

Question and answer on Anarchism [Anti-Imperialism]

Q. What do you understand by anti-imperialism?

A. This is a word that is undergoing a sea-change. When Imperialism was understood as powerful Nation-States building up by colonial expansion, the meaning of *anti*-imperialism was clear. Its support came from Anarchists and Nationalists (of small oppressed nations). Socialists were divided: many, following Marx, thought that the industrial nations were 'progressive' and they supported colonial expansion especially in America and Germany though regarding Russian expansion as reactionary since Tsarist Russia was 'barbaric'. Rural life was to them 'idiotic'. Other Socialists, with a natural regard for colonial or nationally oppressed countries, or for Socialist Parties existing there, were inevitably anti-imperialist.

Anarchists worked alongside anti-Imperialists for instance in struggles against the French, Belgian and British empires. When Tsardom was overthrown and Russia became the Marxist homeland, Communist Parties moved in on the anti-Imperialist struggle. The Leninists cited nations like Finland, whose Socialists had become anti-Imperialists, and during Tsardom been accepted by Lenin, to show that Marxists were anti-Imperialists too, guaranteed by Lenin himself, though Finnish nationalism had since decayed into fascism.

America was as regarded as democratic and anti-imperialist by Marxists; indeed the supreme example of progressive capitalism. After World War I the American capitalists went into a panic over Russia and radicalism (perhaps it was really American workers they were frightened of) and Americanism became the symbol of anti-Communism. The US backwoods Christians set the tone for anti-communism, but America became wooed once more as the great democratic power when it suited the interests of the Soviet Union to have a counterbalance against revived German Imperialism.

In the years of the Popular Front anti-Imperialism became a dirty word among the Left. With the nationalists (of small nations) and a few left socialist groupings (like the ILP in this country) Anarchists stood by the colonial struggle, though as their numbers had been reduced by the inter-war decline in confidence of workers, this was mostly individual actionism. Nevertheless, as a by-product of years of

agitation, the circumstances of World War II brought overwhelming victory to anti-Imperialism. Sooner or later every vestige of empire was swept away which was as much as anyone expected of anti-imperialism.

Anarchists had always gloomily predicted that when the Nationalists took over they would speedily prove as oppressive as the former States, and so it was. Most notoriously in South Africa where the end of British imperialism meant domination by the ruling white tribe, most ironically in India where mystic pacifism became a militarism power by genocide; most pathetically in Nigeria where people who had been libertarians in adversity became authoritarians in triumph.

Today the empires that seemed so great lost all their influence during the war. Those succeeded to empire were the Nation-States never described as 'imperialists' and which do not give their emperors crowned eagles – America and the Soviet Union. The new phrases Soviet Imperialism, American Imperialism, would have sounded strangely once, though they were always justified. If all this is understood, then we are anti-imperialists in the same way as ever.

We find however that this all this is not always understood even among some Anarchists (especially in Germany). Since the term 'anti-imperialism' has become a weasel word in the Left, and a synonym for anti-Americanism, it glosses over the crimes of the Russian Empire (the wheel has come full circle). Whenever we see the word 'anti-imperialism' nowadays we sniff at it carefully before opening the package, not as one would for explosives, but to see if the milk has gone sour.

Black Flag no. 170 (11/5/1987) Anonymous but we believe written by Albert Meltzer. ■

Library update (May 2022)

We hope you enjoy this issue, and that you think it's better late than never. We hope you enjoyed the online *NOT the Bulletins* we did. Not sure when 'normal service' will resume. We're doing the best that we can!

Here are some recent articles from the KSL website that we didn't have room for here. As you might expect, other people have been busy digging away at anarchist history too.

[pto]

Inside: Anarchist lives... and banners

[cont.]

Anarchists in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union

The Kiev Lukyanovskaya Convict Prison by Olga Taratuta. An account from 1916 of the execution of three of her comrades for the 1905 bomb attack on the Café Libman in Odessa. Taratuta herself was sentenced by a military court to 17 years of hard labour (katorga).

