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The Kate Sharpley Library Then, Now and Next:
An Interview with Barry Pateman

Hello, Barry. How and when did you get involved with the Kate Sharpley Library?

I first visited the KSL in 1983/1984. I had been around the edges (and probably too involved) of some rather intense disagreements about anarchism and anarchist practice. I had become aware that within anarchism there were numerous histories and practices and I wanted to find out more. At the time the Library was in a squat in St Georges' Residences in Brixton. Col Longmore and Ineke Frencken had done a magnificent job in rescuing and organizing it. I vividly remember looking at some small fliers advertising meetings on supporting Spanish exiles in the nineteen forties and reading copies of "Direct Action" from the same period. Something changed in me. I became an obsessive seeker of anarchist papers, books, pamphlets, ephemera etc. I wanted, in retrospect, to keep them alive in some way. I also visited the British Library, LSE, Warwick etc just reading in the archives there. All the time, though I was bothered that much of our history was in state hands and not within easy access of many of us. It is still not that easy to be an "independent" scholar and access these materials. Above all I could not understand why "prominent" anarchists gave their material to state or private universities and not keep them within the movement - or at least make sure that copies were made of everything so it was with us and hopefully, a little more accessible. I came back full circle then to appreciate the KSL and the work they were doing. It was labour intensive and hardly full of glamour but it was, I felt, vital.

And what happened next?

So my idea was always to, eventually, donate all the stuff I was collecting to KSL, once it had found a more secure home. Then, I think in 1991, I learnt from Albert Meltzer that the KSL was in search of a new home. I was living in Stamford [near Peterborough] at the time and, I guess, did just about have room for it and I volunteered. I cannot say my Mrs was too happy as we arrived with a minibus full of boxes (twice!!) but she put on a fixed smile and made some coffee. She did mutter loudly, I remember. As far as I can recall I was very intimidated by both the sheer amount and the responsibility of having it in our house. Feelings I have never lost, alongside the excitement of it all.

When you took it on, did the library fill a spare room?

The whole house? And what sort of material did it already contain?

The Library filled up one room with boxes and I put others on the floor, on tables etc. Initially I began to sort what I could. English language books, papers, newspapers, pamphlets, correspondence, ephemera in one place etc. Other languages all grouped together as well. As I did this I chatted to Albert about future plans. He was very keen on KSL becoming a little publishing house by publishing some of the material it had. Col and Ineke had produced some nice Bulletins and he was keen to make these a regular feature. That was the genesis of the Bulletin of the KSL. The first publication, while I was still unpacking(!), was George Cores' "Personal Recollections of the Anarchist Past" which he took from George's manuscript. Meanwhile I had chatted to Albert, I think, about changing the emphasis of the KSL. When it arrived it had considerable amounts of anarchist historical material in it. It also had material that anarchists could use - health and safety regulations etc; standard histories of Fascism; books about various aspects and periods of history etc, etc. From my own searching I had become to realise there was so much material by and about anarchists that I felt KSL should concentrate on that. I should say that, at that time, I did not realise just how much there was!! Putting it simply KSL should exist for the collection and diffusion of our history. I had begun to sense that the narrative of anarchist histories and ideas were complex ones and we had only begun to scrape the surface of it. Albert was much further ahead of me in that regard.

"Albert was much further ahead of me" - can you expand on that?

Albert knew that anarchism was not just Kropotkin or Stirner, or whoever. It was the putting into practice of it all that was important. He knew that this could be done by people who had only a bare knowledge (if any!!) of our major writers and thinkers. He also knew that histories of anarchism excluded countless people who had been instrumental in its development and changes. Because these people often did not write theory or were prominent speakers they were ignored. He also knew that, among anarchists, anarchist history could be a history of bitter contention and was as partial as any history. [pto]

Special Double Issue: Novels, Repression and Unknown Anarchists

He was reading accounts of his times in anarchism that, to him, were not particularly accurate. Ironically of late that has begun to happen to me, leaving me to wonder if I have forgotten lots of things, or just not been aware. So all this I sensed.

How has the Library changed since you took it on? I assume it's now larger?

The most obvious change in the Library is its sheer size. It has grown exponentially. Friends and Comrades have donated material, we have bought an awful lot and, as a result, it is massive. You think you know most of the stuff that is out there, yet, everyday, we are constantly coming across material, or references to it, that we have never heard of. It's mostly, all shelved now, or in archive boxes. That helps!! A major difference is that we have accepted that we are an archive. Our job is not just to collect, but to preserve as well. There are not that many Latvian anarchist papers around from the 1900s. We do well to make sure they survive. Consequently much of our time and money (always money) goes into archival preservation material – archive folders, acid free folders, acid free mylar envelopes for our pamphlets etc etc. I was amazed just how much all this stuff costs. We have saved up to buy some acid free boxes. Damn someone is making money somewhere!!

Can you hazard a guess at how many books the library now contains? Or how many minibuses it would fill?

We have over two thousand books, three thousand pamphlets and over two thousand periodicals – and that is in the English language alone. We have large French, Italian and Spanish sections, as well as publications in most languages, including Esperanto. I cannot even begin to assess the amount of anarchist ephemera we have. You would need a few pantechnicons now!!

[Part two of this interview will appear in our next issue]

Mat Kavanagh and the History of Anarchism

The historian G. M. Young reflected that no historian should begin writing until they heard the voices of the people they were researching. No problem with that rule here. Sometimes you can't hear yourself with all the nattering going on in the boxes and on the shelves. It's time then, I guess, to begin writing.

Idly browsing in the archive the other day (an activity much to be encouraged) I picked up a two-volume edition of John M. Robertson's *A Short History of Free Thought Ancient and Modern* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co. Ltd., 1899). On the FFEP was the signature of Mat Kavanagh and on each fly-leaf were meticulous notes on Robertson's text in Kavanagh's copperplate handwriting. Kavanagh is a subject of one of Nick Heath's excellent

biographical sketches on libcom and I would urge you to read it, but I want to talk about Mat Kavanagh in terms of what we mean when we write, or talk, about the history of anarchism.

John Hewetson wrote a warm and appreciative obituary of Mat in the "Freedom" of March 20, 1954 (Mat died on Friday, March 12th, 1954). In it Hewetson said "very few comrades have been so widely known in the anarchist movement in this country for he addressed audiences in many towns." In his *The Anarchists in London, 1935–1955*, Sanday: Cienfuegos Press, 1976), Albert Meltzer writes of Kavanagh that "It was mainly due to his efforts that the Anarchist movement was kept alive during the difficult period between 1914 and 1934 when he still had much to give the movement." Kavanagh then played an important role in British anarchism. Interestingly, though, you don't find him in either George Woodcock's *Anarchism* (London: Penguin) or Peter Marshall's *Demanding the Impossible* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010) – not even a footnote.

