

## The Great Swindle: 'This is not the tale of Salvador Puig Antich'

The movie *Salvador* about the one-time member of the MIL or Thousand (1,000),\* Salvador Puig Antich, executed by garrote on 2 March 1974 in the Model Prison in Barcelona will shortly be showing in cinemas around the country [Spain].

In these days when there is so much talk about the recovery of historical memory, we are faced here with a brazen manipulation of the very memory which they purport to want to resuscitate through the making and screening of the movie, to which there has been a strange build-up over recent years.

In fact a short while ago we got an appetiser on TV3 in the form of its first program about the Transition. It was dedicated to Salvador Puig Antich and to the MIL. Now comes the main course.

We could scarcely have expected any other outcome, given that the movie is based on a book written by TV3's current director, Francesc Escribano. Though certainly very well written, *Cuento atrás* [Countdown] is a perfect example of the art of manipulation and lying. This slick, commercial melodrama offers us no explanation of Salvador Puig Antich's actual battle, the reasons why he fought and perished, what he believed in, the process whereby he became radicalised politically and his commitment to the struggle alongside what was then the most radically anti-capitalist strand of the workers' movement. Or his close ties to that movement and its confrontation with the *dirigiste* [statist] and reformist approach of the PSUC-controlled Workers' Commissions. Not a word is said about the socio-political context that spawned the MIL and likewise its attempts at a revolutionary break with it or, of course, the complicity of the Catalan 'democratic' elements rallied around the 'Asamblea de Catalunya' and its great potential for mobilising the people. The PSUC systematically refused right up until that fateful night to lift a finger to mobilise the populace to save Salvador. They were on the brink of a pact with the Francoists. And thus had to be seen combating these anti-capitalist worker and popular factions whose struggle was geared towards a transformation of society.

Well, as I say, we could scarcely be surprised by the results of this movie. It is all neat and tidy so as to cover



up or misrepresent facts that they have no intention of disclosing, facts bearing on the sham transition and the familiar tragic consequences then and now attendant upon this approach [accepting the myth of the 'democratic' transition] by the working class and people of which all are aware. Hardly surprising that they should cover their shame and try to gloss over their guilty consciences.

Mediapro is Europe's second largest audio-visual multinational: a factory churning out most TV products, ads, movies and the like: it wields great control over the media, revising and adapting recent history

as suits the authorities and keeping mum about past and present struggles. Mediapro is well in with the 'democratic' institutions – the Generalitat and TV3 – and Manuel Hueriga is a specialist in soap operas and the ideal choice for this revisionist and history-manufacturing project. It defies belief that this guy argues that one of the aims of his movie is to denounce the death penalty, when the death penalty was abolished in Spain back in 1978 and after Berlanga and the like produced superb films on the matter years back.

### *This is not the tale of Salvador Puig Antich*

We are served up a slick, commercial soap opera – a rear tear-jerker of a movie. A laughable fictional melodrama, run-of-the-mill stuff. A slick action movie that blinds us to the real history of Salvador and so many others and above all to the whys and wherefores and targets of their struggles. We are shielded from the circumstances, political activity and purposes behind the expropriations and the political and revolutionary awakening that stretches over a lengthy career of struggle. How was the MIL born and for what purpose? Its connections with the workers' movement's most radical struggles. There is no reference to those struggles not even to the final one, in the wake of the execution, when the biggest factories in Barcelona and district shut down and thousands of workers demonstrated, with hundreds arrested on the Ramblas.

We are shown Salvador as some sort of a playboy and his comrades as a gang of ne'er-do-wells with political overtones. [pto]

## Salvador Puig Antich

*The unbelievable chief warder Jesús Irurre*

There is one thing that inspires disbelief and outrage in all of us who have sampled and experienced repression in the Model Prison – the character of prison warder Jesús Irurre.

In the scene where Salvador is being executed, up starts the aforesaid warder to erupt, not once, but twice: ‘Sonofabitch! That murdering Franco! Bastard!’ And yet, folks, nothing happens to him; he carries on with his career as a prison warder! We have eye-witness testimony as to the sort of repression seen from him in the Model Prison from 1973 to 1978 from several inmates who endured the bullying, humiliation and harassment normally inflicted by him during the night as he wielded his baton. Yet Escribano depicts him in his book as ‘a great convert to democracy’ and, despite the objections raised, Manuel Hueriga’s script contains this ‘reassuring scene’ which plainly fits the theory or sham morality behind his movie like a glove: the Franco regime is on its way out, crumbling under its own weight and even the gaoler is a MIL supporter and against the regime. This sparkling thesis is outweighed by the historical record. This politically-motivated falsehood, insinuating that in the early ‘70s what was needed was politics and not what we were doing, presents us as unhelpful nutcases. And Salvador, poor lad, a good lad, is our bamboozled and misguided victim. Our way was not the right way. Plainly the message here is: It is OK to do away with those who stand up to the system of exploitation and capitalist domination. No need to be quite that radical. There are, obviously, other political ways of working, the ones we have now and these are not changing and have not changed. The message going out to the young is unmistakable.

In this movie, not only are insignificant anecdotes accorded an inflated prominence and importance, but the true history of anti-capitalist subversion and of day to day lives altered through autonomous practice is covered up. This movie is manipulative and tinkers with the real history which was insulting and terrifying to all of us who, male and female, who fought and lived through those years.

**I CALL FOR A BOYCOTT AND EMPHATIC DENUNCIATION OF THIS MOVIE’S MISAPPROPRIATION AND MISREPRESENTATION OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD!**

One former member of the MIL, or 1,000, one former comrade of Salvador’s, just one among the many.

[www.sindominio.net/marxa-maquis](http://www.sindominio.net/marxa-maquis)

\* MIL (Movimiento Iberico de Liberacion = Iberian Liberation Movement). The word ‘mil’ also translates as ‘thousand’.

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For a protest leaflet, issued by the Local Federation of Anarchist Groups (Barcelona) in March 1974, see KSL bulletin #16. Puig Antich is pronounced ‘Pooch Antick’

### **Puig Antich, 30 Years On**

I was up and about early that morning. I had not slept well. It was freezing cold in Paris. I turned on the radio and listened to the news. Still nothing.

The news reached me later, by which time I was stuck in traffic on a ring road. My worst fears had been confirmed: “Catalan anarchist Salvador Puig Antich” – the announcer on France-Inter read out – “was executed at dawn today in Barcelona. Franco refused clemency. Also executed was the Polish national Heinz Chez, sentenced to death for the killing of a Civil Guard. Both were executed by *garrote vil*.” Tears welled up in my eyes. “Rotten bastards” – I muttered.

It was not the Francoists that I was thinking of. Not just them, at any rate. My thoughts flew to a few months before. I was remembering a meeting held right there in Paris. Several of us far left militants had sought a meeting with the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Spain. (PCE) It was granted. Santiago Alvarez, the general secretary of the Galician Communist Party, and Napoleon Olasolo, an old acquaintance from the Communist Party of Euskadi attended. We suggested to them that they coordinate efforts to mount a robust campaign to prevent the execution of Puig Antich. Santiago Alvarez treated us to a lengthy oration showing according to him, how “objective domestic and international conditions” would prevent Franco from proceeding with the execution. As a result, since the execution was “objectively” an impossibility, no need to get unduly exercised about opposing it.

