

Here is Louise Michel



[Louise Michel (1830-1905) was back in prison (again) in the 1880s when she wrote her memoirs (after the 1883 Paris bread riot). They were published in February 1886. In this extract she looks back at her younger self, just before the Paris Commune of 1871.]

And so here is Louise Michel. She is a menace to society, for she has declared a hundred times that everyone should take part in the banquet of life. What would be the pleasure of riches if one were unable to compare one's own well-fed condition to that of people dying of hunger? Where would the feeling of security come from if one were unable to compare one's good, solid position to that of people who must work in poverty?

What is more, Louise Michel is a woman. If she could only be fooled by the idea that women can get their rights by asking men for them. But she has the villainy to insist that the strong sex is just as much a slave as the weak sex, that it is unable to give what it does not have itself. All inequalities, she claims, will collapse when men and women engage in the common battle together.

Louise Michel is a monster who maintains that men and women are not responsible for their situations and claims it is stupidity which causes the evils around us. She claims that politics is a form of that stupidity and is incapable of ennobling the race.

If Louise Michel were the only person saying all

this, people could say she is a pathological case. But there are thousands like her, millions, none of whom gives a damn about authority. They all repeat the battle cry of the Russian revolutionaries: land and freedom!

Yes, there are millions of us who don't give a damn for any authority because we have seen how little the many-edged tool of power accomplishes. We have watched throats cut to gain it. It is supposed to be as precious as the jade axe that travels from island to island in Oceania. No. Power monopolized is evil.

Who would have thought that those men at the rue Hautefeuille who spoke so forcefully of liberty and who denounced the tyrant Napoleon so loudly would be among those in May 1871 who wanted to drown liberty in blood? [1] Power makes people dizzy and will always do so until power belongs to all mankind.

Note

1, A swipe at moderate republicans who opposed the Paris Commune: 'Among the people associated with the [education centre on] rue Hautefeuille was Jules Favre. At this time he was a true republican leader, but after the fall of Napoleon III he became one of those who murdered Paris. Power would poison him as it poisons all who are clothed in that cloak of Nessus' (p.50)

From chapter 7, 'The decaying empire' in *The Red Virgin: memoirs of Louise Michel*, edited and translated by Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter. (page 52). This extract appears courtesy of the University of Alabama Press.

Image

<https://fabienribery.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/louise-michel-profil-2.jpg>

The Princess Casamassima by Henry James [Review]

James peoples his novel with figures from the London anarchist scene of his day. He makes the indefatigable Johann Most serve as the basis for three characters: a bookbinder, a chemist, and a German international revolutionist, all of which Most was. Kropotkin, still tired from his journey, perhaps, will do for only one, but James compensates by giving him a sex change and making him the expatriate noblewoman of the book's title, who abandons a life of luxury to side with the oppressed.

Inside: tactics, arguments and keeping the flame alight

Anarchists in London (real and imaginary)

In his preface, James claims to have gathered the information with which to set the scene by sheer dogged observation: “pulling no wires, knocking at no closed doors, applying for no ‘authentic’ information”; instead, it was his practice to “haunt the great city and by this habit to penetrate it, imaginatively, in as many places as possible”.

When it comes down to it, James’s “imaginative penetration” consists of projecting his personal hang-ups and his class prejudices onto the working class in general and the revolutionary socialist movement in particular. The central figure, the bookbinder, has a grudge against the nobility, while at the same time he hankers for their “cultivated” life: a clear metaphor for James’s own persistent bourgeois-colonial hobnobbing.

The actual absence of any true independence of mind and total incapacity for any enlightened social thinking that are the rule among both the state/industrial baronry and the academic mandarins who are their cerebral proxies – this chronic intellectual debility, which is concealed by their impressive titles, appearances, and generally exalted positions, James projects upon the would-be revolutionaries, who are all muddle and dither. The murderous selfishness of the privileged and mighty, so elegantly promoted in that day in the apparel of the academically approved doctrine of social darwinism, finds its reflection in James’s novel in the portrayal of social revolution as culminating in a massive slaughter of the rich and the share-out of their property. This despite the fact that anarchist communism, i.e. collective ownership, self-management and free exchange, was well established as a revolutionary doctrine before 1886.

The instrument of the revolution, at least in its early stages, is to be an international terrorist conspiracy that binds its members by oath before giving them its orders. For of course, since the violence of the ruling class really is originated in hidden hierarchical conspiracies (for the sake of “national security”), and carried out by mere myrmidons, whose slave status is sealed by swearing them in, so must revolutionary violence be ordered by shadowy command structures that enforce blind obedience by the administration of oaths so terrible that they cannot be reported.

James cannot see the inhumanity, idleness, and cowardice of the rich, because of their veneer of “culture”. These vices, however, are all too obvious to him in the poor: insurmountable obstacles to the creation of a just social order. Yet the evidence of tenderness, the skill, the courage of the dispossessed was all around him. It was into the bosoms of working women that the rich thrust their children for nursing, it was into the hands of the working men that they put their very lives when they went travelling, it was the sons of working men and women in the army

and navy that kept them safe from their enemies and defended or extended their dominions for them. The idea that it is the sheer usefulness of the poor that makes the rich determined to keep them poor was evidently beyond Henry James.

To describe and comment upon the actual plot of the novel would be to dignify it quite unjustifiably. In their blurb, the publishers describe the book as portraying “the crucial era of England before socialism”. Of course, what they mean is authoritarian socialism, with its bourgeois, parliamentary, statist and militarist tactics. It would have been fascinating to read an account of life before this disease had infected the labour movement. Unfortunately, all we get is an account of the author’s prejudices. Since these correspond to the ideology of the ruling class today, just as much as yesterday, they are of little interest.

Recently, James’s old house in Sussex was acquired by the Rolls-Royce car firm, to be used for their directors’ frolics. Words or wheels, the social reality expressed is the same.

MH

From: Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review #5 (1980).

Mr Batllori’s Death. The Friend of Ferrer

At the age of only 51, Mariano Batllori, a personal friend of Ferrer, has just died at Walthamstow.

As manager of Ferrer’s publishing business in Barcelona, he found himself exposed to the persecutions that followed the insurrectory movement of July 1909, and became one of its innocent and unfortunate victims.

Batllori had formed with Ferrer, during their schooldays, one of those solid friendships that resist time and all sorts of trials.

When Ferrer was charged with complicity in Morral’s attempt on the life of the King and Queen of Spain, and thrown in prison, some friends of Morral found in a letter addressed to them, by the latter, sentences which completely proved Ferrer’s innocence; but not daring to trust the post office with such a precious document, they sought in Ferrer’s surroundings for a trustworthy person who might carry it to Madrid and put it in the hands of the solicitor; the choice fell on Mariano Batllori.

As manager of the Modern School, he had had time already to endure the vexations and threats of the police, and for a whole year had been trembling for the life of his friend.

When, after his acquittal, Ferrer understood the uselessness of his efforts to restart his school, and decided to start a publishing business, it was upon Batllori he conferred the post of manager and his power of attorney.

Then came the tragic events of July 1909. Batllori was arrested in the shop, at the Calle Cortes, and to

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reach the prison he had to walk through the streets of Barcelona, handcuffed with Senor Casasola, the former headmaster of the Modern School. Without any preparation, without anything on him except a few bob, without even being allowed to go home to inform his family, he was taken to the station surrounded by the civil guard, and exiled to Alcaniz, in the province of Tarragona. There he found himself with Jose, Ferrer's brother, Jose's wife, and their little girl, the veteran Anselmo Lorenzo, the teacher Casasola, and other employees of Ferrer. It will be easily understood what anguishes Mariano must have gone through after he had left Barcelona without being able to address a word or two of farewell to his wife, who was thus left alone with a little girl of five and her ailing mother.