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/wh72t2>

Prison Notes by Mark Mratchny. A founder of Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine (Nabat), Mratchny was arrested by the Cheka at the Nabat congress in 1920. The article contains information on the many other anarchists arrested with him, in particular David Kogan. Mratchny recounts how he and a few others were released to attend Kropotkin's funeral. With appendices: Letter by Mark Mrachny to a Swedish Anarcho-syndicalist and The Fates of Ivan Akhtyrsky and David Kogan.

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

Futerfas Back in *KSL Bulletin* no. 86-87 (May 2016) we printed a photo of Anarchist Esperantist Natan Futerfas, and mentioned his appearance in Eugène Lanti's *Is socialism built in the Soviet Union?* Now it has been translated from Esperanto:

<https://reddebresbowl.blogspot.com/2022/03/is-socialism-being-built-in-soviet.html>

Britain

Glasgow Anarchist Anti-election manifesto 'The time has come to realise that politicians—the sly, cringing, dough-faced lice of politics can do nothing for you, but can do plenty to you :— Rations, Bevin Boys, War, Conscription, Bureaus, Parishes, Means Tests, E.W.O.'s, Labour Camps.'

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/73n7b3>

There's anger & rage inside the prisons [Ian Purdie and Jake Prescott Defence Group leaflet, 1971] 'We must not let them pick us off individually. Our friends who are brutalised, hassled or locked up must never be forgotten or left to rot.'

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/rxwg8m>

The Free-Winged Eagle Josie Giles writes about the anarchist newspaper from Orkney, and why it was 'not absurd but inevitable'

<https://campuspress.stir.ac.uk/scotmagsnet/2022/04/01/the-free-winged-eagle/>

E. Michaels Starting from a 1966 obituary in the Syndicalist Workers' Federation *Direct Action*, 'The Radical History of Hackney' examine his political activity (and also where he lived in Hackney).

<https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/2022/04/15/e-michaels-a-jewish-anarchist-in-stoke-newington/>

The Resistance to Franco

A Roll-call of Female Participants in the Guerrilla War against Franco: An Updated list of Women who took Part in the Post-civil War Direct Fight

against Francoism by Imanol. A tireless chronicler of the resistance to the Francoist state after 1939 provides an updated list of women who joined the guerilla struggle. It can, at times, make for grim reading but we now know their names and we can search out their stories.

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/44j2c7>

The weight of the stars We are excited to see the publication of this biography of Octavio Alberola. Octavio played a major role in the anarchist resistance to the Francoist state. A close comrade and friend of Stuart Christie it is wonderful to see Octavio's story finally told.

<https://www.akpress.org/the-weight-of-the-stars.html>

Stuart and Albert

'Without freedom there would be no equality and without equality no freedom, and without struggle there would be neither'— Stuart Christie. We hope copies of *A Life for Anarchy: A Stuart Christie Reader* will with AK in Edinburgh soon:

<https://www.akuk.com/>

The Stuart Christie Memorial Archive will open at the May Day Rooms in Fleet Street, London in June.

<https://twitter.com/ArchiveStuart>

We have recently put this article by Albert up, which gives an indication of his attitude at the start of the Second World War:

How will the war end? [1939] by Albert Meltzer.

'What the war aims of the Allies are no one yet knows: To destroy "Hitlerism?" Yes. Positively – what? There will be talk of "peace, democracy, international federal union," and what not, but these mean nothing. What do they actually aim at?'

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/gf1x7d>

Flags and Banners

In 2021 we were contacted by someone who had been trying to sell a banner of the Liverpool Anarchist Group. Nothing came of it, largely because looking after fabric is a different (and harder) thing than preserving books and papers. But we did get in touch with ex-LAG members, and this comment stayed with me:

'The flag was never created as a commodity to be sold. At the end of the day it's a piece of cloth with meaning only because of its association with an activist group. It's not a religious icon to be venerated.'