But what if objective conditions let us down? – I pressed him. He looked at me with a paternal grin reflecting the vast superiority afforded him by lengthy experience as an old campaigner over the naïve impulsiveness of this 25 year old youngster who dared to question the scientific character of his analysis. In short, they rejected our proposal.

We did what we could, but we did not have the capacity to whip up across Europe a state of outrage that would really bother the Franco regime. The PCE had that capacity. There was no mobilisation. The execution went ahead. 2 March 1974.

Yet again, objective conditions had gone awry. Their fault, no doubt.

Javier Ortiz. From *CNT* (Madrid) April 2004

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Objectors to the movie *Salvador* and its message have a site: [www.paremoslapeliculasalvador.tk](http://www.paremoslapeliculasalvador.tk) that contains a lot of MIL-related materials from Tellez and others. ‘The Fight For History’ which we published in the KSL Bulletin #20 is well worth reading again: ‘Official History is the bourgeoisie’s history and its mission today is to wreath nationalism, liberal democracy and the market economy in myth so as to have us believe that these are eternal, immutable and immovable.’

## Salvador Puig Antich

### **Thirty Years on From the Execution of Salvador Puig Antich His sisters are to try to reopen the trial that led to his being garrotted.**

*On 2 March 1974 Salvador Puig Antich was executed. The young militant of the MIL (Iberian Liberation Movement) was charged with the killing of a police officer who was shot five times. Puig Antich's weapon had been fired only twice. Thirty years on, his family is trying to get the case reopened and the director Manuel Huerga is to recreate the murdered anarchist's last hours in jail for the big screen.*

The Editors of CNT

Inma, Montserrat and Carme are Salvador Puig Antich's sisters. Even though some thirty years have now passed since the MIL militant was done to death, they are fighting back against the ghastly historical amnesia being foisted upon us. To that end they mean to reopen the case that sent their brother to his death by *garrote vil*. Not that this is their first attempt, but lack of financial backing forced them to back down before now.

Moreover November 2004 will see the start of shooting on a movie that will recreate Puig Antich's final hours in prison prior to being garrotted. Director Manuel Huerga, musician Lluís Llach and Media=Pro productions will be using Lluís Arcarazo's screenplay, based on the novel *Cuenta atrás* by Francesc Escribano (currently director of Television e Catalunya). They have already stated their intention of making the movie a plea against the death penalty. Maybe they have forgotten what their protagonist was fighting against. He was of course worried about State murder but his primary concern was with the very existence of the State. And since keeping our fingers crossed is tempting luck, let us try to recall just who Salvador Puig Antich and the MIL were.

### **The MIL and Puig Antich**

The Iberian Liberation Movement (MIL) was not aligned with any of the emerging political parties nor affiliated to any trade union. Perhaps its members were far-sighted enough to anticipate history, the institutionalised lies, the treachery of the "left" and the democratic reinvention of the right in the wake of Franco's death. Right from the outset they were in contact with anarcho-syndicalists exiled in Toulouse, although their own modus operandi was quite different. They professed to be autonomous and their activities fell into two main areas – propaganda and direct action. They were also the heirs of Situationism and May 1968 and employed irony, humour and irreverence in their texts. Their publication would go under the name *CIA (International Anarchist Conspiracy)*. Their basic direct action consisted of "expropriations" of banks. During the hold-ups they were always unmasked but in disguise, in suits and ties. But the situation altered after 1973 when, in the course of one robbery, they left a bank employee blind. That fact prompted them to dissolve themselves the same year, but it also inspired a change of attitude on the part of the authorities. From that point on they were regarded as

terrorists and began to come under the remit of the army as the hunt was stepped up. In connection with that event, Xavier Garriga and Salvador Puig Antich were arrested on 25 September, in an ambush. In an exchange of gunfire the police officer Francisco Anguas was killed by five bullets, only two of which had been fired by Puig Antich. The court declined to listen to a ballistic report.

In order to place the arrests and the ensuing execution in context, we should bear it in mind that in the wake of the death of Carrero Blanco, the regime, headed by Franco and Arias Navarro, meant to demonstrate their power and their priority, "law and order". At the time there was a new-style, nuanced political opposition that was paving the way for what would later be the "democratic transition" or the Moncloa Palace Pacts. The slightness of the MIL and the dereliction of stronger opposition organisations ensured that a farce rather a trial ensued. At 9.40 am., Salvador Puig Antich was executed in Barcelona's Model Prison, at the age of 24. Most of the MIL prisoners were freed under an amnesty in 1977.

On 5 April 1976, twenty nine prisoners broke out of Segovia prison. MIL founder Oriol Solé Sugranyes was one of them. Unfortunately he was gunned down by the Civil Guard whilst trying to escape.

Jean-Marc Rouillan, a MIL activist and later member of Action Directe is serving a prison sentence in Arles in France.

On 2 March, the very day when Puig Antich was done to death, Franco pardoned the Civil Guard Antonio Franco who was under sentence of death for the killing of a superior officer.

From CNT (Madrid) April 2004

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### **No God. No Master.**

The Spanish Roman Catholic Church was instrumental in maintaining Franco's dictatorship. In the light of the myth-making surrounding Francoism and 'the transition', this piece from the horse's mouth helps shed a little light on the reality of the time:

'The archbishop of Valencia in 1950 stated at a meeting of employers: "A survey we have made among the workers reveals that 76 percent are hostile to the church, 23 percent have acquired the habit of pilfering on the job, without considering it to be of any moral importance, and 42 percent exist under miserable conditions." He went on to add: "The masses, the large masses of workers, are not on the side of the church, which they hate. But they feel an even stronger hatred toward their employers. A great many workers stated that they gained nothing from burning down churches, while they did gain much more from robbing banks and businesses.'"

Quoted in Victor Alba, *Transition in Spain: from Franco to democracy*, Transaction Books, 1978, p197-8

## Spanish Revolution 1936-2006

### **Lécera, an Aragonese village living amid Libertarian Communism**

An exemplary village in terms of the goodness of its sentiments

Lécera is the premier village of the province of Zaragoza and lies within the Belchite judicial precinct. It lies some twelve kilometres from Belchite. Its population is around 2,400 and it boasts some industry, such as the gypsum industry. Agriculture accounts for all the rest, with the main crops being wheat, grapes, saffron and, to a lesser extent, other cereals.

Lécera which, before the revolution boasted no presence of the confederal movement of the CNT is a village of hardworking, sympathetic folk. In terms of its virtues and its understanding it will assuredly mirror many other Aragón villages.

Conversing with the village committee

Upon reaching the location presently given over to an encampment for the use of the militias, the first thing we did was to seek out the committee. We discovered it in the old corporation building. Comrade Pedro Navarro Jarque, Lécera's national schoolmaster, answered our inquiries:

'The Committee goes under the name of the Revolutionary Antifascist Committee and comprises seven members, all of them drawn from the General Trades Union affiliated to the CNT.

