

# K.S.L.

**BULLETIN OF THE  
KATE SHARPLEY  
LIBRARY** NO.3 50p

## THE HUMBLE SOAPBOX

*The Prime Minister was presented with a new soapbox to celebrate his election victory. Sir David English, editor of the Daily Mail, said Mr Major's use of a soapbox was 'brilliant' News item..*

A week before the 1992 General Election, when the Conservative Party was facing almost certain defeat, and the Labour Party was holding triumphal meetings at mass rallies, John Major, in what was regarded as a last desperate effort, took to the streets with a (specially made and adapted) soapbox carried by an aide, and stumped the country, giving prepared speeches at crowded street corners and market squares. The Labour Party, knowing little of the history of the labour movement and slightly ashamed of what it did know, said it had long since passed that stage. What they did not point out, or maybe did not know, was they "passed that stage" when they became respectable as by then it was virtually illegal.

Many radicals abroad look to "Hyde Park Corner" (confusing it with Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park) as a bastion of free speech. It is true a few religious or comic turns are kept alive on improvised platforms at Speakers Corner, and anyone can get up and speak. But genuine Speakers (affectionately called Spouters) Corners existed in every park and at innumerable convenient street corners. Reforming parties and sects marked out their special street corner pitch where they were regularly known. They were a forum for political debate, Generations of workers educated themselves in a political faith more thoroughly than the London School of Economics has managed during its history.

Hyde Park was waning when the television age came

along (and the growth of cars made street corner meetings difficult and finally impossible). But serious political discussion was everywhere (its last bastion was Glasgow Green). It may be noted that in the days of mob violence against speakers, usually by populist parties and often subsidised by free beer, attacks were made on Anarchists, Socialists, Atheists, Suffragists - in particular women of any persuasion. Even Protestant Truth speakers in places like Liverpool were attacked, though here sometimes the police intervened, classifying them with the Salvation Army, ever entitled to flout the rules on marches, meetings, street music, obstruction, trespass and even entry into public houses for literature selling.

Normally the police view was that attacks were orators' hard luck and served them right. However, from the moment Fascism appeared in the 20s (see last issue), the police were concerned to defend them from attack "in the name of free speech".

As anti-Fascist violence escalated but anti-reform violence disappeared, under the growth of socialist ideas, the police took a closer interest in open air meetings and the defence of Fascist speakers. They are still concerned to protect Fascist marches and restrict others. Improvised speaking has vanished from the streets under police harassment - except for the museum piece of Speakers Corner, Hyde Park.

Until John Major "reclaimed the streets" - for him-  
*continued page 3*



# SCOPE OF THE LIBRARY

**What** is the political scope of the KSL to be: is it restricted to the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, or will it encompass the broad class struggle anarchist tradition? RC (Nottingham)

*KSL Replies ....*

**We** don't want to lay down the law as to what is and what is not anarchism but obviously there has to be some boundary or the collection would need to take up the Albert Hall and be too unwieldy for reference anyway.

The political scope will not just be anarcho-syndicalism but the "broad class struggle anarchist tradition" is something impossible to mark the boundary when dealing historically. The expression "class struggle anarchism" comes from the '70s, with the growth of the hippy movement, lifestylism, etc and the need to differentiate between one thing and the other.

If one refers to the Cores pamphlet this is something new. Most Anarchists of his generation would never have used the expression either because they thought it tautological or suggested something different to them. or if they did distinguished between class war and class struggle (so as not to be thought Marxists) , or spoken unscientifically in terms of social justice, but they would have meant the same thing.

What we've decided with regard to the books is to include everything possible that relates to activist anarchism. We are omitting pacifism and "non-violence" and what goes with it as there is already an established library of Peace Studies in Bradford, which has an anarchist section. They agree to letting us have their books on mainstream anarchism, and we are passing them books on Tolstoyism etc. This will strengthen both libraries, and perhaps at a later date we can advertise mutually. There will obviously be overlapping. This way we avoid censorship or laying down dogma.

On the other hand we don't want to go the way of the "anarchologists" and consider anyone who uses the name anarchists, even though pro-capitalist, is one. Their interest is making their chosen "subject" bigger than it really is. For sheer room we will not include any ephemera that passes itself off as libertarian, and if anyone is interested they can try themselves and see how impossible it is, at least without State funding. If we became State-funded we would not be an anarchist library. We will not be middle class academic orientated. But all books relative to the subject we can get will be included.

