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Behind the Slogans: “National Independence”

Hope has been said to be a good breakfast but a poor supper. So is the struggle for national independence. Since most oppressor nations force on subject nations the loss of political and social freedom as well as national freedom, which means little by itself, the original struggle for national freedom becomes linked with the struggle for political and social freedom, and is therefore progressive and even revolutionary. Scotland, when she lost her national freedom, did not become politically unfree as separate from England, and so Scottish nationalism has never become a reality, though the demand for social freedom persists there as in every capitalist country. India, when she became part of a foreign empire, lost any chances of political freedom, and the demand for political and social freedom is linked up in a progressive movement.

Above all we see this illustrated in the struggles of the European countries against imperialism in the nineteenth century. Hungary, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Macedonia, Armenia, Albania, Poland... The sympathy for these subjugated nationals was intense in the Western world, and in spite of many bloody struggles and suppressions liberal republicanism did its best to achieve national independence from the ruling powers of Europe, – Russian, Austrian and Turkish.

Each of these Empires was destroyed – the Czarist, the Habsburg, and the Ottoman. Excepting Macedonia and Armenia, each of the oppressed nations of Europe became free in a national sense following the great split-up that followed the first world-war. National independence, the goal of the nineteenth century, became a snare and a delusion. Poland, that had suffered under three despotisms (Austrian, Prussian and Russian) simultaneously, suffered the ignominy of seeing a fourth despotism arise, that of the native Polish landlords. All the blood that had flowed to make Hungary free flowed again beneath its rising fascist dictatorship. The last of the independent nations to retain forms of liberal democracy were Finland and Czechoslovakia; the latter to lose it in the Munich share-out, and the former to suffer beneath the two-pronged drive of Germany and Russia in this war.

National independence cannot be said to have been a boon to the suppressed nations of Europe, now once again suppressed beneath newest imperialism. Since it

retains to-day the Western sympathy it enjoyed in the last century, let us see how genuine much of that sympathy is.

The sympathies of the British Government inclined of course to the balance of power. It supported Italian freedom when the Austrian oppressor was a rival. Under Disraeli and the Tories it supported Turkish Imperialism, though Gladstone denounced its massacres and its possible rivalry to the British Empire. It attacked Austrian Imperialism always, and when Russia became a rival and a menace to the Indian Empire, Russian Imperialism too. That British ruling-class “sympathy for national independence” was hypocritical was shown in the answer by foreign diplomats: “What about your Irish?” At that time, the Irish question was at least as burning as, say, the Finnish. Another ironical – and true – answer came from Nasir Pasha, general of the Sultan, who replied to hostile English critics that he was going to do what the British had just done in the Transvaal (Boer War), before he massacred the Albanians, Bulgarians and Macedonians, after the Monastir rising.

Whenever British policy inclined to a nation, that nation was helped; when it inclined to its ruler, that nation was forgotten. Such was the “balance of power”. Ruling class sentiment always inclines to its own interests. To-day, Germany attacks British Imperialism for its colonial policy – not because her colonial policy is any different; British Imperialism attacks German occupation, not because she was not its tutor; they are neither of them concerned with national independence *as such* but only as a means of attacking their rivals.

The Allies did not pick on Poland’s cause because they supported Poland. but because (admittedly) at some time they had to stop Hitler Imperialism before it directly attacked British Imperialism. Wars are not caused through the defence of national independence, or through any “St. George and the Dragon” motive, but through economic causes and for purposes of aggrandisement or retention of aggrandisement. Let us therefore, make an end to all the nonsense current that the major Powers are moved by feelings of sympathy towards the minor Powers.

Also, let us finish with the nonsense that certain nations are responsible for wars, insofar as they cause wars between the major nations [*continues over*]

Argentina Special: Severino Di Giovanni, Paulo Scarfó, Virgilia D’Andrea

Anarchism & Violence:

Severino Di Giovanni

By Osvaldo Bayer. Introduction by Jean Weir and Alfredo Bonnano. Elephant Editions. 1986.

Elephant Editions have produced a number of interesting books recently. This is the latest of them.