'It enjoys complete freedom of action, neither accepting nor rejecting the influences of any political party. We were appointed in assembly and represent the unanimous consensus of the village. We have the same powers as a corporation in the internal administration of the village.

'There is a local Administrative Council, made up of five comrades belonging to the union affiliated to the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) and it oversees the organisation of work in the fields and in the industries of Lécera.

'We also appointed a labour delegate who, together with another dozen sub-delegates, sees to the organisation of collective labour and to the requirements of the column serving on this front. Naturally, they all operate in accordance with the Revolutionary Committee.'

Have you collectivised the land?

'This was a thorny, complicated problem. Or rather, it remains so. We want people to be persuaded of the validity and advantageous nature of our ideas.

'We have collectivised the larger holdings and, so far, have not interfered with the smaller ones. Unless circumstances turn against us, we are convinced that the smallholder will voluntarily enter the collective, because the people of Lécera are decent, understanding folk as is demonstrated by their having voluntarily donated a sizeable proportion of harvested produce to the common store.

'At present, the saffron is gathered in on all the smallholdings, is broken up collectively and then is stored away for use and for trade.

'The smallholders, who hitherto had scarcely enough to eat, in that almost the whole of the harvest they brought in used to be seized by the large landowners in payment of debts incurred, wanted to hold on to their land, but, in general assembly, the necessity of pooling all harvests was raised and there was unanimous approval for this.

'People's wishes have to be respected, and they have to be won over by example, without coercion.

'The Revolutionary Committee wants the work of comrade Manuel Martínez, the sub-delegate of the Lécera front to be known. The people as a whole are indebted to him.'

How long has the committee been in operation?

'About three months now. It took office on 25 August, from which date the libertarian communist social system and abolition of money in the village have been in force.

'A variety of products have been bartered with Tortosa and Reus. For the use of the militias on this front, 5,000 sheep have been butchered and some 280,000 kilos of wheat have been consumed. In return, the Supply Committee furnishes the civilian population with every item.'

With money no longer circulating, how do the smallholders manage to supply their needs?

'We mentioned earlier that we preach by example. There are no class distinctions, no differentials. In our eyes, the smallholder, who tomorrow, will doubtless cease to be such, is a producer.

'Through the labour sub-delegates who are also district delegates, there is thorough familiarity with the workers who toil, and the supply delegate issues what is needed to each family by means of a booklet what the Revolutionary Committee has in its foodstuffs warehouse. The share-out is on the most equitable basis possible' – concluded Navarro the committee chairman – 'yet we are always looking for improvements.'

Lécera was always a thoroughly liberal village.

This, an ideal little hamlet in terms of its lifestyle and administration, has always been the home of liberal-minded men. Anecdotes and episodes from the last century were related to us. Nevertheless, neither the CNT nor the FAI, on account of the repressions they had undergone, had had an audience for their propagandists there. The ideas embodied in our confederal organisation were, until quite recently, unknown there.

'Before the fascists' criminal revolt,' the comrades said to us, 'there was a branch of the Republican Left and a Socialist chapter as well. But the CNT was unknown. Now everything has changed and all of the workers belong to the CNT.

'We have 512 affiliated members, nearly all of the workforce, so that the establishment of another union is out of the question. There is a great affinity between us and no differences of opinion of any sort.

## Spanish Revolution 1936-2006

‘On the cultural side, there is a wish to set up good schools and libraries.’

Was there a fascist attack on the village?

‘Within its limits, no, but there has been heavy fighting in the mountains, especially up on Monte Lobo, where the rebels lost a lot of men.’

‘In the early days, confronted by the trust of the forces coming from Albalate, all of the local fascists decamped, together with part of the Corporation, in the direction of Belchite. The remainder of the Corporation stayed in Lécera and... the inevitable came to pass. The people did justice. Naturally it was not a question of a people’s corporation, for that had been deposed on 19 July by the fascists and a rebel appointed in its place.’

In the supply depot.

A short distance from the premises of the Revolutionary Committee we came across the Lécera General Depot. This occupies a great hall and the inner rooms of a building known as the Salón Pompeya which was due to have opened as a dance hall. The stores are crammed with foodstuffs, crates full of milk churns, sacks of vegetables, drums of olive oil, great stacks of canned meats, etc., and on the floor above an enormous array of clothing and other rural accoutrements. Provisions galore.

On the premises we met comrade Antonio González from Santa Colma de Gramanet, who holds the office of delegate-general of supply in Lécera.

The needful was done to ensure that the civilian population goes short of absolutely nothing. The villages surrender nothing to the Supply Committee because they had given everything up to it even before it had been set up. Even so, they provide a huge quantity of olive oil which they had been keeping in storage.

‘The Supply Committee,’ say comrade González, ‘comprises fifteen members, not counting the delegate-general and quartermaster second lieutenant. They are all delegates from the militia centuries, plus one delegate from the local committee.’

‘The food,’ he hadded, ‘as you can see, is in plentiful supply.’

‘Aside from the matter of food and clothing, the committee has no other jurisdiction. It has not the slightest involvement either in the area of health nor in questions relating to the war.’

Trans PS

From *Colectivizaciones: la obra constructiva de la revolución Española*. Toulouse, 1973, pp.203-207.

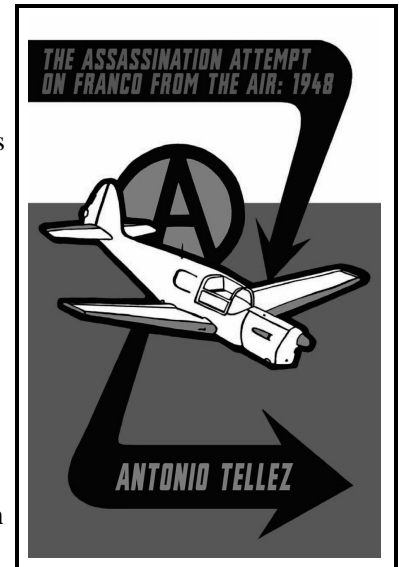
This issue of *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* brought to you in July 2006 by the KSL Collective. Your feedback would be gratefully received. Thanks to everyone who helped on it, and to everyone who’s given their practical support to the KSL. You’ll notice with one book printed and another in the works, we’re going to need even more help now!

### Out Now – First KSL Book! The assassination attempt on Franco from the air – 1948

by Antonio Téllez, with a preface by Albert Meltzer on the Spanish Anarchist resistance and tributes to Laureano Cerrada Santos (from *Black Flag*) and Antonio Téllez (by Stuart Christie). Translated by Paul Sharkey, cover design and layout by Josh MacPhee. Expanded second edition.