From Alcaniz the exiles were transferred to Ternel [ie Teruel], another Spanish province which is still under the yoke of the narrowest fanaticism and where life thus became unbearable. In fact, they were living in a house which was watched day and night by the police and the civil guard, who had erected, at a few yards distance, a wooden shelter, so that their watch should not belie itself for a single moment. Their house door was bolted at 7pm, and no one was allowed to enter or leave that kind of fortress after that time. During the day they were not allowed to go out without being accompanied by one or more policemen. The same escort followed the postman and the purveyors. Thus unable to do any work and to earn any money, they saw the spectre of famine threatening them, and especially so because their correspondence was opened and the registered letters containing money had disappeared. It was but in November, more than a month after the execution of Ferrer, that these tortures came to an end.

Back in Barcelona, Batllori had to seek employment for his living, for Ferrer's publishing house had been closed; but for more than two years his efforts remained unfruitful. His exile, his relations with Ferrer had closed to him the doors of all the employers, and he saw with terror his scanty savings go. A bronchitis which he had caught during Ferrer's first trial became more acute, and physical suffering adding itself to moral suffering, undermined his health every day a little more.

It was then that our friend Guy Bowman, informed of this sad situation, offered him a berth in his newly-opened publishing business, and that was how, submitting himself to a new exile, he came to England and settled down with his wife and his little girl.

The friends who are in the habit of visiting the little cottage at Maude Terrace will no doubt remember the kind and modest comrade whom an imperfect knowledge of our tongue rendered very coy, and whose face bore the indelible imprint of the torments he had previously undergone. In the midst

of the sympathy with which he was surrounded, he looked at one time as if he was going to recover, but the illusion did not last long. Undermined by disease and grief, his organism had lost all resistance, and death met hardly any resistance to accomplish its work.

Mariano Batllori leaves to all those who have known him the memory of a loyal, disinterested [ie not selfish] and devoted friend.

The Syndicalist, September 1912.

Footnote [RA/KSL] :

Berthe J. Batllori, born 1873, is registered as having died in 1915 in West Ham. Her death certificate shows she was still living at 4 Maude Terrace, Walthamstow with her sister Leopoldine, who registered the death. She (Berthe) is given as widow of Mariano Batllori. Both Berthe and Leopoldine had the second name Jeanne. Berthe and Mariano had a daughter who I presume accompanied them to England, but I haven't found any information about her.

Guy Bowman also lived in Walthamstow.

The original of this article spells the surname Battlora throughout, this is an error [which has been silently corrected]: on official documents, including death certificates it's spelt Batllori.

Footnote 2 [PS]

His wife was Berthe Bonnard, a one-time student of Ferrer's Spanish classes in Paris in 1897-98. She was the sister of another Spanish learner, Leopoldine Bonnard, a rationalist schoolteacher. Apparently Ferrer and Leopoldine lived together before declaring their "free union" to a gathering of friends in Barcelona on the very day that her sister, Berthe (Berta) entered into a civil marriage with Batllori. Ferrer and Leopoldine had a son, Riego, before their relationship ended in 1905.

Footnote 3 [KSL]

This article was illustrated with a photo of Batllori in exile, taken from a group shot. This image of Batllori (and the other Modern School exiles) in Teruel can be seen at <https://manelaisa.com/ateneu-enciclopedic-fotos/>. Batllori is number 3 at <https://manelaisa.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/1-desterrados-a-teruel-1909.jpg>

Tom Keell

With the passing of Tom Keell goes one of the most prominent links with the active and enthusiastic period of the English libertarian movement. The London Freedom Group had been founded in the [18]90's around the personality of Kropotkin, who had made England his home after adventures with the prisons and police of half Europe, and despite the difficulties of all anti-state activity, its paper "Freedom" remained a glowing torch of unique literary standard for over thirty years – a remarkable

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life for this type of periodical. During the early years of the century, at a time of particular hardship, it was lucky to enlist the sympathy of Alfred Marsh, son of a prosperous brush manufacturer, who became nominal editor, and from then Tom Keell, who had joined the “staff” as compositor some time before, and had done most of the practical work, gradually took on duties of publishing, accounting, editing, distributing, writing the excellent “Notes of the day” and finally running the whole paper “Freedom” as is bound to happen to an efficient man who is always “on the job” and willing to work and to take responsibility. The practical problems of “committee editing” were burden enough: the tragedy of the group schism brought about by alignment towards the war fever and Russian affairs are even now hardly forgotten; and the fact that a paper with such a policy could be kept alive through the war period was itself a miracle. In all this Tom took a consistent, an honourable, an uncompromising line of anti-state, anti-government, anti-war activity, though it may be human nature to rail at one who stayed on the right path whilst others strayed, it is very difficult to find in his record much to criticise.

With the post-war slump and general world disillusionment the wave of activity and interest in Anarchism (essentially international) fell considerably, and by the time he had decided to retire to the country with his sympathetic comrade of many years, Lilian Wolfe, there was no responsible group to whom he felt justified in handing over. The press was dismantled and sold, bills all paid, and Tom retired to Whiteway Colony, which has had its place for some years in the history of Utopian Colony experiments. Having little urge towards journalism (his memoirs would have been fascinating), he confined himself to keeping in touch with affairs, a periodical visit to his friends in London, and remaining, with the help of the old “Bomb Shop” (Henderson’s of Charing Cross Road) and that independent personality, Charles Lahr, the representative, more or less, of the tiny stream of English libertarian literature.

Can I get a Kropotkin pamphlet anywhere? Ask Tom Keell. Is “Man!” available here without writing to the United States? Write to Tom Keell. Does anyone know anything about Spanish anarchists before the war? See if Tom Keell can help you – and so on – until the Spanish war brought Anarchism again into world politics, attracted new blood, and found him willing to help as publisher and distributor of “Spain and the World.” His firm, neat handwriting on the wrappers to the day of his death remain our last contact with him.

When I first came to London I had 14/7½ d, a suitcase and need of a job. On the third day, having found a room and started personal affairs rolling, I put in my pocket my copy of “Freedom”, picked up if I remember, at an Emma Goldman meeting in

Manchester, and stood at half past four on a Saturday afternoon at the back door of 127, Ossulston Street, “Hello!” – a tall grey-bearded man at the top of a dark rickety staircase. “Are you Mr. Keell?” “I am.” “Can I have a few words with you?” “Come upstairs,” and a man sat on a packing case eating bread and cheese sandwiches, drinking tea and handing out information in a small tidy room under the roof and crowded with its hand-press, type fonts with which he proceeded later to do conjuring tricks all the time he was talking, one chair plus me, neat piles of literature and two rows of his personal books. Trained to look for a good critical study of a new subject, it did not take me long to discover that I wanted an “Eltzbacher.” “Nothing doing, my boy,” said Tom. “Apart from pure luck, you’re twenty years too late – but if you can read French there’s a translation still in print published by so and so” – and from then the twelve years to his death are covered, with some interruptions, by letters, purchases of books and papers, visits to London, meetings at Whiteway and talks! – talks of the past, before my time, talks of the days of Kropotkin and Malatesta in the office and of their personalities; of the coming of the released Spanish prisoners, tortured in Montjuich prison, of their scarred backs and of Tarrida del Marmol; of the public outcry at the Ferrer execution; of printing and other help to Mrs. Pankhurst and the Women’s Suffrage Movement when they were raided by Liberal governments; of illegal pamphlets against war and conscription left in buses and other public places; of Scotland Yard officials and how to deal with them; of useful help with correspondence and propaganda for Emma Goldman’s lecture campaign; of that extraordinary short-lived genius “George Barrett” who could not be replaced; of that fine personality Wm. C. Owen, and of Edward Carpenter, who meant so much to many a pre-war youth; of Whiteway itself, originally founded by a group of Tolstoyans, and of the colourful individualist personalities it has attracted since; of Irish politics, labour, enthusiasm and martyrdom; of George Lansbury, the red “Daily Herald” days, the Miracle of Fleet Street, and the brave days when “Many of us were twenty-one, light of heart, of pocket, but full of ideals” and met at the Minerva Rooms in Silver Street, at the International Restaurant in Denmark Street, or at the Emily Davison Club.

And what good did all the talking do? Well, it kept the torch alive and has handed it on.

From a Correspondent.*

Man! Vol 6 No 9-10 Sept.-Oct. 1938 [p603-6 of the *Man!* Anthology]

*Dr Oscar Swede (1900-1942), attribution from ‘Thomas Keell 1866-1938’ by “HB” (probably Harold Barclay) <http://libcom.org/library/thomas-keell-1866-1938>. Swede’s papers are in Amsterdam.