Severino Di Giovanni was an Italian anarchist. Like many others he was obliged to flee Mussolini's Italy, settling in the large Italian community in Argentina. There he engaged himself, first in anti-fascist activity, then stimulated by the murder of Sacco & Vanzetti he began to "light the fuse on the dynamite of vengeance". From May 1926 to his death by firing squad on February 1st 1931 he carried on a campaign of bombings and anarchist propaganda, funded at the end by bank robberies. This included not merely publishing a paper *Culmine* while on the run from the police, but also establishing a print shop to publish anarchist classics, producing the first volume of a collected Elisee Reclus before his death.

Di Giovanni is a figure of interest to anyone who's dreamed of taking their desire to strike back for

reality. Moreover he is almost entirely unknown to English-speaking revolutionaries. This book is a translation of what is supposed to be the best book about Di Giovanni and gives a very interesting account of his activities.

Sadly while this may be the best book about Di Giovanni it's not quite the book one might have wished for. Bayer, the author, is neither an anarchist nor a revolutionary. Indeed not to mince words, he's obviously a bleeding heart middle class ratbag. Originally commissioned to research Di Giovanni, he was as he states unenthusiastic. To judge by the book he wrote, he only became so when he discovered, to his evident astonishment that Di Giovanni had a political rationale for his actions. The book is another addition to the "anarchism as a history of larger than life heroic individuals" school.

Priding himself on his historical diligence, Bayer has clearly done no more than read a lot of documents and (perhaps) talk to some of Di Giovanni's contemporaries. Some of the results of this compilation are indeed fascinating. His access to police files for example reveals how far the group around Di Giovanni was penetrated by informers. Nevertheless writing history is about more than getting your facts right (whatever the likes of N. Walter might assert). It's also about attempting to see those facts and events in the context of the society they occurred in. Most important of all it is not done with any bourgeois pretence at a-historical objectivity, but in order to illuminate the present. Bayer fails abjectly on this score. First of all he presumes his (Argentinean) readership know something of Argentinean history, which is obviously not the case for revolutionaries in Britain. Elephant Editions provide some background notes which help but can only go so far. As understandable is Bayer's failure to write from a revolutionary perspective since he isn't one. Where his cut-rate scholasticism reveals itself is in how far he is tied to what he has been able to copy out in the library. Where there is little documentation on an event he makes little attempt to fill out background himself. By contrast Di Giovanni's capture and execution which obviously filled the papers at the time take up a wholly disproportionate amount of the book. Bayer's only efforts at interpretation concern whether or not Di Giovanni was 'responsible' or not for a particular action. His real sympathies show themselves in the amount of space he devotes to the obscure army officer appointed to 'defend' Di Giovanni at his trial, who 'dared' to make a liberal plea for 'humanity', which is reprinted in full. (Di Giovanni was 'dumbfounded' by this according to Bayer. Doubtless the hypocrisy of bourgeois justice struck him as forcibly as it will revolutionary readers of this gem today.)

"National Independence"

[From front page] e.g., Alsace-Lorraine, the Balkan countries, etc. The peoples of those countries can, when unaggravated by senseless national distinctions and deliberate attempts to foster separatism between peoples, live together peacefully. Interests not their own cause trouble between them. Hostile prejudices and inculcated teachings foster dissension, but taking away power politics one takes away those prejudices and teachings. In the future there must be no more of this petty disruption that has so long served a privileged few, but a united Europe and a united world.

Certainly we must take up the struggle for national independence when it becomes a struggle against an imperialism. But that struggle for national independence must be waged by the workers and peasants, and we must dissociate ourselves with any bourgeois leaders – for instance, the exiled governments in London, the bourgeois leaders of the Indian Congress etc. – and associate ourselves instead with the masses who alone carry out that struggle. And independence must not be a goal, but a lever to oust imperialism; and when that imperialism is ousted we aim not for an independent bourgeois government, but a revolutionary movement that is going to struggle with other revolutionary movements in other countries for a FREE WORLD.

AM [Albert Meltzer]

War Commentary Vol 4 No 3, December 1942

DI GIOVANNI REVIEW

Lastly, Bayer's book is atrociously written. It should be seen as the equivalent of 'true crime' studies like Donald Rumbelow's on the 'Houndsditch Murders'.

That said it's undoubtedly better than no book at all and Elephant Editions are to be congratulated on doing their best with an unsympathetic text. The political inadequacies are discussed in an introduction, and a great deal of trouble has been taken to remove obvious howlers and render the text as clear English as is feasible while remaining faithful to the original. Personally I'd have cut out some of Bayer's more slimily moralistic platitudes. On the other hand it does warn you of how much, and where, you should read between the lines. Revolutionaries get a great deal of practice in this, in reading about revolutionary history, and given these reservations the book is a very interesting one.