The course of Spanish History might well have been changed on

Sunday 12th September 1948 on the second day of the fishing boat regatta being fought out at San Sebastian before the eyes of General Franco. A group of Anarchists in exile – veterans of the fight against fascism – had laid their plans that the chief of state should die in the waters of La Concha bay beneath a hail of incendiary and shrapnel bombs dropped from a light aircraft... Antonio Téllez (1921-2005), the chief chronicler of the Spanish anarchist resistance, is the author of *Sabaté: Guerrilla Extraordinary*, *Faceries* and *The Anarchist Resistance to Franco*. 90 pages. Illustrated. ISBN 1-873605-80-3 £5 (£4 post free to subscribers) / \$7 (\$5 to KSL subscribers)



### Pamphlets Coming in the Autumn (Fall)

*Alcatraz – Uncle Sam’s Devil’s Island : Experiences of a Conscientious Objector in America during the First World War* (Philip Grosser)

Philip Grosser was an anarchist who refused to take part in a war to make the world safe for big business. Even after the war ended, he was kept imprisoned on Alcatraz for refusing to toe the line. Published in the 1930s, this is possibly the first exposé of America’s most notorious prison. It’s also a powerful account of resistance and endurance. ISBN 1-873605-24-2

*George Brown, the Cobbler Anarchist of Philadelphia* by Bob Helms

Bob Helms traces the life of an anarchist shoemaker from freethinking Northamptonshire to Philadelphia’s burgeoning anarchist movement of the 1890s. Never famous, and only occasionally infamous, Brown was typical of many of the militants who made the movement what it was, and his story sheds a fascinating light on a social movement in microcosm.

ISBN 1-873605-34-X

## The Iron Column: Iñíguez; La Jabalina; José Pellicer

### THE IRON COLUMN (Columna de Hierro)

Anarchist militia column raised in Valencia (Las Salesas) in 1936; it was particularly feared by a variety of communists and reactionaries and none too well-liked by the CNT leadership because of its ideological staunchness and commitment to social revolution and libertarian communism. It grew out of the banding together of anarchist assault forces (from the CNT, FAI and FIJL) that stormed the barracks in Valencia. These original numbers were made up entirely of the most tried and tested, steadfast components of Valencian anarchism (the most uncompromising CNT and FAI personnel: according to some sources, the more moderate members favoured the Torres-Benedito Column). It was organised into centuries which tended to be trades-based (which is to say, specialising in health and cleaning, transport, metalworking) and which – unlike in other columns – were not amalgamated into *agrupaciones* [groups of 5 centuries] but each sent a delegate of its own to the column's War Committee. Initially 12,000 enlisted but there were weapons for only 3,000. The first poorly armed eight centuries set off from Valencia on 8 August 1936, with a clear idea in mind: war and revolution were one and the same. Shortly after the column was launched it equipped itself with a War Committee, plus ancillary services, and membership of these included José Pellicer, Montoya, Pascual Rodilla, Ángel Gómez de la Higuera, Rafael Martí, Morell, Serna, Rufino, Elías Manzanera, Gumbau, José Segarra, Dolz and Canet, plus servicemen Pérez Salas and Gallego and the commanders of the various centuries. That October a radio station (run by José Segarra and Cortés) was added to its resources. The number of fighters rose to 15,000, joined later (despite the difficulties placed in the way by the government and the CNT's national leadership) by a further three thousand: several hundred inmates freed by the libertarians themselves joined up and together they all headed for the Teruel front (Barracas, Sarrión, Puebla de Valverde), manning Valencia's defensive position between Andeguela and Formiche), barring the fascist advance (on 12 August 1936 they defeated the Carlist columns venturing out of Teruel under Cívera and Pérez del Hoyo) and settled in Sarrión, shortly afterwards capturing La Puebla de Valverde and moving on to the fortified Puerto de Escandón less than twenty kilometers from Teruel where, like Durruti in Zaragoza province, they dug in and set up their lines. The column positioned itself southeast of Castralvo with 2,000 men and a battery (machine-guns, mortars and two armoured vehicles): they established libertarian communism in that area (radiating outwards from Sarrión and Mora de Rubielos). The column had two mouthpieces, one called *Línea de Fuego* (a daily from September 1936 on) and another in Valencia called *Nosotros* (which also served as the organ of the FAI and FIJL). The column quickly earned great notoriety for its rabid anarchism which prevented it from countenancing pro-collaboration and compromise views, on which grounds it was vilified (especially by the Stalinists of the

Spanish CP). In October 1936 it issued an exceptionally inflexible manifesto in which, after rebutting the slander campaigns mounted by reactionary infiltrators and "antifascists", it called for the Civil Guard to be disarmed and disbanded, for the armed State corps in the rearguard (carabineers, Assault Guards and Security Guards) to be dispatched to the front immediately as well as for the destruction of the records and files of capitalist and state institutions. This manifesto went beyond mere words because shortly after that the column started to put it into practice. Further confirmation of its extraordinarily libertarian purism was its spectacular objection to the CNT's entry into the government (November 1936). Shortly after that, as rumours began to spread of militarisation of the militias, the Iron Column's delegates articulated its total opposition to this (at a plenum in November 1936 one of its delegates rejected imposition of the militarisation plan over the heads of the militias): the column was undergoing an overhaul and so in December 1936, it carried out a restructuring in accordance with the militias' wishes (into groups of 10, three-groups per section, 110-member centuries, banded together into 1,000-man divisions, divisions grouped into sectors), in accordance with a resolution signed by Pellicer appointing a new War Committee (made up of Pellicer, Segarra, Cortés, Espí, González and Montoya, with Morell, Quiles, Serna and Gumbau heading up the sections, and with Rufino, Villarroya, Navarro, Sanchís, Rafael Alonso and Mármol as divisional delegates – shortly thereafter reshuffled into a line-up made up of Montoya, Rufino, Serna, Espí, Rodilla, José Pellicer, Peñarrocha, Canet, Gomez, Dolz, Morell, Diego, Manzanera, Cortés, Segarra, Quiles and Pedro Pellicer). In January 1937 it sponsored a get-together of all the confederal militias in Valencia, at which the Tierra y Libertad and Iron Columns were alone in opposing the government's militarisation plans. From January 1937 on, the Iron Column was virtually on its own in keeping the anti-militarisation flag flying (at around this time, seeing that many CNT militants were backing militarisation, personnel were starting to jump ship) but there was a palpable feeling that the race to militarisation was unstoppable: a report from the column's War Committee that month bluntly summed up its choices as "disbandment of the column or militarisation". Two months after that the central government, with the acquiescence of the reformist leadership of the CNT and FAI, issued an ultimatum: the militias on the Teruel front would fall under the oversight of the Ministry of War which appointed Benedito as commander and it would also start to act upon the December 1936 regulations (which stated that funding to un-militarised units was to be terminated). The government's note outraged the vast majority of the column who, as a sign of protest, agreed to quit the front, leading to clashes in the rearguard (in Burriana, Vinalosa and Alfara) with the state's apparatus of repression, resulting in the arrest of nearly a hundred militians, forcing the War Committee to issue a statement declaring that the column