Well-being, Class, Tactics

Transition and the right to well-being

It is a deliberate lie to say that we are in the grip of a *recession*, which is a temporary slump in trade, part of the ebb and flow of normality.

This does not describe the economic situation in Great Britain nor that prevailing in most of the capitalist nations. It is pure governmental propaganda to suggest that it is; and all the slogans of getting the Tories out, “ditch the bitch” and the like are an attempt to trivialise and personalise the issue. It is not Mrs Thatcher’s lack of compassion or dogmatic errors that are responsible for the present slump. She could, as the previous Labour governments did, direct the economy in such a way that the nature of the unemployment crisis is overlooked. Labour governments became adept at cosmetic surgery and also, to do them justice, introduced or permitted to continue what one might call first-aid measures to help the casualties of economic crisis. These are now cut because they are clearly cosmetic and therefore “uneconomic”.

But Labour politicians accepted, and made a great national saga of, the theory that there is an inevitable ebb and flow of world trade, the crisis theory of economics that balances the conspiracy theory of politics. It is untrue. This is not a recession but a transition.

Transition

The capitalist world is undergoing a major change similar to economic revolutions of the past, which have displaced class after class. Now it is the working class who are being displaced. They are losing the right to work. It is not that there is a temporary lull in work: the need for work is disappearing. Technology has displaced the need for many human hands before and is doing so still. What we now see is the whole of heavy industry vanishing, whole towns and regions made redundant – not just in the industrial sense either. It is a problem of “what to do with the people”, which States have often on their hands – which criminal Statism often deals with by genocide but which less totalitarian regimes have to settle by evasive measures. There are now whole regions which the State may as well write off as no longer being financially viable. The work of keeping industry going falls into fewer and fewer hands. The industrial proletariat as such is vanishing. Under rising capitalism an expanding work force was essential, and it had power in its hands: it lost its opportunity to take over and is now paying the price.

It was always possible under rising capitalism for an increasing number of the work force employed in industry to think of itself as “middle class” socially because it once had, and in many cases still has, social advantages – not getting their hands dirty, or getting paid holidays and sickness when these were not general – which have now dwindled solely to having had further educational facilities, but with the

same ability to be turned on the dustbin as anyone else – their social advantages reduced to being able to get a better grasp of the small print in DHSS circulars.

Consequences of defeat

The working class movement was defeated long ago, or taken over by others. It has collectively no more idea of what has hit it than any of the social classes dispossessed in the past and most of the protests that have arisen have been diverted into pointless political demands with the only coherent one “the right to work”. A pathetic slogan: The right to work is the right to be exploited; it is the right to be slaves, (which the government does not deny). It is the right not to be subjected to genocide, the logical outcome of redundancy for a class: which is certainly an important right, but surely we have a long way to come to that? The opposite of the right to work – the right to drop out and stagnate – is equally destructive: that is the right to accept what the State propose, capable of realisation, since no government will object to it!

Why unemployment

The capitalist countries face unemployment and “recessions” and not communist countries for a simple reason: the uninhibited free market (to which the Tory Government is devoted) means there is no economic necessity for the people who have been displaced by the technological progress of the twentieth century.

They have therefore to be pushed out of meaningful productive jobs into the “digging holes and filling them in” type of toil, upon which governments, according to the degree of human feeling prevalent, may make variations. (One of the main ones, for instance, is the huge growth of the university industry, not to spread education, or to provide a better educated workforce, but humanely to reduce unemployment and incidentally to brainwash and condition).

The totalitarian countries are able to plan ahead and utilise their workforce as they wish. No need to use the lever of unemployment, or face union opposition through putting workers out of their homes or into jobs far below those for which they have trained. The work force there is like an army and it goes where it is put. There is no point in unemployment, all that is done is to alter the categories when putting them through the educational stage and planning for the future – fewer industrial workers, more psychiatrists; more manual jobs, more servile jobs and less skilled work for the period ten years ahead. In fact (like it or not) unemployment shows the democratic side of capitalism, not its dictatorial side; for in dictatorships there is no unemployment since people are set to work as the government requires. This does not alter the fact that unemployment is a major social evil, but the

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alternative is not the right to work but *the right to well-being*.

If the community advances all are responsible – if we are not now in the conditions of the Middle ages everyone has contributed in one way or another to what is, and the right to well-being is universal. Not just for the famous, or the rich, or the well connected; not just for the proletariat or for all those who work – but *all*.

Since the major advance in technology has meant that there is not enough work for all to do, the solution lies in reducing the amount of work we do, and extending the amount of leisure that we have, and balancing work and leisure, so that work is not a punishment and leisure is not a bore. The fact that no governments of whatever hue, and no States of whatever economic background, wish to achieve this, does not mean that we cannot nevertheless insist on our basic human right to share in *well-being*. The sooner this is realised the better, for even though it needs a complete revolution, the moment this is appreciated [it] colours our attitudes. No one need be ashamed of asking for “too much” when they know we have been deprived of everything, nor regard a mystical “social welfare” and moderate their demands accordingly.

Everything is ours, the government creates nothing. We have the right to live well. The State has no right to exist but force.

Albert Meltzer

Black Flag : Organ of the Anarchist Black Cross
v.6,no.7 (April 1981)

owns more than the bottom 80%.

Health Divide

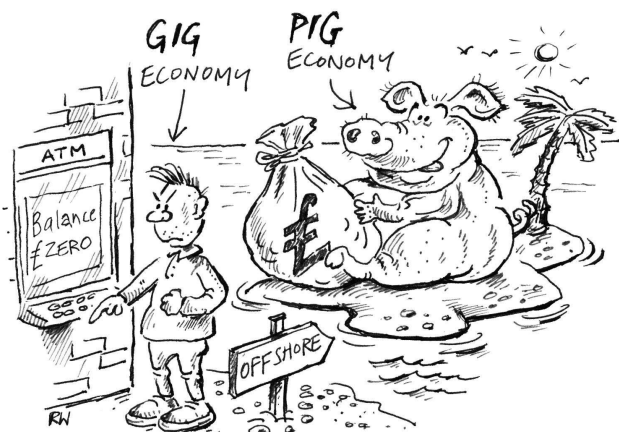
The “Health Divide”, an update of the Black report by the Health Education Council (after Sir Douglas Black, former Dept of Health chief scientist – the report was suppressed by the Government in 1980) shows the widening of the health gap between rich and poor over the last decade. A press conference on the updated report, planned for March 24th wasn’t allowed to go ahead “because it was a sensitive business in the election year” – Sir Brian Bailey, the chair of the Health Education Council. The report says: “All the major killer diseases now affect the poor more than the rich and so do most of the less common ones”. It then goes on: “The unemployed and their families have considerably worse physical and mental health than those in work”. The conclusions are that material deprivation – whether poverty, poor housing, or poor work conditions – is the major factor explaining the poor health of the less well off. This, of course, comes as no surprise, but the Government is embarrassed by it.

Obviously related to this is the housing crisis with over 150,000 officially registered homeless people. Their plight was the subject of “World in Action” which interviewed many families forced to live in hostels, ex-isolation hospitals, army barracks and caravans. One couple in Hertfordshire were living in a single hostel room 12 ft by 10ft and were expecting their first child at any time. In Wareham, Dorset, homeless families are treated like dirt by Purbeck council. One councillor said: “Homeless people shouldn’t be breeding like rabbits”; and another: “They should have their children taken into care and the parents should fend for themselves”. The Homeless Persons Act states: “...mobile homes are not satisfactory for families with children...”, yet Purbeck have put families in run down caravans. Not surprisingly Housing Minister, John Paton and Environment Secretary, Nicholas Ridley, refused to be interviewed on the programme.

These examples of serious social deprivation are in the “affluent south” illustrating that society is divided wherever you live. Just think; in the same town there are dispossessed families living in caravans while rich Tory councillors and business executives live in large, posh detached houses. Most of us live slightly higher up the social ladder than those in the programme, but what have we got? – run down council estates or pokey Barratt homes mortgaged to the hilt, and most of us struggle to make ends meet.