So, apart from some aficionados Mat Kavanagh, it would be fair to say, is not well known now. Never mind that he tried to hold a movement together by passing on its traditions and histories. Never mind he was a prolific and popular speaker – to some the public persona of anarchism and anarchy – and, I think, a clarifier of anarchist ideas. The problem we have is that he did not write all that much and what he did write, that wasn't about figures from the anarchist past, was often in the moment, and not written with an eye to posterity which appears to count in some peoples eyes more than anything.

Throughout the nineteen thirties and beyond Mat wrote clear, lucid and straightforward sketches of anarchists who often had played a similar role to himself in the development of British anarchist organization and practice. Now, these were, as I said, written with at least a glance towards posterity. He was shrewd enough to realize that something was being lost and needed to be given whatever permanence he could provide. These biographical sketches became, in retrospect, pathways illustrating his own journeys in anarchism. His other writings though were different. They, too, were straightforward and lucid, but very much concerned with now. How to organize, the chances for anarchy after the war's end etc etc In some of them we can certainly see progressions in his thinking. In the May 1935 issue of Freedom he appeals to Communist Party members over the heads of their leaders to join anarchists in common struggle. By the September 1944 of War Commentary he blanket criticizes the Independent Labour Party and its members for opportunistically adopting anarchist positions. All sense and possibility of collaboration between anarchists and other groups on the left does appear to have disappeared, in his mind, anyway.

Barry Pateman / Mat Kavanagh

Those of us interested in anarchist history are faced with something of a challenge here. We can certainly, if sketchily, find some traces of Kavanagh's anarchism, but we need to put in some real work to be able to place his non-biographical writings in the social context they were written in. They are not candidates for subjects in a Ph.D. in political theory. Other writers will have to suffice for that. What interests me about his writings is Kavanagh's sense of audience. Who did Mat write for? Now we know Mat worked for long periods of his life on building sites and, later, as a barber (there is a rumor that he cut George Orwell's hair) and it struck me that we can see Mat's articles as the written evidence of lots of conversations and discussions he must have had every day; if we go back to Robertson's book and look again at Mat's notes on the fly leaves, two things strike me. One, here is a working class scholar at work, making sense of a huge amount of information and following his own autonomous, intellectual trails. The second point is here is Kavanagh actually working out what knowledge he can take from this book that will be useful in his discussion on anarchism and anarchy with his work mates. It's evidence, if you like, of a search for that really useful knowledge that will help inform his chats with people over lunch breaks, in the pub, and at various types of meetings.

Now, I wouldn't dream of suggesting that working class people are incapable of understanding complex intellectual ideas, although I would suggest that complex intellectual ideas are very rarely capable of understanding working class people, but I'll leave that for another time. I would argue, though, that some conversation (or discourse) may well be different from accepted "intellectual" discourse and, at least, just as important. In Kavanagh's world you choose your words carefully, listen a lot, try and create a logic in the face of illogic, take the piss, have it taken out of you, argue, swear, and use examples and similes that reflect the common culture of work and social experience. Always you are prepared for unexpected challenges, agreements, and plain mockeries. This is not a place where you are talking to the converted and you can vent your spleen against all sorts of impure and hopeless paths to anarchy every other anarchist has taken apart from you and your mates – and you are not sure about one or two of them either. This is a different world that needs different writing. Put simply it is where the language of anarchism meets the language of everyday life. All this I think helps us understand Mat's articles a little better. They are written appeals to people's common sense, often taking them on apparently uncomplicated journeys from beginning to end, yet dealing beneath the surface with rather complex ideas and feelings. Now no one is saying that one method of writing is better than another. What I would say is that we need to be aware that

writing like Kavanagh's was an integral part of anarchist history and we should respect and perhaps look at it more closely than we have done.

Two final thoughts. I am, of course, struck by Mat Kavanagh's desire to inform his contemporaries about their movement's past. As I have grown older I can appreciate the critical role he played. For a movement that is often predicated on youth and excited and intrigued by the new Kavanagh played a critical role in maintaining continuity, memory, and culture. It's easy to disparage the past, and the old ways as circumstantialism runs rampant (you know "circumstances have changed, things are not the same"). Of course adapting to circumstances can be good and, sometimes, not so good! Whatever the results of that discussion I am still struck by how many unwritten and unsung anarchists must have played a similar role to Kavanagh in other countries.

The second thought that struck me was prompted by a line or two in John Hewetson's obituary. He wrote that Kavanagh's "experience taught him to adhere to the traditional ideas of the movement." Mm... I'm not quite sure what that means. I'd guess it's a coded reference to the centrality of class struggle. It's an interesting point though. When you are talking on the job, at lunch breaks or in the pub you chat about a common culture – the foreman is useless, we don't need him. Look at how crap these tools are. No warning about overtime again. Those carpenters did a crap job (Of course sometimes you just get drunk and have a laugh and forget all about it!) Whatever the topic you probably don't begin to talk about any overarching new theories of social change. You start from where you are and what you see and feel. It's hard enough to deal with the "old" never mind the "new". That said – when Kavanagh spoke at all those meetings, or when Chaim Weinberg did the same in the USA, we do probably need to ask that, if they were recognized by their contemporaries as important to the spread and proliferation of anarchists ideas, what, then, was the anarchism they spoke about and what was it's relation to the books, pamphlets and newspapers produced by the more well-known anarchists? Above all we might ask where are they in the histories of anarchism and anarchist thought and practice, and what anarchism have we all been building on and reacting to?

<http://kslnotes.wordpress.com/2010/09/06/mat-kavanagh-and-the-history-of-anarchism/>

Credit

This issue of *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* produced by the KSL Collective October 2010. Let us know what you think of it!

London and Liverpool

Some little known anarchists: James Harrigan

The subject of this sketch was a cockney of the working class. A shoemaker who tramped the country making and repairing boots and shoes, varying his occupation by hawking different articles. He held meetings in the provincial towns which he visited during his travels, never looking for any assistance in his propaganda work. All he wanted was a crowd, and with his strong voice, and ready wit, he always held their attention. He was a member of the first "International", and opposed the "arm-chair" revolutionaries of those days, as he did later on in the "Eighties". He probably earned the proud distinction of being the first open-air propagandist of avowed Anarchism in England. When H. Seymour was publishing the first English anarchist paper, Harrigan was selling it at his meetings in the parks, besides occasionally contributing to its columns. The "Anarchist" after a fluttering existence, during which it changed from Anarchist-Communism to Anarchist-Individualism died on the advent of "Freedom".