It's unfortunately that the book's deficiencies make it less useful than it might be. In the introduction the publishers suggest that it provides the materials for reflection on the question of violent action by the oppressed as opposed to terrorism. It does indeed provide food for thought, however it breaks down irritatingly at the point where this becomes most important. Di Giovanni's activities were initially directed at the issues of concern to the exiled Italian anarchist community, but soon broadened their scope in response to the movements of class struggle in Argentina. Di Giovanni was an anti-fascist but equally a resolute opponent of any idea of a popular front with liberalism or leftism (including a fair part of his so-called anarchist comrades). When a military coup overthrew the Radical government in power, Di Giovanni had no illusions about democracy being something to fight for. Nevertheless when an exiled Radical minister issued a leaflet threatening a terrorist campaign if the Generals didn't resign power by a certain date, the group around Di Giovanni surprisingly decided to make this empty threat a reality. They "decided to go into action with dynamite attacks in order to create a widespread climate of despair and disquiet and to rock those in government." These are Bayer's words and as elsewhere in the book he hints, without supplying evidence, at 'inside' information. On the day in question Di Giovanni's group exploded three bombs, two in railway stations and one in a street resulting in a number of deaths and injuries. That is all Bayer tells us about this significant political decision and its consequences, making any judgement of it from a revolutionary perspective all but impossible.

Nevertheless the book is fascinating and well worth reading if only for its account of Di Giovanni's relations with his 'fellow' anarchists. The anarchist paper *La Protesta* conducted an astonishing campaign

of vilification – effectively to the point of naming him as the author of the activities criticised. (One of its editors was Diego Abad de Santillan well on the path that would lead him to a ministership in the 'revolutionary' government during the civil war in Spain. His attacks on anarcho-banditry have to be seen to be believed). Di Giovanni's response to this, having failed to persuade them to desist, was to shoot one of its editors. In light of events in Spain it's a pity he didn't shoot more!

This is another point where anarchist revolutionaries today might learn from Di Giovanni's example. Particularly as *Freedom, La Protesta's* equivalent in Britain defies the impossible by getting worse each issue. Shooting its editors would be a bit excessive. Given the relative political significance and seriousness of the one paper as against the other spitting on them would be about the mark. Some might feel this was too much effort – however the example of Di Giovanni also shows that revolutionaries fail to deal with reaction in their own ranks at their peril ...

C. O. J.

From *Anarchy* 38 [1985]

Some copies of *Anarchism and Violence* are still available from AK press in Edinburgh

Credit

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Thanks for your orders, the donations and assistance with texts for website & bulletin. Feedback welcome.

The Dawn: a monthly advocate for constructive anarchism

This is a new and well-produced 8-page tabloid. It has lively anarchist commentary on issue like prisons, the Iraq war and what it means *in practice* to be an anarchist. It also has short news bits (the whole point of doing it monthly), reviews and an intelligently introduced "history spotlight" on nationalism. The editors say "We are not an organ for a 'historical society' ... our aim is to make anarchist theory appealing and accessible to others through entertaining and biting commentary, interviews, essays and artwork ... Please write for *The Dawn*, God knows you can do it better than we can." Not sure about that last bit: they've done a good job on number one. Lets hope they can keep burning bright – and biting.

Available from *The Dawn* at:

BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX (Send £1)

PO Box 24715, Oakland CA 94623, USA (Send \$1)

VIRGILIA D'ANDREA

Viva l'Anarchia! [Long Live Anarchy!] In memory of Severino Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó

Speak, tell me then: It was a dream:
A vision in a tortured mind:
The spasm of a wounded dream:
The anguish of an intrusive distress.

I am suffering and tense and my heart is torn asunder.
Speak, tell me, you: You dreamed it
Do not gaze upon me, rapt in pain,
With that sad and worried look.

Tell me ... but no ... the ghastly thing is true!
True! Do they lie still and degraded,
Weeping shadows in that dark night,
Pale Hamlets, limp and lost?