The last we heard, the banner was being offered to the People's History Museum in Manchester. Coincidentally, we saw that Chummy Fleming's Anarchy flag is preserved in the State Library of Victoria. See it (and a letter of his we've just bought) via <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/76hg8h>

Wishing you bread, freedom, health and peace. And something interesting to read!

KSL Collective, May 2022■

Bessie Kimmelman: fragments of an anarchist life

In 1916 and 1917 Kimmelman contributed to the Defense Fund for San Francisco Labor Prisoners (Thomas and Rena Mooney, Warren K. Billings, Israel Weinberg and Edward Nolan, accused of the Preparedness Day bombing on 22 July 1916). Her contribution at a San Francisco lecture by Emma Goldman was reported in *The Blast* (September 15, 1916). Contributions via Alexander Berkman were reported in the issues of January 19, 1917 (a subscription list) and March 15 (from New York).[1]

In 1927 Kimmelman sent money to the Relief Fund for Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists Imprisoned or Exiled in Russia.[2] In 1927 she was also closely involved in the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee in Cleveland. Her letters and telegrams to the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee in Boston can be seen online in their archive.[3]

Emma Goldman's reply to one of Kimmelman's letters suggests that she was also involved in protests in Boston: 'Your description of the confusion in Boston on the eve of the 10th of August is very vivid indeed, but it is no consolation to me that those who answered the call for pickets in behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti acted so helter-skelter, without any sense of the need of a preliminary organization.'[4]

Kimmelman continued her activity after the killing of Sacco and Vanzetti. 'The Cleveland Sacco and Vanzetti Defense Committee intends to dissolve as such. We shall again carry on our educational work in the anarchist spirit as we have done before our intensive campaign for the liberation of our two comrades; only with more zeal and energy. The public is more eager to study anarchism now than ever before.'[5]

In September 1927 as secretary of the International Committee for the Relief of Russian Political Prisoners she sent a letter about postcards the group had produced 'demanding the liberation of all Russian political prisoners for the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution'. 'We have conceived of this idea a long while ago, only we were too busy with the Sacco-Vanzetti case so we could do nothing in this direction until now.' [6]

In 1931 Kimmelman was again in touch with Berkman (from Los Angeles, where she was heavily involved in the Libertarian Group), telling him of the forthcoming Arestanten Ball (prison-themed solidarity fundraising event) on April 11, 1931.[7]

In May 1934 Kimmelman wrote from New York to Berkman asking for 'constructive valuable suggestions' for a conference to be held at the Ferrer Colony in Stelton (August 11-12, 1934) as part of 'a serious attempt to reorganize the anarchist movement on a workable basis'.[8]

In 1935 I.A. Herman from the Kropotkin Literary

Society of the Workmen' Circle, Los Angeles told Berkman that 'Bessie Kimmelman is in New York for the past two years [...] working in N.Y. taking care of poor children'.[9]

We know she asked Max Nettlau for a message to celebrate Tom Bell's 50 years in the anarchist movement.[10] No doubt more fragments of her life are waiting to be found!

Notes

1, See pages 161, 210 and 226 of the collection of *The Blast* published by AK Press

<https://www.akpress.org/blastcompletecollection.htm>

1. For more on the Defense Fund see *Emma Goldman: a documentary history of the American years. Volume three, Light and shadows, 1910-1916* (Stanford University Press)

<https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=21071>

2, See the accounts of the Paris section in their bulletin (number 3, June 1927 and number 4, November 1927), reprinted in *The Tragic Procession* (pages 37 and 41)

<https://www.akpress.org/thetragicprocession.html>

3, Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee (Collection of Distinction)

<https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/collections/commonwealth:tm70rf920>

4, Goldman to Kimmelman, December 29th 1927. (image 66 of)

<https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00520.109>

5, Bessie Kimmelman (Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, Cleveland) autograph letter signed to Joseph Moro, Cleveland, Ohio, September 1, 1927
<https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:k0698w57b>

6, See Bessie Kimmelman, 1927 Letter re postcards, calling for release of imprisoned revolutionaries in Russia <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/63xv1t>

7, See Kimmelman's letter of February 22, 1931 (starting at image 60 of)

<https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00040.43>

(Alexander Berkman papers, IISG, folder 43). The flier advertising the event is image 6 of

<https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00040.47>

(Alexander Berkman papers, IISG, folder 47).