Harrigan, like Chatterton, has been described in a novel which Olive [Helen and Olivia] Rossetti wrote under the nom-de-plume of Helen Meredith: "A Girl Among the Anarchists". She gives us a picture which is, on the whole, a truthful one. "He was a very small man, certainly not more than five feet high, thin and wiry, with gray hair and moustache, but otherwise clean-shaven. His features were unusually expressive and mobile, from his some-what scornful mouth to his deep-set observant eyes, and clearly denoted the absence of the Stolid Saxon strain in his blood. His accent, too, though not that of an educated man, was free from the cockney twang. His dress was spare as his figure, but though well-worn there was something spruce and trim about his whole demeanour, which indicated that he was not totally indifferent to the impression he created on others."

Harrigan's propaganda work was done in what has justly been called "The heroic period of Anarchism", when the names of Emile Henri [Henry], Ravachol, and Sante Caserio were on the lips of every-one, and Anarchists were regarded as bomb-throwers and assassins. Hostile audiences were often met with, yet he could gain their sympathy without compromising his position, invariably explaining that, in his view, the violence of some Anarchists was a natural reflex of the violence and tyranny of governments.

Propagandists such as Harrigan, work away at the street corners, and in the parks, known only to a few, and leave a memory only among those who were their intimates. But who can measure their influence on their time, or tell what waves of thought they have set in motion? Is it improbable that Maurice Hewlett, after listening to some Anarchist speaker in one of the parks,

was inspired to create that fine anarchistic character "John Senhouse", in the "Open Country"?

Thousands of such men and women, in the course of years, have worked persistently and unobtrusively, changing the current of thought of their time. Like practically all such sincere workers, Harrigan died miserably poor.

Mat Kavanagh, Freedom, April 1934.

Liverpool Anarchists in the Early 1980's

The writer of the following contribution left Merseyside in 1985 and was subsequently an active anarcho-syndicalist in London.

The Liverpool Anarchist Group of the later 1980's, and beyond, centred on the Mutual Aid Centre, had an earlier predecessor. Together with its spin-off, Liverpool Direct Action Group, the development, mistakes, evolution and changes of direction of the earlier Anarchist Group in the early eighties can be said to have paved the way for the later flowering of Anarchism in Liverpool.

The first meetings of this earlier Liverpool Anarchist Group took place in the spring and summer of 1982, alternately in group members' homes and in the News From Nowhere bookshop, a link with the past activism of the 60's and 70's of which none of us were then aware. It is no coincidence that this group, and others across Britain at the time, were getting off the ground at a time of widespread interest among young people in anarchist ideas unknown for a long time, due in large part to the then anarchist punk music scene. For example, the leafleting by the Anarchist Group of a gig by the anarchist band Crass in May 1982 resulted in a large influx of new members and contacts. Sifting through the genuine and bogus was learned through experience.

There were strands other than the above, however. The initial advert in News From Nowhere bookshop which had led to the setting up of Liverpool Anarchist Group had been placed by a member of the national anarcho-syndicalist organisation, the Direct Action Movement.

The early interests and activities of members of the Anarchist Group at this time, 1982, reflected the directions from which people were coming, namely the non-violent direct action wing of the peace movement, and the Hunt Saboteurs. This changed with the influx of new members from the end of 1982 into 1983 with decided class struggle views, and as the views of existing members changed and developed while other members drifted away.

Membership at this time was informal. Anyone who attended more than a couple of meetings was a 'member'. Collections were made at meetings to cover the postage costs of the Group Secretary and for printing leaflets. Two further things should be said here. Most of the then members of Liverpool Anarchist Group were from young working class backgrounds, with no earlier experience in

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student or Left politics. There was, briefly, an anarchist group at Liverpool University, the strangely-named 'Discordian Association'. There were no joint activities of any significance, save an occasional bookstall; when member of Liverpool Direct Action Group intervened on several occasions at the university during the Miners' Strike a couple of years later, it was as outsiders. The Discordians had long gone.

Secondly, Liverpool Anarchist Group did not represent the sum total of all libertarians on Merseyside. There were other libertarians with a class perspective, some of whom did later join the LDAG.

[break in text] of the North West Anarchist Federation. A loose coalition of disparate views, this fell apart in 1984. However, it did result in wider contacts with other areas, contacts which were later strengthened in some cases, and contributed to the politicisation and further development of views of comrades in Liverpool.

Evident of this politicisation was the wider field of activities of Liverpool Anarchists in 1983. These included pickets of Army Careers Offices in protest against the newly-introduced Youth Training Scheme and its military links; participation in the first of the "Stop The City" protests in London during September of that year; regular attendance on the picket lines during "The Messenger" dispute at Warrington; and regular leafleting to highlight the case of K. Omori, an anarchist and Ainu native people's activist then on death row in Japan for alleged involvement in a bombing which killed two people. Also in this year, Liverpool Anarchist Group moved its meetings to a city centre pub. Discussions became a regular part of meetings.

Some Liverpool anarchists by now were involved in "The Black and Red", a musical and cultural project inspired by the 1 in 12 club in Bradford. A plan to squat an old cinema in New Brighton fell through but, from loss-making beginnings at the end of 1983, regular gigs at the Lark Lane Community Centre in 1984 began to attract considerable numbers, and a regular weekly venue was started up in Liverpool city centre. The Black and Red would up in 1985, as people involved either moved away or were busy elsewhere.

In 1984 the Liverpool Direct Action Group was set up. Solidarity work during the Miners' Strike, following on from *The Messenger* dispute, brought class struggle anarchist members of Liverpool Anarchist Group, including members of the Direct Action Movement, into regular working contact with other class struggle libertarians. The setting up of the new group addressed the need to build on that contact at a very important time. Although nothing to do with the DAM, the name of the new group did cause some confusion.

The above decision meant that, for a time, there were two anarchist groups on Merseyside, with overlapping memberships. Anarchists were active in support work throughout Merseyside during the Great Strike. This, combined with leafleting and graffiti campaigns in the city centre meant a significantly greater anarchist presence, which in turn began to attract the active hostility of sections of the bureaucratic Left running Liverpool City Council and local unions. Three issues of a local anarchist paper – *Renegade*, later *Agitator* – were produced and widely-circulated. Apart from the Direct Action Movement, contacts were developed with Class War at this time.

The Liverpool Anarchist Group set up in April 1982 called it a day in November 1984. From its first activity, leafleting a CND march in Preston, time had moved on. Views had changed, people had moved away, there was so much more else happening. Later anarchist activists, and some old faces, would build on the foundations it had laid.