Divided by Class

The facts speak for themselves. We live in a class-divided society – a minority wealth-owning class and a wealth-producing class (the immense majority). Many don’t immediately recognise this fundamental divide – skilled workers are rewarded more than the



Gig economy, pig economy Richard Warren
The Price We Pay

We live in a very much divided society, not just North/South as the papers often tell us, but in every town and city. Even the official statistics in “Social Trends ’87” published in January reveal the gap between rich and poor yawning wider. From 1976 to ’84 income of the bottom 2 fifths of households fell from 10% to 6% of the total, while the top 1 fifth’s share rose from 44% to 49%. Ownership of wealth shows an even greater contrast: 1% of the population

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unskilled and higher up are the “professional classes”. In other words capitalism divides workers into a career hierarchy, with the unemployed at the bottom and lower management at the top. But all these people do essentially the same thing – provide labour, whether physical or mental, that turns the wheels of capitalism. The social wealth created isn’t used to benefit all of us equally – far from it! A large slice is constantly creamed off by a small section of the population who do no work at all – the ruling class.

This small percentage who own most of the wealth also control it. And so the interests of society are sacrificed to their interests. While this system may produce lots of profit (not much going our way though!) and inflated salaries for directors and managers, for most of us we have to put up with a low wage, bad housing, poor health (and a crumbling NHS), second rate education, unemployment – the list goes on. In short – pleasure for the few, misery for the rest of us. Surely society could be more fairly organised than that! Yes, but the government or the bosses certainly aren’t going to do it for us – it’s up to us to change things.

Sexual inequality

Although the women’s movement has made some gains, women are still treated as second-class citizens. In conversations and arguments women are often interrupted or even told to shut up “because their opinions don’t count”. The “woman’s place is in the home” attitude still persists. They are expected to do most of the housework and look after the kids. Again, the figures speak for themselves – women in full time employment only have 24.6 hours free time per week whereas men have 33.5 hours; even housewives only have 32.2 hours free time (“Social Trends ’87”). Women, on average, are paid lower wages and suffer sexual harassment at work. Because of the attitude that “women are there to be fucked” they are in danger of being assaulted or raped, often by husbands who consider their wife to be their property to be used or abused as they see fit.

Racism

With widespread poverty and frustration people look for a convenient scapegoat. In 1930’s Germany it was the Jews. In 1980’s Britain it’s blacks and Asians. They are blamed for “taking our jobs” or even “our hospital beds”. Yet the nationalistic press conveniently forget that blacks and Asians have worse housing than whites and suffer from higher unemployment and social deprivation. On top of all this they get hassle from the police and beat up and murdered by gangs of fascist thugs.

The problems in our society that are blamed on ethnic minorities are problems generated by the capitalist system we live under. Quite simply it cannot satisfy our needs. Instead it produces poverty, division, frustration, violence.

Society is divided into classes, and our class is artificially divided by sexism and racism. The key to maintaining inequality is power – imposition of the will of persons considered more important on to those considered less important. Yet all human beings ought to be socially equal, but this system denies us that right. Power is expressed as authority. Hence the chain of command in workplaces where the shop floor worker is reduced to the level of a machine. At school our children are subject to imposed discipline in preparation for the job market. Women suffer the authority of men who “know what’s best”. And we are all subject to the authority of the State which claims to be acting on our behalf but in fact is acting on behalf of the ruling class.

As anarcho-syndicalists we reject power relationships because we are passionate believers in freedom – freedom from domination, from exploitation and from tyranny. We also reject the class system and the economy based on capitalist relations of production and distribution, because we believe in social and economic equality. We advocate class struggle for the liberation of humanity and fight for a world in which the wealth created by all is enjoyed by all.

Direct Action No.38 (April 1987)

Anarchy and the art of motor-cycle maintenance [Or, Squatting in Ilford]

Introduction – Anarchists in action. Squatting in Ilford, E. London.

In 1968-69 I was one of many anarchists involved in squatting in Ilford and in the long battle with Redbridge Council (Ilford). What follows is just a look back at that. It is not an attempt at any sort of history. It is just a very brief and selective summary of the situation during a part of a long struggle. My experience during this time is one of the factors that has made me take the position I do in the main article.

In essence squatting was part of the anarchist direct action campaign for more and better housing, with greater control of it in people’s own hands. We were squatting because of the increasing number of empty houses in London, coupled with the increasing number of homeless people. Under Redbridge Council there were more and more houses which were due to stand empty for ten years or more, before being demolished for a new car park or offices. When squatting started in Ilford, Redbridge council reacted hysterically. As a wide generalisation they attacked us in five ways :-

- 1) Brute Force. Squads of ‘bailiffs’ attacking at 4-6 am and throwing squatters out after beating them up, and then wrecking furniture and gutting the house.
- 2) Preventative Vandalism. Gutting empty houses so they could not be squatted in, as well as boarding them up.

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- 3) Propaganda. Putting forward in the local and national press, the wildest accusations against squatters – that we destroyed property, jumped the housing queue, we were less than human, and believed in violence and anarchy.
- 4) Minor Harassment. Such as persuading the electricity, gas and water boards to cut their supplies off.
- 5) The Law. Obtaining eviction orders, injunctions, etc. and bringing charges of assault, ABH, GBH, against us.

By the end of the campaign, we were responding to their attacks in about six different ways, as follows :-

- 1) Brute Force. Getting together all the comrades who were prepared to fight and maintaining 24 hour guards on squatted houses.
- 2) Defence Work. Making houses more defensible, one of them was a mini-fortress.
- 3) Building Works. Rebuilding gutted houses to make them habitable for new squats.
- 4) Propaganda. The town hall was covered with slogans, a banner was even put up over the top of the town hall one night. A daily news sheet was put out to the streets surrounding the squatted houses. Constant news and letters were sent to the local paper until it contained more pro-squatting material than anti-squatting. Street theatre and processions were held.
- 5) Minor Harassment. Every opportunity was taken to publicly embarrass the local councillors and the council, culminating in a violent attack on the whole council during a council meeting in which the whole council fled for their lives and the mayor was nearly strangled with his chain of office. (There then followed a running battle with the police, while the victorious forces of liberation beat a strategic withdrawal to their own fortress one street away),
- 6) The Law. Every attempt by the council to use the law against us was opposed, all charges denied, and we started bringing more and more counter charges against them. At the end of the day we probably had as much success in the courts as they did. But the ammunition that our legal moves provided the propaganda machine was enormous.

[Photo, caption: Redbridge Town Hall with a banner on the top saying “Brute force doesn’t cure homelessness.”]

[Photo, caption “More slogans on the town hall – with their author”]

Squatting is still with us today, so there is no doubt that the anarchist movement won a major victory on the streets of Ilford, Fulham etc. It was not as complete a victory as it might have been, but that is another story my children. In the beginning it was a disaster. The people who first tried to squat very rapidly became worse off than ever – homeless, their furniture smashed, two of them in hospital, and the council trying to take their children into care. And of

course charges of assault and breach of the peace against them.

Against all the odds we turned defeat into victory. And looking back (although I did not think so at the time) I think this was due not to any one tactic, but to the combination. All the things we were doing interlinked. For instance the legal games that were played (bitterly attacked by me and others at the time) had some very important effects which contributed to the general success. Firstly, they caused the legal moves made by the council to be largely ineffective. This seems to have led to them making moves which were illegal and hasty. This improved our position – we were indignant! It confused the council and caused a split in their ranks, it confused the liberals, the press, and the tv., who didn’t know who to support and ended up supporting us, the squatters, more than the local council, and it confused the police, who at one point retreated into a neutral inactivity which culminated in their standing on the pavement in a line, watching squatters and bailiffs fighting it out at 5.00 am in the morning. The police being violently sworn at and insulted by local people in night clothes and dressing gowns, and then having at last to intervene on the squatters side, because the bailiffs in desperation had set fire to the house, having been completely routed in the fighting.

At the time, this six-point attack we were making on the council was causing great divisions amongst ourselves. No one person supported all the things we were doing. There were endless arguments about which of them was the RIGHT thing to do. People doing other things were attacked, at the least for wasting time and not doing anything, at worst for being counter-revolutionary, and supposedly harming the movement.