8, See letter of May 27, 1934 and following call for conference (image 64 of)

<https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00040.43>

9, see letter from I.A. Herman, October 15, 1935 (image 9 onwards of)

<https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00040.44>

(Alexander Berkman papers, IISG, folder 44).

10, See letter of January 12, 1932 (image 2 of)

<https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH01001.706> (Max Nettlau papers, IISG, folder 706)

Update:

BESSIE GETS BETTER

Bessie Kimmelman, Commonwealth student, writes

that she is recovering from the operation she underwent in New York on February 19. Her plans for convalescence include several weeks in the country and mountains.

Bessie, a member of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, came to Commonwealth in 1924. She writes that her work at the College is only temporarily interrupted, for she "will return, a second Hercules, in September."

Commonwealth College Fortnightly, Vol. 2, No. 7, April 1, 1926 (bottom of front page)

From: Commonwealth College Fortnightly. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, November 2017.

<http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/p17212coll1/id/166/rec/1>

Another update

The online archive of the Fraye Arbeter Shtime (<https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/freiearb>) contains a report from Los Angeles: 'The death of our neighbor Betty Kimmelman has halted the activities of [the Libertarian Refugee Fund] for a little while.' (Issue of 1962/08/15) ■

The Makhnovshchina and Its Aftermath: Documents from the movement and its survivors [Book review]

Nestor Makhno, the Ukrainian anarchist gave his name to the Makhnovist movement or Makhnovshchina.[1] He describes their aims: 'They are fighting against State power in any way, shape, or form and for the freedom and independence of workers in pursuing the cause of the Revolution, especially in its Anarchistic tendencies – the expropriation for community use of all the tools of production and means of consumption and the safeguarding of these direct conquests of the toilers from encroachment by the State.' [p15] Even a quick glance at histories of the Russian Revolution and Civil War will show you that Makhno and the Makhnovshchina were well-known enough to attack. Archibald points out that in the early Soviet period books on the Makhnovist movement 'generally depicted the movement as *kulak*-based [ie wealthier peasants, KSL] and ultimately reactionary, characterized by banditry and antisemitism. [...] An unusually serious Soviet treatment of the Makhnovist movement was the book *The Makhnovshchina* by the Soviet agronomist Mikhail I. Kubanin [...] he was able to prove that their movement was neither antisemitic nor *kulak*-based. But [...] while it draws on archival documents difficult to access even today, [it] has more than its share of distortions of facts and

rigid application of Leninist doctrine.' [p3] Makhno's response to Kubanin is the longest piece collected here, and it is complemented by pieces by Galina Kuzmenko (Makhno's wife) and fellow Makhnovist Peter Rybin. Also included is the 'pamphlet war' that arose between Makhno and Voline in exile: Voline is accused of having behaved 'like a conservative accountant' [p169] while Makhno is accused of 'acts that are abnormal, indeed criminal.' [p174]

Archibald's selections, introductions and notes help the reader to understand these sources in context, not only showing what happened and suggesting why, examining the distortions made of Kuzmenko's diary but also disentangling errors about dates. Some serious digging has been done: see the unedited version of Trotsky's article on the Makhnovshchina discovered by Ukrainian historian V.F. Verstiuk 'The present moment is most propitious for us to liquidate the Makhnovshchina ... Based on political considerations, the surrender of Gulyai-Polye [to the Whites] is desirable for us.' [p70] It's also clear that, 100 years on, there are still sources waiting to appear: Voline's interrogation by the Red Army still in the archives and Kuzmenko's diary as printed here is the best available transcription, but a definitive edition is being prepared by Yuriy Kravets [p104].