Love, Sacrifice and Revenge by Diego R. Barbosa

Amor, Sacrificio Y Venganza (Love, Sacrifice and Revenge) by Diego R. Barbosa was published as No 16 in the *Novela Libre* series in December 1935. The Montseny family published monthly pamphlets intended for working class readers as the *Novela Ideal* series and the companion series *Novela Libre* had more literary pretensions; both series were expected to meet three criteria – spread an appreciation of a libertarian society, appeal to the readers' emotions and be accessible. Something like 160 writers contributed to the two series and Diego R. Barbosa (1885-1936) wrote four, of which *Love, Sacrifice and Revenge* was the latest. It had been on the bookstalls and selling at just 50 centimos a copy for less than a year when its farmhand and anarchist author was murdered (beaten to death) by Falangists.

José Luis Gutiérrez Molina (*El Anarquismo en Chiclana: Diego R. Barbosa, obrero y escritor (1885-1936)*) offers us this summary of the plot.

The protagonist of the action (...) set in Andalusia during the Second Republic is Juan Despierto, a peasant who feeds his family with whatever game he can hunt down and meagre work he can find. One day he runs into Ramón, a game-keeper and son of the man who murdered Juan's own father. He also meets an anarchist propagandist, Daniel, a young man forced into exile for his beliefs. During his absence, Daniel's sweetheart Mariana is raped by one of the landowner's sons, and is forced to marry an estate worker in order to save appearances: that worker is none other than the game-keeper Juan has just met. On his way towards the estate Juan tells Daniel what became of his sweetheart. They both determine to wreak [pto]

Diego R. Barbosa, farmhand, anarchist, novelist

[continued from previous page]

revenge on the rapist. The game-keeper later joins them. The reuniting of Daniel and Mariana reawakens feelings they thought they had forgotten. As the winter comes on, the peasants are forced into striking and Daniel is arrested. He is at large again by June when fire destroys the crops. One day Ramón, Daniel and Juan track down the rapist and have their revenge. They string him up from the very same pine tree used years previously by the game-keeper's father. Thrown into prison, Ramón asks Mariana to move in with Daniel.

This drama has all of the favourite themes of the anarchist activist author, Barbosa. The protagonists mirror the various types of country folk. but they are more than mere archetypes. They are living characters. Especially Ramón and Juan Despierto. The former is the slave who has not managed to shrug off dependency and submissiveness towards the bosses, the land-owners. Whereas the latter is the farm labourer who 'instinctively' and later as a result of his reading and anarchist propaganda knows that neither the soil nor the animals can be anybody's property. Because nobody created them or reared them.

In every case except Daniel's, their personalities grow. The game-keeper comes to question his job and gives free rein to the built-up resentment he feels about his father's death and the rape of his wife. And the change is personal too. He realises that Mariana's real love is Daniel and he finishes up asking her to go with Daniel. Juan Despierto is changed too. Little by little his 'innate common sense' matures into a consciousness of his status as a victim of oppression. Poaching stops being a 'petty crime' and becomes a form of rebelliousness and peasant protest.

There are no such nuances in the character of Daniel, nor that of the señorito rapist. The anarchist acts as a catalyst in the situation. His contact with Juan and Ramón sets off a chain reaction, although he himself is unchanged. He represents the anarchist activist whose behaviour and actions awakens and organises men whose consciousness is asleep. And he is an anarchist rather than a trade unionist. [Here] labour organisations seems rather distant and is barely hinted at in that he is in preventive detention – like many a CNT member found himself – in connection with a strike. At the other extreme, equally schematic, we have the figure of the señorito, Pepe. A tidal wave of lust, he lacks the values which his adversaries knowingly or unconsciously boast: courage, industriousness and nobility. He stands for the estate-owners who refuse to see themselves as like other men, with the same rights but without the privileges that allow him to keep the peasants in poverty and claim exclusive title to the bounty of nature.

Not that the plot is timeless. In chronological terms, it is set during the Second Republic. When the oppressed awake and shrug off old superstitions such as believing

that the polished stones strewn around the fields derive from lightning bolts. This is a very recurrent theme among anarchists: the sort of education that banishes ignorance is the best weapon of the revolution. Which is why the powerful and the wealthy do all in their power to deny the workers education. But education by itself is not enough. A violent society cannot help but engender more violence. Men can be horrible just as nature can. Hence the awful death inflicted on the rapist and the arson that razes the fields and inundates the village with ashes that nothing and no one can do anything to stop.

Thoroughly conversant with his subject matter, Barbosa offers us a fluent story in which he depicts in sombre colours the failure of republican reformism which is explicitly criticised for its law on municipal boundaries. This was an attempt to confine the activities of a worker within fixed boundaries when necessity acknowledged no such boundaries. It was meant to ease the authorities' inability to prevent a landowner boycott that left the fields untilled and added to peasant misery and to preserve the repressive practices of the Civil Guard. Barbosa makes it plain that the example to follow was the example of the anarchists and what they were doing.

José Luis Gutiérrez Molina

"Love, Sacrifice and Revenge" Chapter one

Juan Despierto made his way across the broad meadow, heading for the wide pastures of El Carrizal, the estate of the dowager Marquesa de Turbiasaguas, intending to enter there and catch a few things to ensure that his loved ones had some meagre fare to eat that day. He came to the edge of the estate, skipped over the barbed wire with his usual agility and slipped inside as stealthily as you like, since the pastures not only belonged to the estate but were fenced off for the sole and exclusive enjoyment of their owners and their distinguished friends and relations.

He had not taken too many steps and was poised to nestle down in one of the spots known to him when he was startled by a booming voice that resonated in his ears:

"Ahoj there, pal. Where are you going?"

You can read the rest of the chapter on our website:

<http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/hhmhvs>

Chatting on the Phone with Miquel Mir (22 April 2010)

Miquel Mir rang me this morning, ranting about my hating his books and the work he had done. When I made to answer him that I was merely exposing him as a fraud on the basis that ... he cut me off, repeatedly shouting that I should listen to him, to which I replied that he was the one that needed to listen, and since he began shouting even more hysterically, repeating that everybody needed to listen to him, I hung up. [pto]

On fiction and history

Chatting on the Phone with Miquel Mir [continued]

A few minutes later the phone rang again. It was Miquel Mir back to ask me, more calmly and in friendlier and rather incredulous tones, if I had hung up the phone, to which I said that if it was a phone conversation that he was after he would need to let me speak, not raise his tone of voice and show good manners, and that if he couldn't play by those rules I'd hang up again.