In regard to other documentation, KSL was originally compiled in Brixton, and almost all of its contributors were from the anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Since moving to Oundle (with reasonable space) we have sent out more invitations to contribute material. We now have a far wider selection relating to people who were not anarcho-syndicalists but in the anarchist tradition, e.g. Guy Aldred archives. A recently donated (as yet unopened) batch relates to the AWA and ACF. Also we have an enormous unclassified Cienfuegos Press/Refract Archive relating to trials and struggles all over the world, including Angry Brigade trial coverage. There are also translations of Spanish, Italian and French works unlikely within foreseeable time to be published in English (though we hope any publisher interested will contact us. One Russian publisher has already done so in regard to books on Anarchism and Revolutionary history).

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*Further details of progress of the library (especially in regard to access) will be made in future issues as possibilities become clearer.*  
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**We are always interested in exchanging with other collections/libraries books we hold in duplicate, with other titles we don't hold. We incidentally have received books regarding Marxism and Leninism which we are not including (unless there is a direct reference or application to Anarchism). Perhaps some socialist library would be interested in exchanging books on Anarchism in which they are not interested?**

## *The first two publications of K.S.L.*

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

by GEORGE CORES

**FIRST FLIGHT**

**The Origins of Anarcho-Syndicalism in Britain**  
by Albert Meltzer

Both £1 each (inc. UK postage)

All our publications are available through  
AK Distribution, 3 Balmoral Place, Stirling,  
Scotland

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This bulletin appears in November 1992  
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### *the humble soap box continued ...*

self alone - the police had illegalised extempore speaking. It is dubious if getting on an improvised platform (which usually happened to be a soapbox lying around) and saying what you thought was ever actually made illegal. Except for the Salvation Army, the police claimed it was "obstruction". Even at Hyde Park, selling literature outside the gates obstructed the traffic and pedestrians, although selling the Sunday papers or Christian literature did not. Selling inside the gates is illegal - though not for ice cream vendors. (Later a few sellers were allowed outside the reconstructed lavatory entrances in the underpass).

Stump speaking built up the labour movement; its decline heralded its end. The working class movement was built from it, what is now regarded as the left comes from State-controlled University sources. The hopes of the labour movement on education were unfulfilled: what in practice it built up was the Labour Party and a working class divorced from it, which now picks up notions from the tabloids.

Extempore speaking had its drawbacks. The regular speaker, feeling himself or herself a leader or a misunderstood genius, could turn to parliamentary ambitions (e.g. the old Clydeside socialists), aspire to leadership by virtue of their oratory, or obtain an inflated ego that made one think oneself was so much more important than the cause represented. But for John Major to play at speaking from a soapbox, surrounded by armed plain clothes guards, was an obscene travesty of the reality.

#### The Manchester Anarchists

In the "Personal Recollections" of George Cores (pub. KSL) reference is made to the Manchester Anarchists of 100 years ago and their struggle for free speech. We have since publishing it received for our archives a copy of the relevant chapter of "Twentyfive Years of Detective Life" by Jerome Caminada (Chief Detective Inspector of the Manchester Police, pub John Heywood 1895). Writing of "Manchester Anarchists at Work" he deals with the events of September 1893.

He says a number of "irresponsible young men" held meetings at Ardwick Green.

(The numbers of young working class men and women as given in the proceedings and in Cores's memoirs and the support they received indicates that though this was not a "golden age of Anarchist activity", it was certainly a promising one - far from the depressing scene Manchester and everywhere else presents today).

Det Insp Caminada naturally - and perfectly frankly - attacks the views they were expressing (including "abusing Her Majesty and the Royal Family and criticis-

ing the emoluments they received", as well as "preaching Anarchism") and said there were "serious complaints" about those views which led to charges. The Chief Constable was asked to put a stop to "what had become a serious nuisance". He "tried to reason" with the obstructionists, pointing out that it was a very improper place to hold their meetings and offering them the use of Stevenson Square, "where they could air their grievances from morning till night without being interfered with".

The offer being refused of Stevenson Square which was deserted at all times, the Chief Constable himself came to the next meeting in Ardwick Green, stated it was an obstruction and could not go on. (The meeting was certainly not as large as John Major's, with worldwide publicity: probably less than that of the TV and press photographers and journalists following him).