That we get to hear from Kuzmenko is one of the best things about this collection. Archibald can correct Makhno's assertion that she was apolitical: 'She was known for her anarchist sympathies in Gulyai-Polye even before her marriage' [p38]. The final appendix is her 1973 account of first meeting Makhno. Also included, but more tragic, is her account of meeting her traumatised mother after the killing of her father [p73 onwards].

Black Cat Press have (again) added to what we know about the Makhnovist movement. Let the final word go to Makhno, from his response to Kubanin: 'We stuck to the course of the revolution, loyal to our purposes – the purposes of the oppressed and the exploited. We can be taken to task for stumbling. For having been too ruthless or too soft on our enemies. But at no point were we traitors, oppressing the toilers.' [p29]

Note

1, The Makhnovshchina can be translated as either the 'Makhno phenomenon' or 'time of Makhno'. See The meaning of Makhnovshchina by Malcolm Archibald <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/g79fdr>

The Makhnovshchina and Its Aftermath: Documents from the movement and its survivors

Nestor Makhno, Galina Kuzmenko, Peter Rybin, Vsevolod Voline; translated by Malcolm Archibald and Paul Sharkey; edited by Malcolm Archibald. Black Cat Press, 2021. ISBN 9781926878249. <http://www.blackcatpress.ca/Aftermath.html> ■

Alternatives to suicide

[In 1980 Cienfuegos Press published *Towards a citizens' militia: anarchist alternatives to NATO & the Warsaw Pact*. Various politicians complained. An earlier article in *Black Flag* declared 'to be attacked by these people is like having the Good House-keeping seal of approval.' (v.6, n.3, June 1980) Here Albert probes the motives behind their fear of the idea of popular self-defence and speculates on what they would have done if Hitler had successfully invaded Britain. Would they really kill themselves rather than collaborate?]

'Towards a Citizens' Militia' has stirred up a lively controversy: not since 1940 has the general subject been aired, and the climate has changed a lot since then. The furious reactions of the gang of would-be betrayers has already been commented on in *Black Flag*: it must always be remembered that times of military defeat may be times of setback in terms of nations as powers, but they are also times of opportunity in terms of politicians, and the seizing of initiative *from* politicians is something that they naturally regard with the greatest of abhorrence. It is no coincidence that excess of patriotism produces the most national traitors.

In France in 1940 it was not the fascists who had knocked heads in the streets (and had their heads knocked in, too) who came to power. Neither Petain nor Laval were fascists. Petain was the arch-patriot, respected by all nationalists (which in France meant nearly everyone); Laval was centre MP and an opportunist. Looking from the vantage point of history, we can see why Winston Churchill MP, Ian Sproat, and Labourite James Wilson did all in their power to have Cienfuegos Press banned, and stigmatised its productions as "books of terror". Though in theory these people are for the defence of the regime against foreign enemies, foreign conquest is something which they take into account in their personal plans for power. It is significant to note how, when asked what they would have done in the event of Hitler taking power in England in 1940, almost all British politicians (and every one on the right) said (a generation later) that they would have committed suicide, and presumably murdered all their families too.

Enoch Powell put it, "The key question is the king". If the king retained power, but the government moved to Canada, "we" could fight on. If the government had submitted, and the only alternative to foreign domination was illegal resistance, there was no alternative they could fairly state (a generation later) but suicide (and family murder). But it may well have been that they would have desired to live, or to spare their families, and the alternative then would have been collaboration, since illegal resistance was out for them. The present Churchill has underlined this well with his

denunciations of a citizens' militia, and distortion of self-defence as terrorism.

Mass Terror does not Terrorise?