The conversation proceeded, somewhat strained but within the parameters set, and the upshot was as follows:

1. Given my insistence that the name Josep Serra does not figure in the Control Patrols' list of names, he initially argued that he had been with the CNT-FAI Investigation Service patrol. When I said that the name Josep Serra does not appear in the roll-call of that Service either, which shows Manuel Escorza was paid 84 pesetas, he was obliged to come up with a different story, confirming for me that there never was a Josep Serra. According to Mir, the name was taken from the papers of a quite separate individual. Using this name the actual patrol member, whose name is unknown, was able to live a clandestine existence and in fact that was the name they put on his grave. He indicated that he was unable to tell me the real name of the patrolman who had lived in exile under the alias Josep Serra, on account of an undertaking he had given to the family. My response was that this was all very novelish and convenient, because that way nobody could verify that the patrolmen and his diary ever really existed. But that this was not an historian's approach and that he should in any event have explained that right from the outset. I stressed to him that he was amalgamating novel-writing and history and that he had no scientific methodology. "Miquel, you can't decide whether you're writing a mystery novel or a history book." In any event, he finished up confirming my contention that THERE WAS NO JOSEP SERRA.

2. Repeatedly I emphasised to him that he had manipulated and tinkered with Asens's memoirs and had changed the dates of Asens's trip to France and Switzerland in that Asens had written "February 1937" whereas he, on page 229 of his book had altered the dates and put "October 1936", because that fitted in with his contention that Terradellas pocketed the money handed over for the Marists. And this was not on and was a fraud deliberately perpetrated in order to defame Terradellas. To my surprise, his response was that "Asens's memoirs are mistaken", to which I replied of course that memoirs, no matter whose they might be, are never 'wrong' and in any event one could take issue with any memoirs just to suit the thesis of some historian who is manipulating them and that word is "fraud". I got tired of repeating to him time and time again, this way and that way, that he had

committed fraud, misrepresentation, deception and at no point did he contest this.

3. I also told him that a history book without footnotes was a novel and that he needed to make up his mind once and for all to have it on the cover of his books that they are novels and not history books. His excuse was that his publishers had removed the footnotes for reasons of readability. My answer to that was that he was insulting his readers by treating them like fools and that in any case such serious defamatory charges as he was levelling against anarchist militants or against Terradellas needed to be properly documented and explained with notes. Now he apologised, stating that the edition had been a very limited one and that it would not be found in the bookshops nor on "St Jordi's Day" [Catalan national holiday], that to all intents and purposes it had been a commission from the Marists who were keen to see it in print, but that it was never meant for the wider public. I observed that many newspapers had joined in with the campaign of defamation targeting the anarchists and Terradellas, all on foot of the fraud that he had perpetrated. At which point he blamed his publisher, since he could show me his book with its hundred-odd notes. If I wanted to see it, all I had to do was arrange a meeting and he would show it to me. My answer was that I had the actual book in my hands, that it stank to high heavens and I was at a loss to know how to pick it up. I countered by saying that as the author he alone bore the responsibility for allowing the book to go out without footnotes and "massaged". And that he had at all times had the option of not publishing under those terms. I further told him that he had no credibility as a historian. And that his audience was confined to a fascist, far right and/or Terradellas-bashing readership.

4. He accused me of having on several occasions come to the defence of the "Marqués de Terradellas", to which I replied that apart from the fact that I did not think of that as an accusation I was not defending any marqués or anybody else but merely exposing his defamation of various anarchist militants and of Terradellas in particular in that these were founded upon the "massaging" of Asens's memoirs. That I wouldn't have opened my mouth if the documentary evidence produced had been authentic, but that I could not stomach this fraud of his which, in my view, was punishable under law, in that it was tantamount to libel. And that's when he hit me with the numbered bills from the ransom payment.

5. I asked him what this new fairytale was all about. He gave me some sort of a story about two brothers, lawyers to the Marists, who had traced these numbered bills all the way to Terradellas with whom they had spoken during his time in exile in France on several occasions, accusing him of pocketing the ransom paid for the Marists. I replied that this was news to me but that if

On fiction and history

he had the documentary evidence he should produce it. He told me that he would be doing precisely that in his next book, to which he would also add the arrest orders issued by Escorza and statements made by the families of the murdered Marists. My answer to that was that he had no credibility and that he could come up with whatever he pleased. Whereupon he talked about showing me other memoirs from a different anarchist militant plus some letters from the latter. He could not photocopy them for me but we should meet up, I could read them and hand them back and later promise to help him tackle the presentation of them in another of his books. So after my accusing him of fraud and libel here he was offering me a chance to help him draft his next diatribe!

6. In an effort to break off what by then had turned into a real pain of a phone conversation, I asked him sarcastically if he was familiar with the three-card tricksters of the Ramblas because he was in the same game himself, what with “now I’ll let you have a look at some photocopies, oh yes I will, oh no I won’t, three cards on the ground, card here, card there, where is the ace?” He replied very sniffily that he never frequented the Ramblas, to which I responded sarcastically that he really ought to from time to time, to see the outrageous or ordinary folk, the pretty girls strolling around and the ideas being tossed around and to clear his head: to which he repeated, rather shocked, as if I had just invited him to sample the whores, that no, he never went to the Ramblas. I insisted that he did not know what he was missing, that it was interesting to see all the three card tricksters in action together, one dealing the cards, one positioned to invite wagers, card here, card there and one always came away the loser, especially if one won, because then somebody would give you a punch and make off with your winnings. But no, the Ramblas were not his cup of tea.

7. At the end of our conversation he switched tactics. Having tried stick and carrot he now switched to divide and conquer. He told me that his targets were not the FAI, (he had nothing against them; they were just out to make their revolution). But there had been a Companys and a Terradellas who had worked hand in glove with the revolutionaries, signing off on decrees, pocketing money and betraying the ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya). And they needed calling to account. He insisted on inviting me yet again to work with him on this: he would let me see Bundó’s memoirs and in return I would help him make sense of them so that they worked to the detriment of Companys and Terradellas, that is, but not to the detriment of the FAI. Again I insisted that he send me the memoirs and once I had read them I could offer an opinion but working together with somebody ignorant of historical methodology and capable of “massaging” the documentary record was out of the question. I

recommended him a handbook on historical methods so that he might bone up on the scientific rudiments of the historian’s work. I’m not sure he got the insult. He insisted that we should meet up so that he could let me in on a couple of who-knows-what terrifically confidential matters. And that, seen or unseen, he would let me read Bundó’s memoirs. Again I told him to make me photocopies so that I could read them at my leisure, comparing them with the bibliography available and then make a judgement of them. Again he insisted that he could not make photocopies but that we should meet up. It seems he was going to send me twenty photocopies of these memoirs and ring me back inside the fortnight. Or maybe not.