## The Iron Column: Iñíguez; La Jabalina; José Pellicer

“was asking to be relieved, but has neither disbanded nor militarised”. By mid-March 1937, the column had largely been disbanded, very many of its militians having quit and this was the backdrop to an Assembly held in Valencia on 21 March which opted for militarisation as the lesser evil (albeit with a lot of protests): shortly after which, the remaining 4,000 militians (out of a total of nearly 20,000) were converted into the 83rd Mixed Brigade under the command of Pellicer, with Segarra as political commissar (the staunchest anti-militarists – Pellicer, Segarra, Cortés, Rodilla and Ángel Gómez were awarded high ranks). This, along with the 58th and 59th Mixed Brigades made up the 41st Division under Colonel Eixea. In May 1937 the Brigade set off for Benicarló and relieved the *Espana Libre* unit in Moscardó, where it was attacked from the rear (24 July 1937) sustaining heavy losses, as a result of which it had to be relieved: it was reorganised in Tejadillos (in Cuenca) and took part in the Teruel offensive (December 1937), resisting the Francoist onslaught on Morella before making for Castellón where it was halted and had to undergo reorganisation in Libras. Later, in March 1939, it set off for Madrid to support Mera and

Casado and saw out the war in Alcalá under the command of Mares. Before the column disbanded its assets were shared around rationalist schools, CNT field hospitals, anarchist prisoners’ aid and propaganda and cultural activities. In short, it was a purely anarchist column, for which reason it came under frequent attack from its natural enemies (the communists and the right) and from “circumstantialists” (high-ranking CNT and FAI committees, the CNT National Committee, the FAI Peninsular Committee, the Valencian CNT Regional Committee), all of which made much of the presence of ex-cons in its ranks (actually, there were not that many, nor, of course, were they all that vicious). Furthermore, it should be remembered that when the column’s War Committee learnt that armed gangs purporting to be from the column were engaged in looting, it had them arrested and executed. Apparently, at a point when the counter-revolution and the state’s recovery were gratifying even to certain CNT personnel, the Iron Column was a real nuisance.

Miguel Iñíguez (revised entry for his *Historical Encyclopedia of Spanish Anarchism*, unpublished)

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### **La Jabalina (The Wild Sow)**

#### **a Woman Shot for Standing by the Revolution**

Militiawoman María Pérez La Cruz watched her last sunrise on 8 August 1942 when, at the age of just 25, she faced her last fight before a firing squad in Paterna. The young fighter from the anarchist Iron Column, known to her comrades, on account of her mettle and bravery, as *La Jabalina* (The Wild Sow) was one of the few women, if not the only one, shot by Franco in Valencia in the post-civil war years.

María, born in Teruel in 1917, enlisted as a volunteer with the Iron Column at the age of barely 19 “operating as a fighter in the trenches (of the Teruel front) where she was wounded”, to cite the 91-page indictment that Major Salvador Daroca, examining magistrate brought in against *La Jabalina* in summary trial 2053-V and passed to the Captain-General of No 3 Military Region on 19 August 1941. Major Daroca’s account, used as the basis for a court martial that passed a death sentence on María, placed the young libertarian woman in the ranks of the leadership of the anarchist militia, pointing out that she was a member of “the same group as the Pellicer brothers (Pedro and José)”, the founders of the Iron Column which marched off to the Teruel front with some 3,000 meagrely armed men and women determined to take on the fascists whilst simultaneously making the revolution. Comparison between the “criminal deeds” that the army judge credited to María as a result of revelations made in the hope of being spared by a militiaman engaged in supplying bread to the Iron Column and the substantial bibliography on the Spanish Civil War built up by the Fundación Salvador Seguí in Valencia, affords us an insight into the work done

by women on the fighting front. In this regard, historian Eladi Mainar, in his book, *De milicians a soldats, les columnes valencianes en a guerra civil epanyola (1936-1937)* [*From Militians to Soldiers: Valencian Columns in the Spanish Civil War*] points out that women “represented a substantial group within the Iron Column” which they joined as nurses “as well as in the capacity as ordinary militiawomen using rifles and fighting against the rebels.” Mainar emphasises the presence of women in that column as a fighter “shows the consciousness and social development achieved by women” in those revolutionary times. Never before in Spain had women “attained such tellingly high levels of social, political, economic and sexual liberation”. In November 1937, barely seven months after the column vanished after regularisation and became the 83rd Mixed Brigade after the Republican Government passed a decree banning the female presence on the front, the militiawomen were pulled out of the trenches. In his book, *The Story of the Iron Column*, Abel Paz borrows from the minutes of the 21 March 1937 gathering in Valencia at which the members of the column “unanimously” agreed to its militarisation. At that meeting, a fighter by the name of Falomir asked that the reorganised column “bar women as nuisance elements just on the look-out for a man”. This macho allegation was withdrawn after it provoked, the minutes record, “a unanimous objection from the gathering.” ... “Comrade José Pellicer cleared up the situation of those female comrades, insofar as any who were willing to could serve as militiawomen and thus carry a rifle.” This apparent undertaking from the column’s delegate was nothing of the sort, according to the evidence of one of the militiamen who participated in the final sitting – Manuel Velasco Guardiola – as mentioned by Paz in his book. “I saw

## The Iron Column: Iñíguez; La Jabalina; José Pellicer

women weep out of courage and rage when they were told that they could no longer fight in the Brigade or on any other front”, Velasco relates. He adds too that some of those female comrades who were to be side-lined from that point on “were every bit as brave and led from the front in every attack”.

### The trial

The fortitude of the Iron Column’s women can also be gauged in La Jabalina’s trial. In spite of her youth, the beatings, torture and abuse that she had had to endure over three years in captivity – she was arrested at the end of the war in 1939 – she never repented of what she had done and the only thing to which she ever confessed was having been the lover of “one Paco aka El Francés [the Frenchman]” Major Daroca tagged on to this admission the fact that the column’s war delegate in Sarrión was known as “el Francés”, the supposition being that he was the person in question. The only request for María to be spared came from her mother Isabel Lacruz in a letter addressed to the chairman of the court martial. In that letter, which has survived alongside the rest of the summary trial records in the archives of Valencia’s Court Martial No 13, La Jabalina’s mother calls upon the court to show mercy to her daughter, citing the fact that she was very young at the time that she took off with the militias and thus did not realise what she was doing. What she had done was startling, for the Civil Guard in Sarrión, in its report to Major Daroca, stated that La Jabalina “as a militiawoman, dressed in overalls, was involved, with others from the committee [the column’s war committee in La Puebla de Valverde] in taking away detainees who were subsequently murdered.” The Civil Guard accused María of involvement in the murder of a deputy Igual, 11 priests and one rightwinger. But the charges that resulted in María’s appearing in front of the firing squad emerged from the admissions made to Major Daroca by a male anarchist comrade who had witnessed her performance. That militiaman told the examining magistrate that La Jabalina served with the column’s flying squad that had attacked the Castelló prison on 8 August 1936 with the aim of freeing the inmates so that they might then join the anarchist militias. A number of prison warders perished in this operation. The accused also took part in the Iron Column expedition that on 24 September 1936 set fire to the records from the Provincial High Court, Police Headquarters, Model Prison and Civil Registry of Valencia in broad daylight. The informant added that on 14 August 1936, the day that the column captured Sarrión, the accused was implicated in “the murder of the local mayor”. The witness explained that one of the column’s founders, the Alcoy anarchist Rafael Martí aka Pancho Villa, prior to being killed six days later in the battle for Puerto Escandón, had told him that La Jabalina “had killed more people than he had hairs on his head.” One of the most bloodthirsty deeds that the informant chalked up to Maria was the murder in Puebla de Valverde of “two engineers, a father and son, who were transported in the

car of the Pellicer brothers to the place where they were going to be murdered, but, after refusing to step out of the vehicle, La Jabalina shot the both of them inside the car, killing them both.” The witness told the army magistrate that he knew about this “having had it” from the lips of Pellicer himself who had told the accused “never to shoot anyone inside the car again because she had made a right mess when she shot the engineers.”