Irrespective of the tactics and programme of such a citizens' militia (and there is a wide variation in peoples' ideas as to what they think of the tactics advocated in the manual: those with military experience viewing it as highly practical, those without military experience viewing it as quite naive and those with experience in Northern Ireland falling into the second category, about which more later), it cannot be denied that a citizens' militia of one sort or another is essential if one is not to fall into line with the super-powers whose tactics and programme are instant death.

It is a comment on those who speak of "books of terror" that they categorise this pamphlet as one of "terror", yet the alternatives – NATO or the Warsaw Pact – allow only for mass death and genocide of the entire population with only the outside "Afghan" possibility of capitulation or minor localised resistance.

An interesting comment was that made by a reviewer in 'Tribune' that those who opposed lining up with super-Powers in the pact with death had to consider citizens' militias as a viable alternative: but pointed out that it involved the acceptance of conscription for all. This is not valid. One must bear in mind that the only basis for a citizens' militia is *trust*. Any resistance to a super-power implies that it has *won*; and that resistance is therefore either *illegal* (the government having sold out) or technically legal but in practice illegal (the government having escaped and denied legal imprimatur to its successor); and for resistance to be effective it has to take place between people who can trust one another.

Volunteers

Conscription is the diametrical opposite of this. Resistance must be of those with the will to resist. Those who "have no stomach to the fight" are better out of it, as they will be in practice anyway. It is a mistake to think that resistance to a dictatorship (whether it seized power as the result of a military coup, or is imposed by foreign powers) can only be of the whole people. Never will the vast majority voluntarily move to resist tyranny at one go: there are too many temptations to postpone, too many excuses to think it might get better, one might get overlooked and too many and too vicious means of repression.

The left, on the whole, while talking about revolution, sees it as an open operation; if it can't be done perfectly legally (as, by coincidence, the Spanish revolution, since the fascists were in rebellion against the government) or in a position where nobody is more illegal than anyone else (as in Russia 1917), then at least let it be by general spontaneity so that it legalises itself automatically.

But things don't necessarily work out that way. The rearguard has to take action against the oppressors, and then the tyrants call it terrorism. It is because none of the issues are clear-cut in this way in Northern Ireland that the booklet viewed from such a viewpoint looks unrealistic. Most of the population is going about its daily business in the normal way – subject to annoying body checks in the centre of the city and exposure to indiscriminate bombing or shooting. What has all this talk about uprooting trees and dislodging cars to do with urban fighting? Nothing in this context.

In order to establish a dictatorship – either because a foreign enemy can only rule that way or because an internal group has made a coup – exceptional methods are needed. The population cannot go about its business in the normal way: if it were allowed to do so, it might by industrial action bring the whole society to a standstill and prevent the coup. What must be done by the dictators are spectacular actions, massacre being the most obvious. The Nazis did not fill up trains with Jews just out of malice: they did it to impress the rest of the population into subservience. The Spanish falangists – who were faced with the problem of wiping out social revolution – went to the factories and shot one in ten; or rounded people on the streets and for years filled the railways with prisoners – travelling from one jail to another – for precisely the same reason: to impress the population and dominate. Such terror tactics have to be countered by more spectacular actions than can be, or need to be seen, in anything other than a dictatorship. Occupation over the years, even accompanied by police repression, does not amount to a dictatorship: nor does it evoke the same responses which amount to those of war.

This is why those with Army training can recognise elements of basic survival skills in the book, and those with experience of Ireland find themselves, on this issue, as sceptical as those who have no military experience at all.

Who should take up arms?

Finally, it should be recognised that the basic right of self-defence is implicit in a democracy: this was recognised in America from the beginning to distinguish itself from the monarchical principle that only the privileged could bear arms. However, in most modern capitalistic states, and in all feudal states up to the present, there is an acceptance of the monarchical principle, caused by an understandable fear that if the people have arms, they will not tolerate the government.