8. In short: Mir has acknowledged that there never was a Josep Serra and has acknowledged “massaging” Asens’s memoirs “because Asens was mistaken”. Meaning that he has confirmed the two points I raised against him in the article “The Mir Affair.”

9. Obsession: He has some sort of issue (I know not what) with Companys and Terradellas. I imagine that Mir does not agree that Companys and Terradellas should have collaborated with the anarchists and the CNT. He fails to understand the balance of power at the time which left them with no alternative. He will carry on with his drive to defame libertarians and Companys and especially Terradellas because he has an irrational obsession. Only a court case for libel could stop him. A complaint tabled by a range of historians might be interesting as it might “shock” the publishers well disposed towards Mir.

10. Conclusions: Despite Mir being a non-entity as a historian, somebody who knows practically nothing about the existing bibliography on the Civil War and who has no overall grasp of the thing, we are faced here with somebody who does possess certain documentary evidence (we have no way of telling in advance whether it is genuine or not) and who has proved that he will not hesitate to “massage” it to suit himself. He is feted by certain like-minded publishers and newspapers, out of ignorance, morbid fascination, inadmissible political pressures, commercial considerations, clerical and class hatreds or ideology. Mir is more than capable of feeding a market for anti-libertarian and Terradellas-bashing trash-history bereft of all historical rigour. In a matter as delicate as political violence during the Civil War, Mir may well play a poisonous role and thwart the slightest progress on this topic.

Agustín Guillamón

Source: www.red-libertaria.net/noticias/

[For Guillamon’s original articles on the writings of Miquel Mir, see his Book Review of “Memoirs of a FAI Gunman and a Chronicle of Anarchist Barcelona” and “The ‘Mir Affair’, or the clergy’s hatred of anarchists” on our website.]

Francesco Ghezzi

Free Francesco Ghezzi From Bolshevik Inferno

Who is Francesco Ghezzi? An entire volume would be necessary in order to outline the exceptional story of the life of this revolutionary idealist; nevertheless it is important that lovers of liberty become acquainted with at least the most essential points of his stormy life.

Ghezzi was born 38 years ago in the city of Milan, Italy, in a poor, religious family. He suffered from childhood on all the bitter experiences of poverty. As he grew older he became generous audacious, and developed a bright, open mind, framed in an outspoken and honest character, thus building in his heart the noble sentiments of protest and revolt against slavery and exploitation. At an early age he began to feel the urge to dedicate his life to the cause of freedom and to the rights of the downtrodden, having felt that liberty and justice will be denied as long as government and authority remained in power. This unflinching belief led him to become an Anarchist, an opponent of all forms of oppression of man by man.

In addition to his ability to think clearly Ghezzi has for 20 years been a man of action, a revolutionist of the classic type. In Italy, he took part in every revolutionary mass movement, always among the first in the face of danger. Many times he was persecuted and imprisoned, but the tortures and suffering helped to strengthen his anarchist faith. At the outbreak of the world-war he opposed this war definitely and concretely – he flatly refused to bear arms. He crossed the border to Switzerland, where he reinvigorated his Anarchist and anti-war activities, for which he was imprisoned for 15 months.

As the war ended he returned to Italy only to agitate and to work for the advent of the social revolution. The revolutionary effervescence of the times resulted in actual deeds against the exploiting powers and again Ghezzi was exiled from Italy, having been marked as one of the most dangerous enemies of rising fascism. He went to Russia, hoping to find there a true motherland, but he became disillusioned upon finding a new dominating class (in place of the czaristic rule) born of the Bolshevik party, which was aiming to destroy all the fruits of the revolution and to inaugurate a new tyranny and repression against the masses.

Forced out of Russia he landed in Berlin, where, upon request of the fascist government, he was arrested by the Social-democratic government with orders of deportation, which meant sure death at the hands of the black shirts, but following an international protest and agitation he obtained his release and returned to Russia. Since this time (the winter of 1922-23) Ghezzi lived the life of a worker and peasant in a state of submission as was imposed by Bolshevik rule. He never altered his stand as an

Anarchist, nor could he remain silent in the face of all the Bolshevik injustice. For this unflinching attitude the O. G. P. U. (Political Secret Service) tried to get rid of this clear-sighted opponent and in 1929 Francesco Ghezzi, without any evidence or specific charges, was arrested and sentenced to three years of imprisonment.

Ghezzi Is Dying of Tuberculosis

The years of jail and the various persecutions undermined Ghezzi's health, and the 18 months of slow agony in the Bolshevik dungeons (the political prison regime in Bolshevik Russia far surpasses the Czarist prisons in cruelty and despotism) are dooming Ghezzi to his death. This crime of torturing to death a true friend of the people, only because of his opposition to a new form of tyrannical government shall be an indelible stain upon the pseudo-friends of the proletariat. True Friends of Freedom, arise in protest and save Ghezzi from his present plight! Don't hesitate! Let your voice re-echo in Moscow till it stirs Stalin & Co.

Ghezzi Has Never Been Tried

In a capitalist land, when an Anarchist or a Bolshevik or any malcontent is arrested, he is indicted on a specific charge, even if framed up, and accordingly he is tried and sentenced if found guilty or released by a tribunal, with the prerogative of obtaining defense counsel. *No charges of any nature have ever been made public against Francesco Ghezzi, he was not given a chance to obtain a defense counsel, neither was he given a regular trial. Yet Ghezzi has been sentenced to three Years of imprisonment!*

By whom and how has this sentence been imposed? Was it by orders of the O. G. P. U.?

Suppose in a city of a capitalist country the police arrested a citizen merely because he opposed the existing government and sentenced him to many years of imprisonment without first arraigning him before a duly functioning judge, forbidding him to see his friends or relatives, denying him a lawyer, refusing to state the charges. Would such a procedure be considered different than vile inquisition? No Public Prosecutor anywhere would dare attempt to commit such barbarism.

Under Bolshevik despotism the institution of justice, when applied to political prisoners, is monopolized by dangerous fanatics, little czars, upon whose mercy depends the life and liberty of political opponents. This is done exactly as in fascist Italy.

A New Sacco and Vanzetti Case?

In that Ghezzi case it isn't American plutocracy that is trying to drink the blood from the veins of a labor friend, but the pseudo-Communist government of Moscow, the citadel of old and new czars, where the Ghezzi of the past were no worse off than those of the present.