Take for example the defence works at one house. These created a fortress from which we worked. It was a house with no ground floor. Behind the front door was a 10 foot drop to the basement, there was no staircase, access to the lived-in part on the first floor was by rope ladder. The garden was crossed by pits and barbed wire, which made it dangerous to run across, especially at night or early morning. It proved to be an excellent position, being successfully defended by seven men and women against fifteen bailiffs, who attempted a surprise attack early one morning. A bloody encounter in which some of them went to hospital, but I don’t think any of us were even scratched.

At the same time these defence works made the place hell to live in; sent three people to hospital (outpatients), one for walking through the front door, one for falling down the ladder while drunk, and one trying to make an effective smoke bomb; and took up a lot of time which meant that less was done repairing other houses, which was very important to the propaganda war; showing us to be creating housing,

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while it was the council who destroyed it.

[Photo caption 'The cover Anarchy 102, August 1969 Bailiffs attacking a squat at 6.0 am – and failing']

We were at each other's throats the whole time, constantly putting down those who did not see our tactics as the most important and wasting their time doing unimportant things like drinking tea with a reporter.

At the end, fighting broke out between us, a house was surrendered and retaken (by a flying squad of squatters from the other side of London) and some people have not spoken to each other again to this day.

AND NOW TO THE POINT... A number of major divisions have split the anarchist movement over the last 15 years. The ones which come most strongly to mind are over the class war and sexism.

Both of these produced very similar style of arguments (with the words changed) and similar results.

The class war advocates put forward that class was the major division within society, that the class war was the decisive struggle, all others being side-shows, and that all our efforts should be directed to that end.

The feminists came along a few years later to say that sex is the major division in society, that the struggle against male domination is the decisive struggle, that all others are side-shows, if not intrinsically counter-revolutionary and that all our efforts should be directed to that end.

All through these discussions one or two people were saying that they felt that the nuclear family was the origin of all our problems and that only by destruction of that could we advance, while others were saying that the school and educational system were where it was at; then suddenly hash and H and then LSD were going to usher in the new dawn.

I feel it is about time that we all recognised that the society we live in is divided. Divided not in one or two ways, but in dozens of ways. All these divisions cause conflicts and tensions. Most of these divisions are important. Individually these divisions are not equally important. Individually we see society in a different way, and it is different aspects of society which oppress each one of us most. At the moment because I find one aspect of this society more oppressive than the rest and you find another more oppressive, we are at each others throats. It is as though we are separated by a wall, one side painted blue and the other green. We both agree that the wall must be destroyed, but at the moment we are fighting each other over what colour the wall is.

The reason why I say that things look good for the anarchist movement, while others say that things have never looked worse and that it is the extreme right who are on the up and up, is only due to our

standing and looking at life from two different positions. It is not that one of us is blind or stupid, or 'intrinsically counter-revolutionary.' We are looking at the same events from two different angles. Each view is as true as the other. This is easy to say, but hard to believe. Take for example MW's article in this issue, and what he says about the strength of the NF. [1] None of what he says fits in with what I see around me. I see only small turn outs of a few thousand, despite massive publicity, I find almost no support for them locally. I can see them only as a small, isolated group, who are remarkable only for their failure to make an impact despite all the favourable circumstances going for them today. So what can I conclude about MW's analysis. That it is crazy? That he is blind? It is nonsense to be ignored? Yes! Those are my initial reactions. But it is just an extreme example of the same world viewed from a different position. His view is probably no more true or false than mine.

[M.C.Escher drawing, caption: "It all depends on how you look at it. M.C.Escher"]

What is true of our views of society, is true of our ideas on tactics. From our different viewpoints we see different things needing to be done. Time and again we put more effort into destroying each other's ideas than into destroying the state.

If we look back to what I was saying about Ilford, our strength was the number of different ways in which we were fighting. Our main weakness was the amount of time and energy we were spending arguing among ourselves. We should keep discussing tactics amongst ourselves, what I'm against is the self-destructive arguments that endlessly go on amongst us. As the issues become more important, heated words turn to blows, as they did at Ilford.

CONCLUSIONS. In the article, 'What is to be done?' in Anarchy 23,[2] I said (among other things) that the anarchist movement needs to be built upon respect. In some ways I'm saying the same thing in a different way.

First, I'm saying society looks different according to where you are standing. So different that at times we don't seem to be even looking at the same things – but we are! So the bickering over which view is 'correct' should stop. Instead we should listen to how society looks from these different positions, and accept it. To deny someone's view of society may in theory be harmless enough, in practice it is almost a denial of the person concerned (which is why these arguments get so heated and become so personal).

[M.C. Escher drawing, caption "It's amazing all the different things you can get to fit together if you try. (and you can draw like M.C.Escher)"]

Secondly, I'm saying that almost all the different tactics we discuss are good ones. A great tactic is the use of all these tactics at once, as happened by accident at Ilford. All the different tactics [cont. p14]

Anarchist Solidarity

Looking at Anarchist solidarity with prisoners and exiles in the Soviet Union

In 2010 the Alexander Berkman Social Club and Kate Sharpley Library published *The Tragic Procession: Alexander Berkman and Russian Prisoner Aid*. It tells the story of the anarchist solidarity effort with their comrades in the Soviet Union (first in the Joint Committee of anarchists and Socialist Revolutionaries, and then under the wing of the anarcho-syndicalist International Working Men's Association). These bulletins, published between 1923 and 1931, illuminate the development of Bolshevik repression over many years. But they also shows how and why the solidarity was vital to imprisoned and exiled revolutionaries, how it drew on Russian revolutionary traditions, and how information was crucial to the work they did.

Bread (and books)

It was clear from the beginning that anarchist solidarity aimed to offer 'both moral and material aid'[1]. Not only did they stop people from starving: there was the psychological support of being remembered. 'Twice we received from Chicago the papers "Noviy Mir" and "Russky Golos"'. Wonder who sent them. May be you. But I can tell you, whoever did, the very fact is pleasant and encouraging. People are thinking of us ... N. (Central Russia)'. [2]

Money was required by the prisoners and exiles: 'your aid helps a great deal. Else some would die of hunger and cold.' [3] Exiles were supposed to receive an allowance: 'we are allowed by the Government 6 roubles 25 kopeks per month (less than \$3.25 Transl.) There is no chance of earning anything: first, because there are only two or three local institutions in our village, while several hundred persons are looking for work; secondly we are not accepted on principle ... The lowest minimum one needs here to exist is 10-12 roubles a month per person, not counting any expenses for the necessary clothing. Therefore, but for your help, - well, you know where we should be ... S.- K.- (North of Siberia). [4]

In other, more remote, places even money was useless. 'G. is about to go now with my last pair of trousers to exchange them for potatoes. The peasants have very little left from their crop, because of the high percentage they have to turn over to the State. They refuse to sell for money and so we must give them our very last possessions.' [5]

The aid that was sent reached more than one individual at a time. Each recipient 'represented an anarchist colony, ranging from "4 or 5 or even 20 comrades whom we reach through the one correspondent in a given district"' [6] This was thanks to the *starosta* system: 'Klichevsky was a *starosta*, literally an "elder," for the community of anarchist exiles in the city of Tashkent. This was an elected position which entitled Klichevsky to negotiate with

the Soviet authorities on behalf of his fellow-exiles, and also gave him access to information about anarchist exiles and prisoners at other locations.' [7]

Besides this, the aid fund sent books and magazines, both political and educational. The German Communist paper *Rote Fahne* is mentioned several times. It must have been more informative than the Russian press!

Not sectarian

Alexander Berkman was happy to work with Left Socialist Revolutionaries like I.N. Steinberg - unlike New York's Anarchist Red Cross. This led to his exchange of letters with Lily Sarnoff where he wrote 'Supplying bread to Maria Spiridonova (who is a Left Socialist Revolutionist) is just as imperative as to aid [Aron] Baron (who is an anarchist).' [8] It's also noticeable that even after 1926 when the Aid Fund is an explicitly anarchist affair, news from other socialist currents is still included.