The left finds itself confuted with its own logic on Israel, when it tries to say it is a fascist state: it is basically a democratic state which can allow its citizens to have free access to arms and to take the arms for a conscript army home with them. Fascism,

as in fascist Spain, is frightened to let even conscript soldiers learn too much and relies on an “old guard”, select-SS, Praetorian guard or the like. Of course, saying that a country is democratic is not to say that it lacks aggression against others, or is a free society, least of all that it lacks police repression: all these things exist in Israel as in other democracies. What distinguishes a democracy from a dictatorship so much is not *freedom* – that is only achieved by a libertarian society – but voluntary acquiescence. Fascist countries cannot allow people to take arms home with them. South Africa can allow it to its white population only; like Israel its democracy is one-sided. Britain retains the monarchical principle against the bearing of arms but at a pinch, in 1940, could allow home defence if it came to it. (Of course it never did).

Does Revolution need arms?

Social Revolutionary change is to do with a change in the industrial relationships: it means an alteration in the way the property system works, and an anarchist revolution means an abandonment of the idea of enshrined property rights. Industrial relationships can only be altered by people who are concerned with them. It is a matter of occupying the places of work, of changes in the way society is run, of an alteration in the way power is directed from above so that it is levelled and control comes from below. Libertarian social revolutionary change means a widening of conceptions so that such attitudes spread to all social relationships and prevent authoritarian tendencies developing in the way people relate to one another.

This has nothing to do with taking up the gun and nothing to do with sabotage or “violence”, notwithstanding the media-induced image. Such resistance is needed not in order that a libertarian social revolution would take place but to prevent authoritarians from outside (or inside) the country, from destroying the revolution or taking it over.

As conventional war means mass murder, let the discussion on Citizens' Militias continue!

A.M. [Albert Meltzer]

POSTSCRIPT

As a postscript to the saga of ‘Towards a Citizens' Militia’ (now in its second edition), We had a report from a comrade travelling the bookshops in Scotland and getting a somewhat frosty reception. In the Hope Street, Glasgow, bookshop of the Workers Revolutionary Party he was told flatly that they didn't want to have anything to do with Cienfuegos titles because “the police were out to get Cienfuegos and if I didn't realise that I was a fool” and that “stocking the titles would establish a pretext for a raid on the bookshop”.

This attitude to threats is reminiscent of that adopted by some minority ethnic groups who in doing so yield their enemies a position of power

which they have not yet legally acquired. All that has happened with Cienfuegos press titles is that certain reactionary MPs have demanded that this book be banned and the press closed down. Immediately a civil liberties lawyer (an NCCL official) advised PDC to stop distributing the book! Yet these are the people they call on us to oppose. However, when the same book was advertised – with quotations from these self-same MPs – numerous orders were received, from all over the country and elsewhere, from shop stewards and others, all saying to the same effect: “If these people are against it, I’m for it”. Yet the so-called “vanguard parties” are afraid to cater for their demand – an obvious lesson. It may be mentioned that as regards “closing down” the press or banning it, notwithstanding the media, no legal machinery for this exists. A publisher can – rightly or wrongly, successfully or unsuccessfully – be prosecuted for publishing a book. The penalties do not include “closing down” the press. The people who are calling for this are too stupid to know their own stupid business.

Black Flag v.6, n6, January 1981 ■

Ken Williams [a tribute from Hastings]

It’s difficult to know where to begin with Ken. The character me and my friends knew was probably semi-unrecognisable from the anarcho-syndicalist legend of 1980s London, although we knew he was in there. I met him around 2007, as I was finishing school, having fallen into a new group of friends with his son and daughter. They warned me he would be hard to communicate with or understand when I first went to their house – I already knew about both his heroin addiction and his past in politics. They were right – he was friendly, but came across hyper and half-mad. For all the world it looked much more like speed than heroin to me – the drug seemed to affect him differently. I disappeared upstairs and didn’t think too much about him, beyond that he seemed nice, and that his manner was pretty much exactly what I’d been told to expect.