Benjamin Lajo and Rafa Montaner, Valencia.

### THE VALENCIAN DURRUTI

The memory of José Pellicer Gandía, one of the Valencian anarchist founders of the Iron Column is safe in the hands of his daughter, Coral, and is now being salvaged after years of being overlooked and forgotten.

“Loose talk is the greatest menace to a man’s good reputation”. These emphatic words were spoken by a pained and outraged Coral Pellicer (b. Valencia, 1937), the daughter of José Pellicer Gandía, the charismatic driving force behind the Iron Column, an assault unit made up of Valencian anarchists and which served on the Teruel front, defending the Republic after the outbreak of the civil war. To this day, she is convinced that warped and “horribly unfair” misrepresentations of what happened in Valencia and in the rest of the Comunidad Valenciana region during the war, “especially where the anarchists are concerned.”

For some years now, following publication of a number of books and the reopening of the records of the summary courts martial in the post-civil war years has been ardently trying to salvage the memory of “the youngsters who fought for human dignity and had a great social sensibility. Look at them”, she urges us, pointing to a number of snapshots of members of the unit set up by her father, “These were guys with rope-soled sandals and little else. They gave their all out of a belief in a better society for all.” At which her eyes moisten.

Surrounded by stacks of papers, books, newspaper clippings and letters from columnists living abroad, and photocopies of countless documents, Coral prattles endlessly – her energy and physical appearance resembling those of a woman twenty years her junior – as she strives painstakingly to reconstruct what became of Valencian anarchism 65 years ago.

José Pellicer came from a family from Valencia’s upper bourgeoisie – his grandfather, Vicente Gandía Pla, was the founder of the Castillo de Liria *bodegas* – and was educated by the Jesuits. He started work in the family firm as a book-keeper but by the age of 20 in 1932 was active in the CNT before moving over to the FAI. “His concern was to educate the workers in trade unionism and he organised lots of strikes at that time, including one at his grandfather’s firm. He was also a highly educated individual, speaking French, English, Castilian and Valencian, as well as Esperanto”, Coral goes on.

It was in fact at an Esperanto class that he met Maruja Veloso “his partner and my mother, who was one of the



## The Iron Column: Iñíguez; La Jabalina; José Pellicer

very first women in Valencia to study medicine”, Coral points out as she shows the last letter he wrote Maruja from prison, urging her to see to the education of their daughter.

Pellicer “was to his comrades what Durruti was to his. He had great charisma and was one of the few not bedazzled by the ‘scrambled egg’ he acquired with office, either on the Valencia War Committee or the committee from which he coordinated the Iron Column which grew to number upwards of 20,000 men and women on the Teruel front.” And she displays letters recently received from colleagues of her father, sent from various parts of the globe with professions of admiration for him. She stipulates that among the anarchists “there were no bosses or leaders”, but her father was one of the commanders of the Iron Column when it was converted into the 83rd Mixed Brigade of the Republican Army in 1937. He was wounded on the front, twice, was commissioned to travel to Paris to purchase arms and spent six months as a prisoner in a private communist prison in Valmayor, due to differences between the CP and the anarchists that Coral makes no bones about but refuse to make a song and dance of. “These things happen”, she says.

She grows indignant at the cavalier way in which events from those days are weighed up. Especially at the contents of the military indictments in connection with the “paseos”, militia patrols blamed for indiscriminate criminality in several Valencian districts. “There is absolutely no way that the Valencian anarchists organised patrols in order to ‘bump people off’. That is a fallacy and a shameful one”, she stresses.

“There were patrols of anarchists, sure. My father organised them but their purpose was to guard against outrages. Looters and killers such as the guy known as ‘The Chilean’, for instance were arrested, tried and shot. In many villages there were plenty of infiltrators, fifth columnists and personal scores to settle. After the war it was all too easy to pin all the outrages on the anarchists. Which is what happened.”

She cites the “contemptible” accusations levelled at the young María Pérez la Cruz aka *La Jabalina*, who was shot in Paterna in 1942 after a very cursory trial. “After the war some 41 women were shot in Valencia, 12 of them in the city itself”, Coral adds. In recent years, since retiring as a journalist she had been delving into the civilian and military records in Segovia, Avila, Salamanca, Toulouse and Bordeaux among other places. “There is more to this than a daughter’s love. There’s the need to recover historical memory”, she pronounces.

And she cites an incident in which José Pellicer featured. The time when he “rescued the Holy Chalice”. “My father stumbled across it at the bottom of a trunk during a search of the home of Sabina Suey but did not mention it to his fellow searchers. And instead urged that it be moved to a safer location”. She adds that the version of events given in the book *How the Holy Chalice of the*

*Last Supper was Saved* by the canon of Valencia Cathedral, Elías Olmos Canalda “is silly nonsense”.

“Life is strange!” – she adds – “In the early 80s my mother made a train journey up to Teruel and bumped into a group of female pensioners. Sabina Suey happened to be one of them and en route she told my mother the story just exactly as she had heard it from my father on the very night of the episode and as she had related it to me.”

Coral also harks back to when the San Miguel de los Reyes prison was thrown open, a decision she credits to her father and other comrades of his, all of them anarchists. “That was a beautiful act because there were lots of people unjustly imprisoned. It’s the sort of thing done in any revolution. France marks the capture of the Bastille prison as a national holiday, a revolutionary act.”

José Pellicer was condemned to death and shot in Paterna on 8 June 1942, charged with murdering the brother of an officer in the Francoist army. “My father never fired a shot other than on the battle-front. He too was denounced anonymously and tortured in Las Torres de Quart.” And what is more”, she recalls of her uncle Pedro and other comrades of her father such as Rafael Martí aka ‘Pancho Villa’, Paco Mares, Elías Manzanera, Joaquín Canet ... the list is endless. “The losers in the Civil War were the protagonists of epic deeds but they did not have their Sophocles. It would be an historic mistake to overlook them in the context of Spanish history. And the Iron Column was a combat division made up of anarchist volunteers that had to fight on the front, taking heavy losses and also had to look to its defences against attacks from the rearguard. Because they were revolutionaries, their memory has had to endure slander, insult and opprobrium. All that I ask is that they get the honour and respect they deserve”, Coral concludes.