In an attack on the meeting (by how many police Caminada does not say) the detective inspector hit the speaker with his umbrella. Later, when they were fined and ultimately imprisoned, he sued for the damage to his umbrella hence the Anarchist song (which he tells us he resented) "The scamp who broke his gamp at Ardwick Green" (tune Monte Carlo").

This legally upheld attitude - that the speaker standing on the soapbox must be responsible for damage done to the person who broke an umbrella hitting him, did not apply merely to the police nor was this confined to a hundred years ago. (Nor just to England: the Haymarket Trial in Chicago was more serious - that the speakers should be hanged for a bomb exploding while they were on the rostrum). Matt Kavanagh, an Anarchist speaker in Liverpool, was as a young man around 1905, involved in a case where people storming his platform had their clothes ripped, accidentally or not. He, being on the platform, could not have been physically responsible and they were clearly the aggressors. But he was held responsible for the damage to their clothing. The suffragists were constantly told that if they suffered from eggs, mud or even bricks, it was their own fault "for not behaving like ladies and staying at home".

A amusing sideline is that during the Great War there was a mob attack on a peace meeting at the Unitarian Church, Southgate Road, when Bertrand Russell was in danger of being lynched. The respectable ladies with him appealed to the police presence to save him. They remained stolidly impassive as one after another implored them to save the life of a man they described as the most distinguished philosopher in Europe or the most celebrated mathematician in England. Only when one, more worldly wise, protested that he was the son of an earl did the police wade in as one, truncheons out

(from page 3,

to preserve the noble dissident.

During John Major's pseudo-soapbox stump, a member of the public threw eggs at him, and was fined for the assault and ordered to pay damages for the suit. It would have been interesting to know if Neil Kinnock, instead of holding a presidential-type campaign and scorning the humble soapbox, had gone stump speaking and been hit by an egg, whether the police would have decided he was enough of a socialist to deserve what he got (as had virtually been decided by previous assaults on Ramsay MacDonald, Aneurin Bevan and even Kinnock himself) or if the new respectability led to his being treated equally with John Major. The media would certainly have treated it differently.

Guy Aldred

We turn from the play acting of John Major as a stump soapbox speaker, complete with speechwriters and a specially made box (reminiscent of the organised "gypsy caravan tours" when the gypsies have been driven out) to the real stump speakers of a bygone day. They had to know how to get and handle a crowd by themselves. Some devoted their entire life to "open air propaganda" (living upon collections) some did it for entertainment (professionally), while a great many did it voluntarily, obviously for a time.

Of those who could lecture copiously, without notes, fascinate a crowd, spread the word, explain a chosen subject more clearly than any University lecturer, one must select Guy Aldred as pre-eminent. This is not to describe his life (which should be done - a biography of him is unpublished, though he published many autobiographical writings) but some incidents which describe the problems of the "soapbox" and how it was steadily illegalised.

Aldred (born in London, and originally a boy preacher, but for most of his life's activity centred in Glasgow and a propagandist for anarchism and socialism) maintained that literature selling, essential to propaganda, was enshrined in the constitution. He pointed out that when Scotland came into the Union, the Scots demanded that colportage (the unauthorised selling of dissenting literature in public: "colportage" = selling from a tray round one's neck) What they were afraid of was that religious dissenters be prevented from selling Bibles etc should the English government become Catholic. Whatever the merits of that fear, the law was enshrined.


A line of reformers ensured secularist then socialist literature was respected. Aldred argued this many times in court successfully. He pointed to the fact that if one

applied to the police for a street trader's licence to sell papers, one was told there was no such licence available because it was not necessary. Because of the colportage laws, newspapers were sold in the streets (limitations came within the trade itself), without police permission being necessary. (This is the origin of the term the "gutter press"). When in the thirties the police decided sales of socialist literature caused obstruction, they were altering the laws on colportage. Aldred struggled to enable colportage within the Royal Parks. This was not legally successful and he was fined many times - but he was never defeated on the subject of colportage outside. Permission to do this has disappeared and with it most of the demand to do so. What now moulds public opinion is the "gutter press" which can be sold without licence to do so being necessary (other than by the suppliers). Since Aldred, nobody has challenged this police decision that public availability of dissenting literature plus free speech equals obstruction. We doubt that John Major's precedent would be accepted.