The revolutionary tradition

Vera Alexandrovna Martsinkevitch, Left Socialist Revolutionary, died in Kem camp in April 1925. The report shows how the collective of political prisoners kept up revolutionary traditions of mourning in the face of official opposition: 'Her comrades were not permitted to bury her. Secretly they had to steal over to the hospital to bid her good-bye for the last time. Only in their barracks could the "collectiv" intone the funeral march, for their murdered comrade, "You have fallen a victim"' [9]

The Russian revolutionary tradition shaped the attitudes of the Russian anarchists too. When Emma Goldman talked about the 'Heroic women of the Russian Revolution' [10] she started with the wives of the Decembrist rebels of 1825.

Many of the prisoners and exiles could compare Tsarist to Bolshevik prisons from personal experience. 'Politicals who had served in Schlüsselberg and Petropavlovskskaya (the worst places of imprisonment under Tsarism) say that Solovetski is the most terrible experience they have suffered.' [11]

Similarities with the Tsarist regime are invoked to remind readers that the state is not 'withering away'. 'The present regime in the Butyrki prison - Lazarevitch relates - is one of utmost severity. The politicals are kept in isolation. It is not permitted to leave one's cell, nor to stand at the window or to communicate with fellow prisoners. Exercise, for each political separately, is allowed for one hour daily. Loud talking, singing, or tapping [of messages] is punished by the dungeon, as in the days of the Tsar.' [12] Pointing out these similarities could be dangerous to the prisoners and exiles. Nikolai Viktorov 'was sent to prison in Tobolsk, Siberia, for allegedly "insulting a policeman," who he had called gendarme.' [ie a member of the tsarist political police 13]

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The organisation of solidarity

There were tensions over how solidarity efforts were to be organised, or who should be supported. But such support work was easier to organise than other political activities: ‘Anarchists agreed that they had a duty to aid their comrades who had been imprisoned or exiled by Soviet rule and this acknowledgement gave them a sense of purpose and a unifying cause during a period of factionalism.’[14] ‘The debate between Unified Anarchism and the Organizational Platform centred around difficult and complex concepts, such as the nature of revolution and politics. Relief aid was more tangible; by sending anarchist prisoners food, books, or clothes, exiles could give support and demonstrate their sociability.’[15]

Clearly the solidarity work was not a-political. Anarchists abroad were reassured that the Bolshevik myth was not all-conquering: ‘Encouragement is to be found – strange as it may sound – in the fact that the prisons and exile places are filled with politicals. It is the best indication that the conscience of the country is not dead.’[16]

The relief effort was part of an international network. The accounts record not just money sent to anarchists or particular militants but money directed to aid exiled Bulgarians, Italian prisoner committees and others. We also get glimpses of a younger generation inside Russia: ‘young persons, politicals of the new generation, whom we, “the old guard”, do not know.’[17] – possibly a sighting of the ‘Wildcat’ anarchists recorded by Viktor Savchenko.[18]

Testimony

Reading through the Bulletins reprinted in *The Tragic Procession*, besides seeing the importance of the money they raised (and how scrupulous they were in recording and distributing it), you get a sense of the importance of information. Letters are reprinted to give a snapshot of current conditions (even where safety means the name and location of the author can't be given). We're given a view of news as it comes in – even, in some cases, of ominous silence. This attention to detail reflects a concern to prove what's going on. It's also part of an attempt by the aid fund to make their imprisoned and exiled comrades something more than just a set of statistics. Their revolutionary career (be it short or long), their personality, their health difficulties are all used to maintain the connection with the comrades abroad who – whether they knew them or not – held out a lifeline.

Notes

1 *Tragic procession* p.4: *Bulletin of the Joint Committee for the Defense of Revolutionists Imprisoned in Russia*, no. 1 October 1923

2 ‘From our correspondence’ *Tragic procession* p.16: *Bulletin of the Joint Committee*, Nov.-Dec. 1925, p.3.

This anonymously published extract is from a letter of Anton Shliakhovoy to Mark Mratchny, from Tula, 02/07/1925 Flechine papers folder 48. Translation (by Malcolm Archibald) online at

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/5qfvz7>

3 ‘From our correspondence’ *Tragic procession* p.26: *Bulletin of the Relief Fund of the International Working Men's Association for Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists Imprisoned or Exiled in Russia* no.1 December 1926, p.5

4 ‘From our correspondence’ *Tragic procession* p.17: *Bulletin of the Joint Committee*, Nov.-Dec. 1925, p.4

5 ‘From other letters’ *Tragic procession* p.69: *Bulletin of the Relief Fund*, April 1931 p.6

6 *Outcasts, outlaws, and outsiders: Exiled Russian anarchists in the interwar years* Elizabeth Jane Dennison, PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 1993. p.107 quoting A. Berkman to Yelensky, 1 February 1930, G file, Boris Yelensky Archive, International Institute of Social History

7 See Malcolm Archibald's introduction to ‘A Letter from Tashkent (1925)’ by Boris Klichevsky <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/w6mbrb>

8 the exchange is in folder 8 of the Berkman papers in Amsterdam, page 65 onwards. [See next article]

9 ‘The death of Vera Martsinkevitch’ *Tragic procession* p.26: *Bulletin of the Relief Fund* no.1 December 1926, p.5

10 Emma Goldman Papers at the International Institute of Social History, folder 221 see text at <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/3xsk7w>. Goldman gave a lecture on “Heroic Women of the Russian Revolution” at the Folk House in Bristol on May 4th 1925.

11 ‘Transfer of all politicals to Solovetski’ *Tragic procession* p.3: *Bulletin of the Joint Committee*, no. 1 October 1923

12 ‘The case of Lazarevitch’ *Tragic procession* p.25: *Bulletin of the Relief Fund*, no.1 December 1926, p.4

13 ‘The mill of the Bolsheviks’ *Tragic procession* p.44: *Bulletin of the Relief Fund*, no.5 March 1928 p.3 <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/9p8f3t>

14 Dennison p.88

15 Dennison p.104

16 ‘After thirteen years’ *Tragic procession* p.58: *Bulletin of the Relief Fund*, November-December 1930 p.1

17 ‘Conditions in Russia’ *Tragic procession* p.62: *Bulletin of the Relief Fund*, November-December 1930 p.5

18 See Viktor Savchenko, ‘The Anarchist Movement in Ukraine at the Height of the New Economic Policy (1924-25)’, in particular p.182.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21226/T2CK78>

Anarchist Solidarity

Anarchist Solidarity : An exchange between Lilly Sarnoff and Alexander Berkman

Lilly Sarnoff (1899-1981) was a Russian-born American anarchist. She is probably best known for her correspondence with imprisoned Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón between October 1920 and November 1922 (see ‘Prison Letters of Ricardo Flores Magón to Lilly Sarnoff’ at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859000005617>). ‘While he was imprisoned at Leavenworth, Flores Magón began a long correspondence with “Ellen White,” the pseudonym of Lilly Sarnoff, a young New York anarchist and member of the defence committee working for his release. Sarnoff, born in Russia in 1899, came to the United States in 1905 with fresh memories of the anti-Jewish pogroms she had witnessed. Joining the anarchist movement as a young girl, she was active in behalf of political prisoners and wrote poems and sketches for a number of American anarchist periodicals, including *The Road to Freedom* and *Man!* After Flores Magón’s death, she threw herself into the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti, corresponding with them and visiting them in prison, as she had done with Flores Magón. For many years she was a member of the Ferrer colony at Stelton, New Jersey, where she continued to reside, with her companion Louis G. Raymond, until her death in 1981. In 1971 she published a booklet of poems, the first of which tells of Flores Magón and his calvary in America, where “rebels are not wanted,” but “only those of small minds, crafty men, and ignorant.”’ [‘Ricardo Flores Magón in Prison’ in *Anarchist Portraits* by Paul Avrich p 211]

[Headed paper] The Anarchist Red Cross
Re-organized 1922 / Y. Fearer Sec’y-Treas / c.o. Freie
Arbeiter Stimme / 48 Canal Street, N.Y.C. / FOR
THE RELIEF OF ANARCHISTS IN PRISONS THE
WORLD OVER [end of letter heading]
37 Lee Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.
June 28, 1924.