By Juan Antonio Blay

*Levante*, 13 January 2002

Taken from [www.nodo50.org](http://www.nodo50.org). Trans PS.

### Available now: New Pamphlet

Elías Manzanera

*The Iron Column : Testament of a Revolutionary*

Translated by Paul Sharkey. With a profile by Ramón Liarte and an introduction by the KSL

“the Iron Column were neither ‘bandits’ nor ‘saints’. They were revolutionaries who knew who their enemies were.”

Elías Manzanera helped to set up the Valencian anarchist militia unit, the Iron Column, to unleash social revolution against the military and fascist revolt of July 1936 which began the Spanish Civil War. The Iron Column was the most intransigent and most maligned of the anarchist militias. Manzanera served on its War Committee and here remembers both its achievements, and his comrades who fell fighting, not only against fascism, but for anarchy.

ISBN-13: 9781873605196

ISBN-10: 1873605196

30 pages £3 (£2 to subscribers) / \$3

## Books

### Review

*Anarchism: a documentary history of libertarian ideas*, volume one, *From anarchy to anarchism* (300-1939) edited by Robert Graham.

What would you want from a new anarchist anthology? Thankfully this one avoids both 'pickled onions' (paragraphs grown stale through repetition) and the misrepresentation which comes from choosing novelty for its own sake. There are some classic essays – and some that should be. The pieces from Latin America and Asia are especially valuable because so little is easily available elsewhere. The size of the book (over 500 pages) allows Graham to cover the 'big names', and important thinkers like Galleani, de Cleyre and Fabbri who are usually ignored in the 'big names' approach and also to introduce interesting unknowns.

Credit should go to the helpers, too: Paul Sharkey seems to have translated half of it, and the effort put into getting translations of Chinese, Japanese and Korean texts should be applauded. There is an index which is always a good idea, but unfortunately this one seems to have been computer-generated rather than done by a human (separate entries for 'jails' and 'prisons'?) Printing an extract is the same as printing the entirety of a work so there are still leads to be explored.

'Anarchaeologists' should already have got copies, but happily I can also recommend it for comrades who are interested in anarchism as a living idea. It complements rather than replaces Guerin's *No Gods, No Masters*, but they both finish in 1939, so we have to wait for volume two to see what happens next.

Black Rose, 2005. ISBN 1551642506, £19.99.

### The Dandelion

v.6, no.23 October 2005

Tribute to Valerio Isca, a beautifully produced pamphlet with tributes to an 'extraordinary ordinary man' from his friends and comrades. 31 pages

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write to: Michael Coughlin, Post Office Box 205, Cornucopia, Wisconsin 54827, USA

### Kate Sharpley Library News

#### Out Now, New Pamphlet

*War and Revolution : the Hungarian Anarchist Movement in World War I and the Budapest Commune, 1919* by Martyn Everett

The Budapest Commune of 1919 has been neglected by the historians of anarchism, yet it provides an important and fascinating case study of the anarchist movement at a crucial historical moment. We can see how and why anarchist fortunes declined after the end of the First World War, as anarchist organisations fused with marxist parties, or were crushed by proto-fascism. ISBN 1-873605-38-2

### Coming Soon

#### Abel Paz, The Iron Column:

#### Militant Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War

Translated by Paul Sharkey. First published (in Catalan) as *Crónica de la Columna de Ferro* Barcelona: Editorial Hacer, 1984.

Abel Paz, a veteran of the anarchist Durruti Column, is one of the foremost writers on the Spanish anarchist movement and Spanish Revolution, best known to English-speakers for his biography of Durruti. In *The Iron Column* he tells the story of one of the most famous militia units of the Spanish Civil War which held out for the revolutionary gains of 1936 longer than almost anyone. This is the story of a group of revolutionaries willing to take the fight to fascism: and unwilling to tolerate dictatorship behind them, either. Paz uses the testimony of its members, extracts from their newspaper *Línea de Fuego* and internal documents to tell the story of the Iron Column in the context of the rise and fall of the Spanish Revolution which raged alongside the Spanish Civil War.

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Contents include: Valencia in July 1936, the creation, structure and engagements of the Iron Column, confronting the push for militarisation and the fate of the Iron Column. Appendices cover: *Línea de Fuego*, identified members of the Iron Column, The Plenum of Confederal and Anarchist Columns and more information on Gino Bibbi and José Pellicer.

Abel Paz, *The Iron Column: Militant Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War* 200+ pages.

ISBN-13: 9781873605042

ISBN-10: 1873605048 Anarchist library series; 10

#### Also available on the Iron Column

An 'Uncontrollable' from the Iron Column

*A Day Mournful and Overcast*

A clear view of what the Spanish Revolution of 1936 was all about from a member of one of the most militant anarchist militia columns. (Originally published March 1937. There is a completely new translation of it in Abel Paz's *The Iron Column* (see above)

1-873605-33-1 £2 (post free) / \$3

#### London Anarchist Bookfair Date

Saturday 21st October, 10-6

Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, N7.

## In Memoriam Paul Avrich

### **Paul Avrich 1931-2006:**

#### **a historian who listened to anarchist voices**

All the collective members of the Kate Sharpley Library are all saddened by the death of Paul Avrich. We offer this obituary not merely as a mark of respect, but to attempt to place his huge contribution to the study of the history of anarchism into context: “He allowed anarchist voices, missing from history, to speak for themselves, with a minimal of authorial judgement or intervention, and much of what we know about the history of anarchism in America is due to the work of this one man.”

### **Paul Avrich 1931-2006**

The death of Paul Avrich has taken from anarchism its finest historian. More than that the study of history has also lost one of its finest proponents because Avrich was also a great historian. If his work brought to life those who shared “the beautiful ideal” it was because he used his considerable talents to treat his subjects with respect, thus avoiding the glib condescension that characterized much of what constituted “anarchist history” in the academy. Avrich’s work reflected his skills as a linguist, the absolute importance he placed on primary sources and his perseverance in finding them, an ability to sustain long, and sometimes fruitless periods of research and a writing style that enabled him to encapsulate his findings in a readable and engaging manner. Central to all of this was a consistent and rigorous insistence on accuracy. He went further, looked deeper and reflected more pertinently than others. He allowed anarchist voices, missing from history, to speak for themselves, with a minimal of authorial judgement or intervention, and much of what we know about the history of anarchism in America is due to the work of this one man.

His work on anarchism in Russia formed the first half of Avrich’s published career. His first book, “The Russian Anarchists” (1967) was a model of what we would come to expect. Succinct, readable and yet packed with information reflecting Avrich’s use of primary sources, it brought to English speaking minds a lost history. It also reflected, as much of his work would do, one of the primary tensions in anarchism, between those who search for organizational structure to support their anarchist ideas and those who are far more wary of any organizational apparatus. He treated the relationship of anarchism and violence with scrupulous fairness and rigor, an approach that ran throughout all of his writing, and reflected confidently the nuances and complexities of anarchism in Russia. He clearly stressed the constructive qualities of anarchism in 1917 and onwards, developing his earlier dissertation on “The Russian Revolution and the Factory Committees”. His work “Kronstadt 1921” (1970) destroyed the Bolshevik myth of Kronstadt being a counter-revolutionary center whose vibrant revolutionary movement had long been dissipated. On the contrary, to Avrich, it was in effect a last ditch stand against the

centralizing, counter revolutionary excesses of Bolshevism. Again scrupulously documented, the work brought what had long been known in anarchist circles to a much wider audience.