Conversely, Aldred went to prison for enabling the republican Mylius to print his paper which laid bare certain scandals in the life of George V. They did not in the least bear up to those currently peddled by all the national press about the current Royals (though admittedly the affair of Edward VIII was concealed until his abdication and the real scandals are only beginning to be revealed now).

**Our next pamphlet (now being set) will be a reprint of the first in the series of booklets by Fred Charles on the Walsall Anarchist trial in 1892.**

**All our publications are available through AK Distribution, 3 Balmoral Place, Stirling, Scotland**

<p>LIFE IN ENGLISH PRISONS MYSTERIES OF SCOTLAND YARD Stirling Revelations</p> <p><small>"LIFE IN ENGLISH PRISONS" by David Nicholl (1981) is a reprint of the complete 19th century edition of the book, the original "Mysteries of Scotland Yard" (1892) by George Cross, the "A Free Press" and "The Chief of Chesham Road" the other two will be reprinted in a separate volume.</small></p> <p><small>This is the first in a series of booklets from Anarchy of 18 days, the most powerful publications of the first great trial by George Cross, the booklets "The Fight for the Rights of Anarchy" and "The Rights of Anarchy" will be reprinted in a separate volume by the same author.</small></p> <p><b>K.S.L.</b> PUBLICATIONS</p>	<p>LIFE IN ENGLISH PRISONS (100 YEARS AGO) MYSTERIES OF SCOTLAND YARD Stirling Revelations</p>  <p>by David Nicholl</p>
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## **DESPERATELY SEEKING BOOKS !!!**

Comrades are asked to donate books  
to the Library.

The following are special wants. Rest  
assured they will be put to good use  
and made available for others.

1. Mairin Mitchell            Storm Over Spain  
Secker & Warburg 1937
2. Andrew Carlson        Anarchism in Germany  
Vol.1 Scarecrow Press NJ 1972
3. Milorad Drochkovien  
Revolutionary Internationals    1864-1943  
Stanford Univ Press 1966
4. W.C.More Confessions of an Anarchist  
E.Grant Richards 1906
5. R. J. Holton British Syndicalism 1900-1914  
Pluto Press 1975
6. J. H. Mackay The Anarchists
7. Isobel Meredith  
A girl among the Anarchists
8. Max Nomad  
Dreamers, Dynamite & Demagogues  
N.Y. 1964
9. John Paton  
Proletarian Pilgrimage
10. Eugene Pyziur  
The Doctrine of Anarchism of Michael Bakunin  
London 1968
11. Alexander Berkman  
Letters from Russian Prisons    Albert & Charles  
Borin (ed.)  
NY 1925  
(or Chas Daniel, London)

**Any editions of these books  
are welcome. Any donations  
of books are welcome.**

## **CATALOGUE NOTICE**

The books now held in the Kate  
Sharpley Library (in the English  
language) have been  
catalogued. This will shortly be  
available for a cost of £2  
including UK postage. We are  
unable to include this free with  
the bulletin as it will be over 20  
pages in length.

Should you require a copy  
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Titles and books in other  
languages, and  
archive documentation in all  
languages, have not yet been  
compiled but details will be  
released in future bulletins.

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DETAILS

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ELSEWHERE IN BULLETIN.

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



## Ongoing anarchist movements(1)

### THE ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS

The need to defend themselves against Tsarist police and Cossacks led to the formation of various Anarchist self-defence organisations within Russia. Both the Jewish and Lithuanian communities had formed defence organisations and on these a unified Anarchist Self-Defence was modelled. Later, this merged into the Anarchist Black Cross, an organisation supporting political prisoners and so far as possible, all those persecuted within Tsarist Russia for whatever reason. It was re-modelled on the lines of the Red Cross and before and during the Civil War was funded by exiles in America. At the same time, the work of the Anarchist Self-Defence continued until incorporated into other fighting organisations, such as Makhno's army.

During the Russian Civil War, as a result of which the Red Cross was active in relief throughout the areas affected, the name "Anarchist Red Cross" was altered to "Black" to avoid confusion.

When Alexander Berkman was in Russia he was not in specific contact with the ABC but when he went back into exile he re-organised the ABC in Berlin. This fought for the rights of Russian prisoners, still possible at that stage, and then for the prisoners of the Italian Fascists. Its funding still largely came from America. As repression grew in country after country, the work of the ABC became more onerous, added to which the depression in America dried up the funding from Anarchist workers there, often the first to be hit by unemployment. Nevertheless comrades in Chicago continued the task for years in a fund named for Alexander Berkman, organised by B. Yelensky.