Dear Comrade B.

I received your two letters with the Statement. I will try to send that 2nd Bulletin this week. I cannot now write of other various news, but there are a few vital things to be written so I’ll write them now without more ado.

First, most of the news you write here, are already know[n] to us. We not merely know – but are already actually in touch with them – such as “Annie”. [1] We had already sent her money when your letter came. To that comrade who is to visit Solevetsky [2] we also had already sent some money – only a smaller amount than to you. So it seems we are in touch with the same people you are...

Of course you know our stand – (this is in re: the

withdrawing of the Russian comrades from the Joint Committee). It has always been and is still against working jointly. That is the reason, as you well know, that we always stipulate when we send money, that it is to go solely for the Anarchists, so that the money should not go through the Joint Committee.

Anarchists and Social Rev. [3] cannot work together. That meeting for June 6th was never held. The Social Rev. were to have called it and didn’t – as they do but little work – and this thing fell through as many other things. The F. A. S. [4] wanted to go in to work with them on that meeting and they refused – and that shows too – their spirit of co-operation.

Now there is another important matter that it seems must be thrashed out well, before any other work can go on between you and us (A. R. C.) You know our work. You know that we are trying to raise money in all ways that we can and use it for the sole purpose of helping Anarchist prisoners. You know too that we are not one – or a few – but a group – a group, which could – with proper help and co-operation expand and grow so that other groups in different parts of the country could be formed and co-operate together with us. However, whether you realize it or not, and I don’t suppose you really do – (that in why we are explaining this) – you are really, instead of aiding us – hindering our work. This is how that happens. You send out letters to different people all over the country with YOUR NAME only – quite ignoring our (A. R. C.) existence – and ask for help. You being well known, people, send money to you (through the F. A. S.). Now if in those letters you spoke of us – that we were doing this work – with you – if you referred them to us, saying that we would send the money to you, since we are an organized body, working expressly for the purpose of helping the prisoners, a much different and better result would be. Now people send in money direct to you – and if they think of the Red Cross at all, it may be perhaps to wonder what we do – since you are collecting money for that purpose. I’ve tried to make this as clear as I could, and I believe you understand. If the R. C and you are to continue to co-operate we must do this on a co-operating basis from BOTH sides – that you must recognize us – publicly – in your letters, appeals, etc. as well as merely to receive money from us to send to people, many of whom we are already in touch with.

I am trying not to make the matter seem worse than it is. This is how I have been authorised to write by the group, and as I see it. It is not quite right that while we are trying in all ways to collect money, that you send in appeals and letters in your own name, as if we had no existence at all. If I could read Jewish [ie Yiddish] – I would cut out the clippings of the F.A.S. for you – to see how bad that is – A. R. C. announcing their regular meetings etc. – and money being sent direct to you printed in the same other

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another page. Perhaps some comrades will send these clippings to you – or I believe you must have that paper yourself – and can look it over.

Now please consider this thoroughly, Comrade B. – What you think and how you wish to act. We shall wait for your reply to consider what next steps to take. Of course if, comradely, you wished to cooperate with us we believe that both the Red Cross and the ‘treasury’ holding the money to go for our imprisoned comrades would improve greatly. But we can work it out more fully later. Now, we will wait to hear your reply to this.

Fraternally,
Lillie Sarnoff

From Alexander Berkman Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Folder 8 (pages 65-66)
<http://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00040.8?locatt=view:pdf>

Notes

1, Annie: possibly Anya Levin. ‘Anya,’ like ‘Annie,’ is a diminutive of Anna or Anne. Anya Levin was arrested in Warsaw in February 1924 as she got off the train with a suitcase full of anarchist literature. She was sentenced to a substantial jail term in Poland.

2, Russian prison islands in the White Sea

3, Socialist Revolutionaries

4, Fraye Arbeter Shtime [or Freie Arbeiter Stimme], New York Yiddish-language anarchist paper

[Berkman’s reply]
Berlin, July 22, 1924

Dear Comrade Sarnoff:

Your letter of June 28 (written by you in the name of your Group) and copies of the Bulletin #2 received. This reply is to you as well as to the comrades of the Red Cross.

You know my position in regard to aid of the revolutionists imprisoned in Russia. As I said in the Statement recently issued by myself and Mratchny,[4] I do NOT consider aid to imprisoned revolutionists in the light of political work. It is not necessary here to repeat all that I said in the Statement, a copy of which I sent you.

To me, in this connection, supplying bread to a Maria Spiridonova (who is a Left S.R.)[5] is just as imperative as to aid A. Baron, (who is an Anarchist). [6] It is not a question of the political views of the prisoners. It is enough for me that they are sincere revolutionists.

Concerning your remark that we cannot work with Left S.R.s, I may tell you that we – at least I – could also not work together with many of the ANARCHISTS who are in the prisons of the

Bolsheviki. Yet I am willing to help them, as prisoners. Among the Anarchists in prison are many Individualists, Stirnerians, Universalists, Gordinists (who are worse than crazy) etc., etc.[7] Some among them pure cranks who did us more harm than good in the Revolution. Yet even YOU send help to ALL Anarchists, not asking what their particular views and opinions are. Some of these “Anarchists” cannot even be considered as Anarchists in OUR sense, yet we are willing to help ALL of them. I can assure you that as a revolutionist I felt nearer to Spirdionova, Kamkov, or Trutovsky[8] (I know them all personally and spent many days with them in Moscow) than to some of these Individualists and Stirnerians whom you are willing – and justly – to regard as Anarchists. In short, I would help Sophia Perovskaya and Zheliabov in prison, the same as I would help Baron or Maier-Rubinichik.[9] (If you really wanted to carry your view out logically, you should aid ONLY Anarchists-Communists in prison, for the Universalists, for instance, are as far from us as the Left S.R.s and perhaps even further in point of ideas).

As a matter of fact, the Anarchists in the prisons of Russia SHARE the things they receive with the Left SRs, and the latter do the same. Among revolutionists in prison political distinctions are abolished so far as food etc. is concerned. You will therefore realise how stupid it is of that fellow in the N. Y. Izvestia who asked me whether I would also “work with Denikin and Wrangel to aid their prisoners”. We are speaking of revolutionists in prison, not of counter-revolutionists. To me the Left SRs ARE revolutionists, even if I disagree with their political views.

Well, you are at liberty to have your own opinion on the matter. That is why I call myself an Anarchist, leaving others free to act and think as they believe best. But at the same time I claim the right for myself to act as I think proper under given circumstances.

Now, you surprise me when you speak of cooperation. I have not noticed any on your part. Two years ago, when I started to publish my pamphlets on Russia, which I considered important to spread the truth about the Bolsheviki, I appealed to you and you – the Group – promised to cooperate. I have never heard another word from you or the Group about it. It was the lack of cooperation in that work that forced me to suspend the series which was to consist of ten or twelve different pamphlets.

As to the money you sent, I merely served for you as a medium through which you forwarded funds to Russia. The cooperation was on MY side.

You speak of letters that I send out in MY OWN NAME to get help for Russia. I claim the right to do so, of course. But as a matter of fact, all such work is done by the Joint Committee and in its name. It is only occasionally, to some personal friend (whom I can reach better than the Committee) that I send a

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personal letter. Such cases are very rare, because all that I did long ago, when I stood alone in this work, immediately after I left Russia. Already in Riga I sent out the first appeal, almost 5 years ago. And that also was NOT in my own name, but was signed by Shapiro and E.G.[10] as well as by myself.

I know that some people and groups and money directly here instead of to you. For instance, Volin[11] and his Group often receive funds for Russia. Some are also received by the Joint Committee, also by Kater and often also by R.Rocker.[12] Sometimes also funds are sent directly to me. For instance an Italian Group of Chicago sent some recently. Also I recently received funds from the Freie Arb. Stimme, (for Russia) which the Stimme received from some St. Louis comrades, whom I even don't know. Nor do I know the Italian Group in Chicago, etc. In other words, people send funds AS THEY PLEASE. Most of those people and groups probably don't even know of your existence, or some of them may prefer to send funds to others, not to you. Surely that is not my fault.