His “Russian Rebels 1600-1800” (1972) continued his interest in the revolutionary heritage in Russia and, again, was unflinching in its examination of its subjects. His groundbreaking “Anarchists in the Russian Revolution” (1973) completed what we may call the first phase of his work. A collection of primary documents interspersed with appropriate editorial commentary it allowed the reader to see and read, often for the first time, the words of the Russian anarchists themselves. From the swirling and tremulous words of the Anarcho-Futurists to the Petropavlovsk Resolution of Kronstadt we see the reach and range of Russian anarchism.

In the preface to his “An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine De Cleyre” (1978) a work in memory of Max Nettlau, himself a great historian of anarchism, Avrich writes of abandoning his project of producing a comprehensive history of American anarchism writing that “a fuller examination of the materials at my disposal, together with the discovery of new sources, aroused a growing sense of the complexity of the movement, of the richness and diversity of its history.” The rest of his life would be spent exploring that complexity, richness and diversity. He also found his methodology. He would explore the lives of those who played a role in the movement because “From most existing accounts ...one gets little understanding of the anarchists as human beings, still less of what impelled them to embark on their unpopular and seemingly futile course. Anarchism, as a result, has seemed a movement apart, unreal and quixotic, divorced from American history and irrelevant to American life.” His work on De Cleyre was a brilliant introduction to this complex and anguished woman. We quickly become aware of the fierce quicksilver mind she possesses and realize, through Avrich’s deftness, that we are in the presence of some kind of greatness. Written nearly thirty years ago it remains unsurpassed as a narrative of her life and an appreciation of the multi-faceted nature of her ideas. Through the interactions that constitute her life a history of anarchism also begins to emerge.

His two greatest works now lay ahead of him. “The Modern School”, dedicated to anarchist librarian Agnes Inglis, (1980) is a jewel of a book. It describes a moment in American anarchist history where culture and militancy meet. Nearly every line drips with original research; the narrative is clear and precise, linking complex and apparently contradictory themes and helping the reader decipher them. If the work on De Cleyre has not convinced us, his work here makes it crystal clear that American anarchism was much more than Benjamin Tucker, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman. “The Modern School” rightfully re-establishes many lives previously lost to the historian as critical

## In Memoriam Paul Avrich

players in the attempt to create anarchy in America. Avrich is re-defining our knowledge, our expectations and our appreciations. It is a book to read and re-read and like all great works each re-reading teaches us something new. So too with his next major work "The Haymarket Tragedy" (1984), dedicated to Joseph Labadie, which continued the standard he had set himself. Using original sources he creates an unforgettable picture of anarchist practice and culture. The heroism and tragedy of the whole affair are presented to us in a highly readable narrative. People are presented to us as fully rounded with their flaws as equally obvious as their strengths. A seminal event in American radical history is presented to us clearly yet passionately. It is the book on Haymarket, the book on late nineteenth century class struggle anarchism and culture and a volume to treasure.

"Anarchist Portraits" (1988) dedicated to Arne Thorne (a profound influence on Avrich) was a collection of essays on a wide range of subjects. All reflect Avrich's customary elegance. He is at ease writing about the Australian anarchist "Chummy" Fleming as he is discussing Kropotkin's Ethical Anarchism. His essay on Jewish anarchism in the United States is essential reading while his sketch of Alexander Berkman's life remains a most valuable template. His essay on "Sacco and Vanzetti: The Italian Anarchist background" was the forerunner of his "Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background" (1991). Here again he looks at a critical event in the history of the left in America and through his biographical style brings individuals and their ideas to life. The remarkable human qualities of many of the anarchists are clearly drawn as well as their inconsistencies and flaws. The violence that runs through this period of history is portrayed straightforwardly without any attempt to judge or moralise. As a result Sacco and Vanzetti, and all the others who were in their affinity groups, are presented in their richness and complexity. A richness and complexity no one else had been able to reflect. A by-product of his biographical approach is that we are guided through the history of anti-organizational and insurrectionary Italian class struggle anarchism of the period, in a manner that brings life and meaning to its theory and actions.

Finally "Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism In America" (1996). Many of Avrich's interviews with anarchist activists from the early twentieth century onwards are recorded here. It is essential reading. Of course memories will play tricks and Avrich's footnotes gently corrects errors. Yet this volume reminds us that anarchism is not just what we read in anarchist papers or in the pamphlets and books regularly circulated. Anarchism is also those, who, by their actions, make up the movement. They sat and listened to Goldman speak. They went to the Modern School. They helped sell papers, financed comrades on the run, lived in the colonies, became jaundiced or never gave up. They put the stamps on the papers when they

were mailed out. They gave life to words. How refreshing to hear these voices at last and how exciting to see our understanding of anarchism so broadened and enriched.

Much remains to be done to complete the work started by Paul Avrich (It is to be hoped that his long worked on life of Alexander Berkman will see the light of day) and we should finish by making some final comments on his legacy. Firstly he implicitly realized that we were still at the discovery stage. There is still much to learn and tease out about the history of anarchism. Much spade work and slog still need to be done to discover anarchist history. We can, though, learn from Avrich's refusal to condescend to the people that made up his histories. He did not have a clever theory and try to prove it, a methodology that treats its subjects like chess pieces rather than people. Instead he preferred to let the facts and events guide him to any conclusions he might make. He did not judge and he did not try to explain actions that took place a hundred years ago with the reasonings of today. For him the discovery and telling of the story was the most important thing and how well we and his subjects benefitted from that approach.

In person he was lovely and enormously helpful to all who came to him with questions. Students and activists and fellow scholars all benefitted from his knowledge. He must have known he was the gold standard ("what does Avrich say?") yet there was no arrogance, just a desire to share and help. He was spare with his criticism preferring to remain silent than chastise. If he offered praise and encouragement it meant the world to the recipient. One could ask for no finer praise from any source. When he began his studies Avrich was chastised by his tutor for studying those who had "lost." It is an interesting thought that his honest and thorough approach grounded in primary sources may well have given anarchists, should they choose to read him, some of the tools to succeed.

KSL Collective

### Paul Avrich Books Republished

AK Press have just republished a number of Paul Avrich's works: *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism In America*; *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism And Education In The United States* and *The Russian Anarchists*.

*Anarchist Voices*, Avrich's huge compendium of anarchist oral history, is now available unabridged in paperback for the first time. *The Modern School Movement* is an essential resource for anyone studying anarchism in twentieth century America (it covers a huge amount besides the Modern School).

Comrades who want to learn from the past and people who study anarchist history and ideas should get hold of them.

<http://www.akpress.org/>

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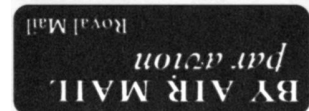
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