turned it down.

He then embarked upon a fight against Francoism in Spain. Alone or in the company of others he set about dynamiting the high-tension electricity pylons. Later, he joined with Marcelino Massana Bancells's group, which is where I made his acquaintance, in the Santa Eugenia (Can Moreno) base in Berga. He was recovering from bullet wounds sustained in a clash he had had with the Civil Guards.

In late 1949, by which point the libertarian guerrillas operating in Catalonia had been virtually wiped out, there were a few survivors carrying on the fight. Ramón was one such die-hard fighter, the one who held out the longest: he stayed up in the hills until he was killed at the age of 55, in 1963.

Ramón survived on what little help the peasants supplied him and on his French resistance pension. Using that money, he bought gear for blowing up electricity pylons and still had enough left over to meet his personal needs, which were minimal. And so, as the years passed, Ramón turned into a solitary tough nut. Pedro Sánchez was his last travelling companion and he shared that 'hermit-like' existence with Ramón.

Pedro Sánchez was war disabled, having been wounded on the Belchite front (Zaragoza): an exploding bomb left him with head injuries (leading to

complications) and the fingers of his left hand had been amputated. Arrested in 1962 and given a 30-year prison term, he was accused of having helped Ramón to blow up a number of electricity pylons.

I made Pedro's acquaintance in Burgos prison. I asked him: 'How was Ramón when you parted ways in 1962?' 'Very bad', he replied. This was his way of saying that Ramón had spent many years cut off from the world and bereft of the most basic comforts; living out in the open for so long a time, Ramón was afflicted with rheumatism and tremendous physical fatigue. Pedro's remarks struck me as rather logical.

Inevitably, Ramón came to grief in a clash with three Civil Guards with whom he crossed paths as night was falling – a sergeant (first class) Jerónimo Bernal Mateos, formerly of the division,[2] and officers Evangelista Fernández and Anacleto Adeva – on 7 August 1963 and took two bullets. The first hit the veins in his neck and the other his femoral artery. Not until daylight came did they make any attempt to approach Ramón's body. Five hours, Ramón spent bleeding out on the ground and he died from lack of assistance, as the pathologist Dr José María Reguant himself was to declare at a seminar.

We can see that when gunned down he was wearing a wind-cheater and dark blue trousers and, among other personal items inside his knapsack was a sleeping-bag, a transistor radio, a watch, a change of trousers, some socks, a razor and some sabotage gear, etc.

Ramón died the death he had foretold. He used to say: 'I'll die alone like a stray dog' and on him they found a number of verses which have been amended to make the following poem, which, in my view, encapsulates his personality to perfection:

*I want my grave  
Well away from holy ground  
Where there are no white shirts  
Nor gilded pantheons  
I want them to bury me  
Far away from those phoney places  
Which folk visit yearly  
To let loose their sobbing.  
I want them to bury me  
Way up in the high mountains  
Alongside the tall pine tree  
That stands alone in the gully  
I want my grave to lie  
Between two stone slabs  
My companions will be the mottled snakes and green  
lizards  
I do not want any priests attending my burial,  
Be they secular or Roman.  
And, as for flowers,  
a bunch of stinging nettles.  
Nor do I want anyone showing up  
To make speeches or sing psalms  
With flags and tinsel  
The vice of the civilized world.*

*The cawing of the crows and rooks  
And the howl of the old fox  
Abandoned when he gets old  
Will be speeches enough for me.  
No lights and no candles  
With their flashes of terror.  
My light will be provided  
By the flashes and the lightning.  
I want my grave  
Covered in tall thorns  
Big, thick, brambles  
Gorse and wild thistles.  
Let grass for livestock  
Grow all around me and  
Let the weary black dog  
Rest in my shade.  
I want my body  
To be laid to rest far from the human hubbub  
Beside the tall pine that stands  
In the lonely gully.*

### **About Juan Busquets**

Former maquisard sentenced to death by a Summary Council of War, later commuted to 30 years in prison, of which he served 20 years and 6 days.  
3 July 2018

### **Notes**

1 'Wiped out' presumably refers to a part of the Division

2 Presumably a reference to the Blue Division (Spanish fascists fighting on the Eastern Front).

Source: <http://www.bllibertari.org/text-de-joan-busquets-exmaqui-sobre-el-seu-company-ramon-vila-capdevila.html> ■

### **Anarchism, 1914-1918: Internationalism, anti-militarism and war [Book Review]**

This collection of essays examining anarchism between the years 1914 to 1918 originated from two panels held at the European Social History Conference held in Vienna in 2014, and as the title suggests, they address various aspects of the anarchist response to World War One. The editors are keen to move beyond the traditional narrative of Kropotkin (support for the 'Allies' and France's revolutionary tradition that was threatened by German authoritarianism as well as suggesting that smaller countries would have better chance of gaining autonomy and independence with an Allied victory) versus Malatesta (no side is better than the other, many are just as imperialist as each other, and as anarchists and anti-militarists we can take no side in this war but oppose it in every way we can). Some of the essays offer tantalizing glimpses of doing just that but the two men, and their ideas, do still tend to dominate proceedings. That said there is a rather poignant and highly informative piece on Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis by Bert Altena that

should considerably increase knowledge of this important militant for English readers.