Over time I had bits of conversation with him – he’d be singing a song around the house that I recognised and we’d talk a bit about it. Eventually, by chance, we’d catch each other in a moment where he was calm. At that time I was waking up on Saturday mornings to sell trotskyst newspapers. I remember him slumped on the sofa, seemingly asleep, and suddenly saying to me “You’re a hero”.

“What?” I said.

“You’re selling the wrong papers”, he grinned. “But you’re a hero”.

He had more and more moments where he was calm as time went by. Later on I moved in with them, and by that point it was days at a time he’d be lucid

and talkative. He started to tell me bits and pieces of history, and I listened. He argued with me about the Bolsheviks, and I argued back, armed with inferior knowledge and teenage righteousness. Sometimes we’d get onto neutral historical ground, and from there we’d roam all over the place – the conversations were hours long, now, and about everything – linguistics, Kierkegaard, the First International, Behaviourism, Makhno, orthodox Jewish life under the Tsars, Nina Simone, punk. He knew so much. There was a rhythmic, grounding quality to him as we lived the crazed lives that late-teens and early-20s people tend to – whatever madness you’d experienced. He’d be sitting on his sofa, coffee and cigarette in hand, reading from dawn until the small hours. For months I remember him sitting stubbornly with Hegel, a dictionary of philosophy on the arm of the sofa, grinding his way through, cheerily parsing the meaning sentence by sentence. I’ve met a lot of clever people in my life, but Ken left everyone in the shade.

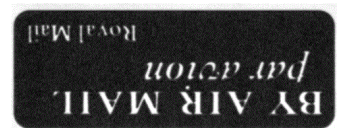
He talked wistfully about the library he used to have – everything had been sold during the dog days of addiction. By this time I was quietly in awe of Ken, and this was one thing I could actually help him with, so I jumped at the chance. We started rebuilding his collection. He’d name a title, I’d search the net until we found a second hand copy for pennies, and we’d get it in the post. The stream of books never stopped from there – eventually he had a much, much bigger collection than when he started. On a day with nothing to do, I’d often ask him for a recommendation, and we’d just sit there reading next to each other, and discussing, for hours.

We got him partially reconnected with old acquaintances like Stuart Christie, and he started to take part in the local solfed [Solidarity Federation]. More of us moved in – the house ended up stuffed with young waifs and strays of Hastings, and Ken didn’t bat an eye. He talked to us about more than politics and history – about music, poetry, about what London had been like, about legendary squats and parties. We’d sit with him on Sunday afternoons to watch crap films, cackling as he eviscerated the plot holes. Every now and again we spoke about our lives. He had a selflessness that was so strong it bordered on the hilarious – allowing hordes of us to move in and looking out for us, getting hot sausage rolls for his dog, Sergei and nothing for himself, offering anything he had without a thought.

Ken was the cleverest, kindest man I’ve ever met. The memory me and my friends have of him is pure gold, and it’ll never leave us.

Alex Price

[There are more tributes and photos of Ken at <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/pvmfhn.>] ■



If undelivered please return to:
Kate Sharpley Library
BM Hurricane
London WC1N 3XX
England

KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library
ISSN 1475-0309

Subscription rates for (4 issues) are:

Individuals UK: £5 Europe/RoW: 15euro
 USA: \$10 Americas/RoW \$20

Institutions £20
Friend (bulletin and all other publications) £10 a month / \$20 a month

[No, things are not back to normal.
We are doing the best we can.]

The Kate Sharpley Library relies on financial and material donations: have you made one recently?

Sign up to our e-newsletter at
<http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/doc/subscribing>

- If this box is ticked,
Please help us out
by signing up
to our e-newsletter

- Your subscription expires with this issue
- Your subscription is now overdue
- This is your final issue

A free copy is an invitation to subscribe...