Francesco Ghezzi

This time Stalin takes the place of Fuller, and Moscow beats even Massachusetts! The Communists are the willing heirs of the Romanoffs, for their persecutions against the honest opponents of their absolutism is *far worse and even more dangerous than that of the former czars.*

Workers of the World! Free men! Francesco Ghezzi is a victim of the O. G. P. U. Capitalism must be fought and abolished, but no new form of slavery under the guise of Bolshevism shall be allowed to go on unchallenged and unopposed.

Bolshevist – Fascists

It is not a mere nickname with which we brand their regime. This is no time for frivolity. We denounce vigorously their shameful deeds and opprobrious tendencies which run parallel with the fascist regime, which subject workers to slavery and repression; where freedom of thought and the right to criticism are stifled; where political opponents are denied the right to work, deprived of the means of subsistence, and are thrown into jails and tortured to submission and even death. This is fascism in Bolshevist Russia!

To the sincere Communists, to the true revolutionary Communists we say: Friends, your so-called leaders are destroying the Russian Revolution; they are playing on your good faith and are basely deceiving you. They are exploiting the Revolution for their own glory; they are sacrificing the welfare of the Russian people; they are planting hatred and contempt not only against reaction, but against thousands who fought and bled for the Revolution.

Don't let any "Communist" or Commissary lead you to misinterpreting this humane appeal. This is *no recruiting propaganda for Anarchism*. It is an alarm that should arouse every exponent of freedom and justice, in behalf of the greatest Revolution in history. Communist friends, beware! Your turn may be next! Stop this political crime before it is too late! Demand from the Russian government officials the IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF FRANCESCO GHEZZI and of all the remaining political prisoners.

See that freedom is given back to all true and sincere revolutionists, regardless of party or shade of thought. Solidarity and tolerance are necessary in order to build a united front in the common fight against all forms of oppression, slavery and tyranny. Join in this crusade and help remove the stains that are blotting the Revolution. Help stop this inquisition, with all its horrors and tortures.

Francesco Ghezzi Must Be Released at Once!

Not only is Ghezzi's freedom demanded by his Anarchist friends and the various revolutionary movements the world over, but also by some of the most renowned men and women in the fields of science, literature, philosophy and political science, such as: ROMAIN ROLAND, Mme. AUTANT-LARA, of the Comedie

Francaise; PANAIT ISTRATI; FRANS MASEREEL; GORGES DURAMEL; MARCEL MARTINET; HAN RYNER; CHARLES VILDRAC; Mme. ANDRE VIOLLIS; LEON WERTH and

The Anarchist Prisoners Defense and Aid Committee of America

[This article presumably comes from 1930 or 1931, when he was imprisoned in Suzdal. The campaign worked: "thanks to the urgent lobbying, Ghezzi was freed after he had been dispatched to exile in Kazakhstan in 1931." He was rearrested in November 1937 and died 3 August 1942 in the Vorkuta camp. For more details see Francesco Ghezzi: Italian Anarchist in Vorkuta by Barbara Ielasi and Mikhail Tsovma in *KSL Bulletin* 55.]

New pamphlet: The Third Revolution? Peasant and worker resistance to the Bolshevik government by Nick Heath

The Makhnovist movement of the Ukraine is the best known of the revolutionary oppositions to the Bolshevik regime. But it was not the only radical challenge the Bolsheviks faced from below. Numerous peasants revolts occurred in the years 1920-22, aiming not to restore the old regime but calling for a third revolution to defend themselves from the new one. Nick Heath here examines their extent, causes and limitations.

Contents:

Introduction : The Third Revolution? Peasant and worker resistance to the Bolshevik government
The West Siberian uprising (1921-1922)
1920: The Sapozhkov Uprising and the Army of Truth
The Fomin mutiny on the Don, 1920-1922
1921: The Maslakov mutiny and the Makhnovists on the Don
Brova, Mikhail or Brava aka Batko Brova, ?-1921
The Kolesnikov Uprising
Workers Revolts against the Bolshevik regime
Lamanov, Anatoli Nikolaevich 1889-1921

Nick Heath became an anarchist in 1966 by reading books on anarchism in the public library. He helped set up Brighton Anarchist Group (1966-1972) and went to Paris in early 70s for a year and participated in the anarchist movement there. Now a member of the Anarchist Federation, he's the author of large number of biographical articles about anarchists as well as articles on the Hungarian Revolution, the Makhnovists etc.

The Third Revolution? : Peasant and worker resistance to the Bolshevik government by Nick Heath
ISBN 9781873605950 Anarchist Sources #14
£3 (£2 to subscribers) or \$3

Stoke Newington Eight Trial

Commander Bomb Explodes

They called it the Angry Brigade trial. It was the top priority hunt, with the so-called crack squad of 25 detectives, 50% Special Branch, that planted guns, explosives and detonators at 359 Amherst Road in August 1971 in a desperate attempt to stop the Angry Brigade from destroying the sacred property of the ruling class.

The odds against proving this planting job in court were enormous. Yet the defence case had the jury virtually split down the middle. For 3 days the jury were divided 7 to 5 (5 for complete acquittal on everything.) Finally, a majority verdict led to a squalid compromise; 4 acquitted, 4 guilty – 4 got 10 years with a jury plea for clemency (part of the deal.)

It was still a victory for the people who defended themselves. Relying on lawyers alone would never have got them so close to a spectacular victory against the state – everyone agrees on that.

The defence succeeded in proving that the police had (i) the motive, (2) the opportunity, and (3) the knowledge of explosives in order to commit the crime – the crime of planting evidence.

And such was the priority to nick someone or another for the Angry Brigade bombings, that it comes as no surprise that they quite happily selected 8 innocent people. As we have shown elsewhere in U.P.A.L., it's no skin off a pig's back if they get the wrong ones.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE DEFENCE

(1) The careful selection of a 100% working class jury, which did not have any trouble in believing that “coppers are bastards” (unlike middle class juries.) Getting the jury was based on a challenge to any juror who had establishment connections with Angry Brigade targets – e.g. cabinet ministers, judges, the police force, the armed forces, and securitor. This was an unprecedented challenge to the political bias of courts and newspaper prejudice.

(2) An attack on scientific evidence ... at the end of the case, the prosecution almost abandoned science, and Mathews, the prosecutor, told the jury to rely on common sense instead. The defence called expert witnesses on chemistry, statistics, and handwriting. In most courts, the prosecution's scientific evidence goes sadly unchallenged.

(3) Three of them defended themselves from the dock, even though they had to do it fighting from their prison cells. But with the help of their McKenzie advisors, they achieved what no lawyer could have achieved – a direct personal rapport with the jury.

(4) The jury was invited to ask questions directly. Justice James ruled against this and instead insisted that all questions from the jury be passed up to him, the judge,

and he would ask them. During the course of the trial, the jury asked a series of very good questions.