The title of the volume does flatter to deceive. There are no chapters dedicated to, for instance, the responses of the anarchist movement in Australia, Austro-Hungary, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal and, most surprisingly, Russia. One presumes that these countries (and others such as Spain) were not covered in the conference but readers should beware if they are looking for information in the book about them.

Still, there are however some interesting and challenging ideas within some of the essays in this volume. A number of them concentrate on the relationship between national liberation movements and anarchism. Kenyon Zimmer's essay illustrates the richness of anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist thought found in American anarchist newspapers at this time—especially those from the immigrant milieu. These anarchists may not be known as 'thinkers' but their ideas reflect a complexity and nuance that is exciting to read. Similarly, practical links between Italian anarchists and those seeking Indian independence are compellingly outlined in Ole Birk Laursen's account of the 'Zurich Bomb Plot' which, for this reviewer, provided much new information.

Some essays remind us that we cannot take our understanding of words for granted. Kathy Ferguson's piece on the American anti-conscription movement unwraps the concept of anti-militarism held by some anarchists there. To them anti-militarism was determinedly anti-capitalism and, Ferguson believes, pro-birth control. As she writes 'Suppressing contraception, protecting private property and promoting war are all, in Goldman's words, "Streams from the same source"' (p215). David Berry and Constance Bantman in their examination of the French anarchist movement make the striking suggestion that perhaps between 1890-1914 'the anarchists' anti-establishment – anti-patriotic, revolutionary, anti-parliamentarian – stance not only concealed parallel processes of collective and individual integration, but actually made these possible' (163). Hopefully they will expand more on this fascinating idea in future work.

A volume like this can only do so much. What I sense is missing are the lived **experiences** of individual anarchists during the War years. Are we to believe that anarchists avidly read Kropotkin's or Malatesta's ideas and followed them to the letter? What of those who saw the good in both arguments? Were positions so cut and dried in the grass roots as they were among prominent anarchists? Presumably some anarchists had to make their own mind up and act intuitively as sources of anarchist propaganda dried up under stringent censorship. I don't think we can underestimate the sense of confusion that permeated the movement at a grass roots level or, at times, the sense of despair at the course of events both outside and inside their anarchist circles.

There are so many questions that still need to be tackled. We recognize that many anarchists, whatever their views on the War, felt it could, eventually, lead to some type of social upheaval. How was that idea developed as circumstances in the War changed? What of those comrades who joined up? Grigorii Maksimov, for instance, deliberately joined the Russian army so he could propagandize among the troops. Did others do the same? Are there examples of anarchists active in the barracks and the trenches or were they overtaken by patriotism and abandoned the person they had been? What of those anarchists who disappeared, those who suddenly became quiet and took no part in the movement in any way during the War. We know Gustav Landauer, for example, retired to his historical writing for most of this period. We should be careful, though, in seeing his and others' similar actions as a type of cowardice. Confusion, uncertainty and feelings of helplessness have their own kind of dignity and need to be discovered and discussed. Finally, we need to discover and calibrate the small victories – the safe space for deserters, the quiet solidarity, the roughly produced leaflet and all the other examples of comrades doing what they can to keep their ideas alive.

We can see this anthology, then, as a beginning rather than the final word. The anthology brings together many themes that we still struggle with today and opens many doors so that others can go through. Hopefully more work will be produced as a result of these essays. It is disappointing that the book is so prohibitively expensive which can easily lead to the ideas within it only being available to certain people. That would be unfortunate so do get your library to order it!!! On a final note perhaps the editors might consider adding sections, or even creating another volume and then working with a publisher to produce a paperback edition. That would be a most useful enterprise with regard to expanding our knowledge of anarchist history during this time.

Barry Pateman  
*Anarchism, 1914-1918: Internationalism, anti-militarism and war*, Edited by Mathew S. Adams and Ruth Kinna. Manchester University Press, 2017. £75 ■

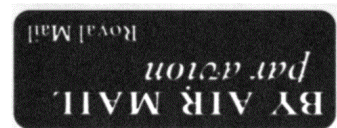
## Recently received (October 2018)

Postbox highlight: *The Cunningham Amendment* (humour and bright colours only sharpen the 'dumb insolence'). No website but they are sponsoring Manchester Anarchist Bookfair 1 December 2018 ([www.bookfair.org.uk](http://www.bookfair.org.uk))

*Arimania* by Iuliu Neagu-Negulescu (a utopia) reprinted (in Romanian) ([www.pagini-libere.ro](http://www.pagini-libere.ro))

*Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, #74 Summer 2018 with review of *Anarchism in Galicia* (cheers), PO Box 42531, Philadelphia PA 19101, USA

New online: 'The English Master' AM Atabekian  
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