I personally am indifferent as to where and how people send help to Russia. I am only interested in seeing that our prisoners should receive aid. HOW and BY WHOM is just the same, just so that they get it.

This is about all there it to be said on the subject. I have explained my position to you, and I hope that you clearly understand it.

Fraternally,
A.B.

Alexander Berkman Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Folder 8 (pages 67)
<http://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00040.8?locatt=view:pdf>

Notes

4, Mark Mratchny (1892-1975), exiled Russian anarchist involved in the prisoner solidarity efforts. See the interview with him in Paul Avrich's *Anarchist Voices*.

5, Maria Spiridonova (1884-1941), one of the most important figures in the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party. She is discussed in Emma Goldman's 'Heroic women of the Russian Revolution'
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/3xsk7w>

6, Aron Baron (1891-1937), anarchist, returned to Russia from exile in the United States in mid-1917. Imprisoned and exiled from 1920 until his execution in 1937. A biography of him by Nick Heath is at
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2fr01d>

7, Individualists, Stirnerians, Universalists, Gordinists. For more on the various stands see Paul Avrich's *The Russian Anarchists*

8, Boris Kamkov (1885-1938) was a leader of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, and took part in

the first Soviet government. After 1918 he was frequently imprisoned and was shot in 1938.

Vladimir Trutovsky (1889-1937) was an organizer of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party in 1917, belonged to its central committee, and held a cabinet post in the first Soviet government in 1917-1918. He spent most of the 1920s-1930s in exile before being shot in 1937.

9, Sophia Perovskaya (1853-1881) and Andrei Ivanovich Zheliabov 1851-1881 were both members of the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will). Maier-Rubinichik: Yefim Borisovich Rubinchik-Meier (1892-1938), was a Russian anarcho-syndicalist.

10, Berkman Refers to Russian anarchists Alexander Schapiro (1882-1946) and Emma Goldman (1869-1940).

11, Volin (Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum, 1882-1945), Russian anarchist.

12, Fritz Kater (1861-1945) and Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958) were both German-born anarchists involved (from Berlin) in solidarity efforts with anarchists in Russia. A short biography of Kater by Nick Heath is at

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

Motor-cycle maintenance / Squatting from p9

and activities that people suggest at meetings and conferences, should not be seen as competing with each other, but as complements.

Chris Broad.

Notes

1 The lagging of consciousness *Anarchy Magazine* No.26 [1978] p7-11

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/95x7j5>

2 See 'Tis the worst economic crisis ... (or, What is to be done)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/kkwjq8> *Anarchy* (second series) no.23 p.5-7

From *Anarchy Magazine* No.26 [1978] p1-4

Book news/mini-reviews [continued]

Anarchists, Syndicalists, and the First World War by Vadim V. Damier, translated by Malcolm Archibald is out now from Black Cat Press. ISBN 9781926878171
<https://www.akpress.org/anarchists-syndicalists-and-the-first-world-war.html>

The Enigma of Hugh Holmes Gore: Bristol's Nineteenth Century Christian Socialist Solicitor Mike Richardson's full biography of this complex figure solves his disappearance (quite a feat, both the disappearance and the solving). It also looks at his defence work for the Walsall Anarchists. Bristol Radical History Group ISBN 9781911522010
https://akuk.com/index.php?a=product&product_id=7697

Not enough pages

Library News (March 2018)

We had a compliment on the ‘generosity of spirit’ of the last issue, asking ‘have you all dropped acid?’ No, comrade: books are mind-altering too!

The bookfair

The London Anarchist Bookfair in October has always been a landmark in the KSL year. We’re sad to report the Bookfair collective are not organising one in 2018. They say: ‘Our decision reflects an increasingly toxic atmosphere, which we do not want to concede to or facilitate.’ More details on the dispute can be found via

<http://www.anarchistbookfair.org.uk/>.

Of all the online comments, I felt closest to this one: ‘It is not that we are opposed to antagonism, it’s that we feel it’s important to pick our tactics and our targets well, and to treat other anarchists – few in number and with many shared experiences, ideas and enemies – with some degree of care and respect. This does not mean we all have to love each other and get along, but that we need to be very careful of the consequences of our actions on individuals who may have to contend with the many hazards of being a thorn in the side of state and capital – from burnout, trauma and state surveillance; to internal conflicts and who knows what personal life struggles.’ (signed by ‘Some anarchists’)

<https://325.nostate.net/2017/11/13/the-loneliness-of-the-crowd-another-reflection-on-the-events-at-this-years-london-anarchist-bookfair-uk/>)

This issue

As a consequence, I read a lot of papers and pamphlets, including ones I’d not looked at for years. Some of the most interesting extracts and articles appear in this issue of the bulletin. Louise Michel wants everyone to ‘take part in the banquet of life’ – a sentiment Albert Meltzer echoed in 1981. We should think about it: what are the good things in life? That leads on to the subjects of class, tactics, and how we deal with our disagreements.

I disagree with parts of these articles myself: industrial jobs just ‘disappeared’, did they, in the early eighties? Don’t think I’m suggesting our forerunners had all the answers. Don’t think being an anarchist makes anyone mistake-proof, let alone perfect. Reading Lilly Sarnoff’s complaints to Alexander Berkman, I recognised that anger, that stressed ‘why don’t you see it like I do?’

Finally, I couldn’t resist squeezing in Oscar Swede’s tribute to Tom Keell: ‘what good did all the talking do? Well, it kept the torch alive and has handed it on.’ Important job, that.

New articles on the KSL site

Interesting articles that didn’t make this issue: Anarcho-Syndicalism: History and Action [Review] by Jack McArdle
<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/j0zqvn>

On the Trail of the Anarchist Movement in East Germany by David Bernardini

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/866v84>

Anarchism in East Germany (1945-1955) by Jean

Barrué <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/mgqq4b>

The Anarchist Press in Germany (1948)

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/3ffcmz>

Their Socialism and Ours by Louis Mercier Vega

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/n8pmjh>

Averting Sclerosis by Louis Mercier Vega

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/4b8hzj>

The First English Anarchist? [Ambrose Cuddon] by Christopher Draper

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/d255kp>

Forgotten Women [Mujeres Libres video tour 1987]

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/kh19sx>

Join the Professionals: The army of the unemployed

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2fr08m>

Interesting things elsewhere

Kate Sharpley Library treasures: “Putting up interesting material from the library, one computer mess-up at a time” <https://issuu.com/barry08>

The Freedom Press Newspaper Archive

<https://freedomnews.org.uk/archive/>

Book news/mini-reviews [March 2018]

Philip Ruff’s *A Towering Flame: The Life & Times of Peter the Painter* is out now in English (from Dienas Grāmata who published the Latvian edition). 350 pages plus photo section. See

<https://www.janisroze.lv/en/gramatas/dailiteratura/memuarliteratura-biografiski-apraksti/towering-flame-a-the-life-times-of-peter-the-painter.html> and

<https://www.valtersunrapa.lv/en-e-shop/gramata/49887/towering-flame>

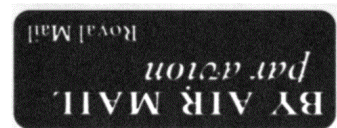
The Red Flag of Anarchy: A History of Socialism & Anarchism in Sheffield 1874-1900 by Andy Lee

A wonderful account of Sheffield’s radical history (and of digging it out: go to research in Amsterdam and they want your anti-poll tax T-shirt for the collection!) David Nicoll features, as you’d expect. Hear him lament his inability to learn Yorkshire:

‘And when I try to talk the language of the country, when I say, “reet owd lad. How’s owd lass”, they laugh at me as if I was a Frenchman trying to talk English and say “Get out you blooming Cockney” [p157]. If nineteenth century anarchists seem so far away with their bicycle outings and singing revolutionary songs, does this not ring a bell? ‘We then proceeded to the station and liberally posted it with little notices, such as “Anarchy no Master”, “Revolution not Reform”, “Read *Commonweal*”.’

[p141, in 1893] Get a copy!
[https://akuk.com/index.php?](https://akuk.com/index.php?a=product&product_id=7809)

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