During the Spanish Civil War (and after) it was found that practically all international support from radical organisations to Spain went to the Communist Party. A scandal arose among the miners and printers that money specifically raised for Spanish miners and for printers never went to those unions, because they were not Communist controlled, but instead diverted to the UGT or the Popular Front. Catalonia received not a penny because the unions were anarcho-syndicalist. Sam Mainwaring jun raised the matter at the 1937 NUM conference and Albert Meltzer with London Printers Anti-Fascist Committee, to no avail. The CP influence was too strong and denounced criticism as "trotskyite-fascist", then their favourite slogan. Mutual aid groups were mooted, some put into practice, all on the lines of the ABC but unconnected with each other. At this time Meltzer started the Asian Prisoners Aid (an offshoot of many groups for Indian political prisoners) with M.P.T. Acharya and extended it to cover Chinese prisoners.

During the Civil War the CNT floated a new international fund, principally but not exclusively for Spanish refugees, the Solidarid Internacional Antifascista (SIA). At that time the ABC was no longer in existence. The monetary support came mostly from the CNT members themselves. After the Defeat the Spanish refugees especially in France required massive support but all they received was that contributed by other Spanish comrades in the SIA. However, after the World War, the official Spanish libertarian movement in exile seemed to hold aloof from those who continued the struggle in Spain. When Stuart Christie went to Spain in

an abortive attentat against Franco, his case aroused international interest (as it involved a Briton - there had been many French and Italian comrades joining with the Spanish before him). Both the British press and many liberals thought it a frame-up (which caused maximum embarrassment to the Franco regime just when tourism was beginning). As a result attention was focussed on the Spanish prisoners. The post-war genocide (estimated at a million people through one cause or another, equal to the number of German Jews killed by Hitlerism). Christie received immense support in food parcels and so on which he shared with the other libertarian prisoners, and so a new network of support for Spanish political prisoners was built. Few abroad had realised such help was possible, and SIA had not enlightened them.

The CNT had always helped its political prisoners, but it was felt the SIA was not playing a sufficient part at the time. For instance, the majority of the money collected or Spanish exiles in France was from American Jewish and Italian needleworkers in the States, who loathed the CP, but supported Spanish anti-fascism. Some of those involved in the Christie defence campaigns managed, through the efforts of Nancy MacDonald, to get this support diverted to the libertarian prisoners. After his release, Christie joined with Albert Meltzer to re-form the Anarchist Black Cross, the committee since the death of Acharya in Bombay being limited to correspondence with a few Chinese comrades and Christie utilised his own contacts with CNT prisoners. The idea was not to collect money but to persuade people to adopt a prisoner, and write or (as could be done in the case of Spain but not elsewhere) send food parcels.

The first prisoner to be released who was supported by the ABC in those last years was Miguel Garcia (who had served 22 years) and the three extended the ABC to an international network. The paper Black Flag, started as a bulletin of the ABC, made it well known in the anarchist movement, and independent groups and networks were established everywhere in an informal international.

The work of the ABC has not been "philanthropic". It has raised collections for prisoners and sent parcels but its main work has been solidarity and making sure people are not forgotten. Its most active section now is in Greece where it is the main unifying factor on the libertarian scene. Internationally, two of its secretaries have been murdered by the police - Giuseppe Pinelli, of Milan, was thrown to his death from a police station window, Georg Von Rauch, of Berlin, was shot down in the street by police. In Denmark too it is strong and forms the basis of the Anarchist movement.

Its sections in Canada, America and Australia pioneered the idea of extending support from just Anarchist and political prisoners to all class struggle prisoners, and this is now general. Owing to resistance to the poll tax, at one time there were more British anarchist prisoners than Spanish. The international network, loosely organised, now spreads far beyond the early days when it was an offshoot of "Black Flag", and groups are entirely autonomous.

It has avoided setting up a section in Spain because of the existence of SIA and the CNT Pro-prisoners aid, seeing no point in duplication. The Stockholm chapter of ABC calls itself Anarchist Black Hammer, and the question has recently been raised as to whether the name ABC should not be changed since it is extending its activities to Muslim countries where "cross" might be misunderstood (it is obviously not intended in a religious sense). — — — — —