(5) All the lawyers in the trial (except the one Q.C.) were forced to respect collective group decision-making. In no other trial have so many lawyers listened so carefully to those defendants defending themselves.

(6) Cross-examination by the 3 defending themselves delved deep into police motives for lying, the psychology of the bomb squad, and the point that innocence or guilt has no bearing whatsoever on the results of a V.I.P. police investigation. Getting someone suitable in the dock is what counts – many of the jury got the message..

(7) Similar cases of planting explosives were referred to e.g. the Irish arms trial based on a Special Branch plot to plant guns and explosives. All the defendants in this case were acquitted (See Sunday Mirror, June 18th). Judge James hated this trial being mentioned.

Detective Inspector Hales has just been charged with a blackmail charge and possessing explosive substances. Unlike the Stoke Newington people, this cop has been given £10,000 bail. Of course, if a cop has explosives it's not such a serious offence, as he is not likely to aim them at the establishment.

(8) Cases of specific police corruption were put to the police witnesses. It caught them unawares.

(9) The defendants opened up their lives to the jury. They carefully explained the whys and wherefores of their class opposition to the state. They were so successful in getting jury support on purely political matters, e.g. their research against the notorious Freshwater property tycoons, that Mathews made a big point of summing up for the prosecution against any “feelings” influencing the jury's verdict.

Mathews told the jury, “it matters not what your feelings may be about capitalist landlords”... whilst conceding that such companies may not be very savory features of our society, Mathews was saying, – stick strictly to the law, members of the jury – even though the law protects precisely these property tycoons. There is no hypocrisy like courtroom hypocrisy. Always make the jury understand the charade that it is.

(10) They turned the conspiracy on it's head, and told the jury about the conspiracy of bosses, cabinet ministers prosecutors and judges to find scapegoats for the Angry Brigade, and to protect their property with every ruthless means at their disposal.

(11) The defence prevented the prosecution from gaining the victory the establishment expected. And with a little more luck, all 8 would have been acquitted.

We can all learn a lot from this trial. (See the Stoke Newington 8 Defence Group publications on the trial.)

Stoke Newington Eight Trial

2'S COMPANY, 3'S A CONSPIRACY

The conspiracy to cause explosions between Jan. 1968 and August 1971 (against all eight defendants) was heavily attacked.

Conspiracy is an umbrella charge which allows the law to substitute guilt by association and suspicion for concrete evidence. In any case, conspiracy is very useful because the prosecution do not have to prove that anybody actually ever did anything.

Added to this is the nebulous nature of the charge, where it is not necessary for the so-called conspirators to even be named. You can always be charged on your own, as a "conspiracy with persons unknown." Conspiracy laws are the natural tools of a semi-police state.

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

The 6 month, trial was an amazing extravagant attempt by the government to get vengeance on the "Angry Brigade." 529 building workers die on building sites every year. Somehow these deaths, neatly reclassified as "industrial accidents" are buried far away from the publicity glare of front page violence. Official society calls knocking the plaster in Robert Carr's kitchen a "terrifying violence" and ignores the callous brutality of everyday death at work.

All the noise about "Angry Brigade violence" had little relationship to the amount of damage that was done. The establishment were frightened stiff, and not of a few pathetic pounds of gelignite. They were scared of the politics behind it.

Four brothers and sisters have been sentenced to 10 years – jailed not for any crime – but for attacking the interests of the ruling class. Up Against the Law is in complete solidarity with them, and with all other prisoners whose only crime was to attack their property interests.

From *Up Against the Law* issue 2 (1972?)

Class War in Barcelona: "Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-revolution in Barcelona, 1898–1937" by Chris Ealham [Review]

Anarchism is more than just the idea of stateless socialism, and the movement is always shaped by the environment where it grows. In *Anarchism and the City*, Ealham's focus is not personalities or philosophies, but anarchist activity and how it connected to working class life. He covers the context it evolved and operated in, including the ideas and actions of ruling class.

This is an academic book, so you get the language of the specialist: "Consistent with the culture of working class resistance to the spatial logic of bourgeois control in the city and betraying signs of earlier protest repertoires, those deemed responsible for the military coup were punished through the destruction of their property." (p185)

Thankfully, it's not incomprehensible, and even gets poetic at times: "*L'Opinió* [left-wing Republican paper] printed a section entitled 'The Robbery of the Day' in which minor non-violent thefts were described sensationally as if the streets were teeming with blood-crazed felons." (p151)

You get some great stories about what the anarchists (and workers) did, from the CNT Public Services Union tunnelling into the Model Jail in the December 1933 insurrection (p136) to the revolutionary recycling of 1936: "In one *barri* the local church was converted into a cinema. Elsewhere, confession boxes were used as newspaper kiosks, market stalls and bus shelters..." (p187)

Ealham doesn't just say what happened, but why. He records the actions and ideas of the powerful, but he's especially strong on the connection between the anarchists and the working class communities they lived in. This is the key to the book. The strength of the CNT was not in the numbers at conferences, but the numbers it could call on on the streets:

"One of the great paradoxes of the CNT was that, despite its huge membership in the city, the number of union activists was relatively small. ... Besides their higher degree of class consciousness – activists were commonly known as 'the ones with ideas' (*los con ideas*) – there was nothing in their dress, lifestyle, behaviour, experiences, speech or place of residence to set them apart from the rest of the workers and, whether at a public meeting, a paper sale, in the factory or the cafe, activists could convey and disseminate ideas in a way that workers found both convincing and understandable." (p41-2) And the tactics they used were connected to working-class life too: "CNT tactics like boycotts, demonstrations and strikes built on neighbourhood sociability: union assemblies mirrored working-class street culture, and the reciprocal solidarity of the *barris* was concretised and given organisational expression by the support afforded to confederated unions." (p36)

This is an epic contribution to the history of anarchism and like the best history books leaves you wanting more (even if you don't agree with all of Ealham's perspectives). Today's anarchist activists (from syndicalists to insurrectionaries) will find some fascinating stories here. But more importantly, they will find food for thought about where we are, where we want to be, and how we get there. If you have a new world in your heart, read this and start asking who's going to help you build it.

Bookunin

Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-revolution in Barcelona, 1898–1937 by Chris Ealham
AK Press, 2010. \$20 / £17. ISBN 9781849350129
First published in 2005 by Routledge as "Class, culture and conflict in Barcelona 1898-1937"

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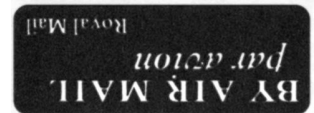
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