After ... in the streets, in the hills, overlooking the plains
Our anger advances like a storm
– Which, swift, gloomy and monstrous –
Baits and challenges and overwhelms and tears apart and
tramples underfoot.

Whereupon the whirlwind is unleashed and lightning
bolts
Bridge every deep and tragic chasm
As massed terrors erupt into flame,
Eventually reducing the world to ruins.

Last night, friends, I saw one of them.
It's hard to talk ... In my throat
A swirling, noiseless choking ...
All words strangled by a sob.

That face shrouded in love's glow
Loomed between the tightly-bound irons;
With its fearless, scornful silence
It spoke disdain for life and fetters.

It made not a murmur, not a whimper
Not a stray tear in the eyes.
I, breath bated at the recollection,
Can feel the drops of sweat upon my brow.

To stand beside you, impotent and transfixed
As you broke under the torment inside ...
With mind spinning, darkening
And ... curses ... to be powerless to do anything!

Amid the clouds the fatal moment looms;
Amid rumbling ghosts the day breaks;
And from the yard to those damned walls
Grim spite slips the traces and rears up...

And of Him who strides as if towards a throne,
For that inertia of mine, for that misdeed,
I try to plead, to crave forgiveness...
But with lips quivering from a broken heart.

Handsome, strong, ecstatic, solemn,
Amid the rifles trained upon him,
A luminous giant he then becomes,
Defying the mob, the lies, the Fates;

When the order came to "Fire!"
A quivering ardour swelled his breast,
And he cried "Viva.!" to his creed ...
And the rising sun drank in his cry.

Wrap him in your fulsome embrace, O Liberty;
Clutch those scattered locks to your clear skies;
Did ever a more faithful lover
Come to die between your arms?

From the earth that in life quickened his blood;
From the recesses of ghastly imprisonment:
From the secret places where pain whimpers;
From the abysses of pain and passion;

Comes the boom of a like cry;
A crash stirs and fades and gasps;
Earth and heavens ooze terror
And condemnation falls upon the outrageous deed.

Roses of blood cloak that beautiful body
Whilst the heavens are marooned in its eyes ...
A nightingale sings sweetly
And the dawn melts into a thin mist ...

When, in his adolescent years, he strolled through the
woods
Proud amid the hills and rose boughs.
When through the fields he strode undaunted
Along the vine-scented paths;

When the Abruzzo from its enchanted woodland
Strew his path and heart with dreams ...
And the sluggish river, laden with regrets
Turned sweetness into love sickness;

VIRGILIA D'ANDREA

When the sun bleached his hair to gold
And his mouth sampled primroses,
And from cliff and rugged gorge
He sought only the echoing songs and haunts

Life, that dark and baleful spectre,
Laid snares along his path ...
Then, having wounded him in his soul,
Tossed him into the stormy waters of his fate.

And even as he scoured the hills and mountains
For a dream of ecstatic glory ...
A lonely farmhouse beyond the quiet bridges
Lilted sadly: A cradle of memories ...

O world, O object world of Cains;
That imposes your infamies with laws.
And murders the Just man and the Rebel
And erects temples and thrones upon the gore.

World of frauds and sly middle-men.
Of thieves, dealers and cheats;
World of filthy, well-fed bellies
Replete with horrendous, dark crimes;

I, poet of the mob, of pain
Would love to seize you by the throat this day;
And, rest assured ... into the mire and the base clay
Would fain plunge your snout.

And, become two mighty talons,
Dig them deep into your breast;
To watch the life ebb gradually from you ...
Whilst chortling ... O accursed world!

Virgilia D'Andrea

From *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, 28 March 1931

New Pamphlet: The Buenos Aires Tragedy 29 January-2 February 1931 : The last fight of Severino di Giovanni and Paulo Scarfó

Published: KSL, 2004. Anarchist Library # 3.
35 pages : ill. ; 21 cm. ISBN 1-873605-58-7
£3 (£2 to individual bulletin subscribers) / \$3
No discussion of Italian Anarchism, the movement in
Argentina or illegalism can pass over Severino di
Giovanni and his comrades in silence. With both



Virgilia D'Andrea (1888-1933)

Born in Sulmona, Italy. After both her parents died, she was educated in a convent school against which she soon rebelled. She qualified as a teacher. Her first contact with anarchism came when she was 12 through reports of Gaetano Bresci's assassination of the King of Italy in Monza in 1900. Qualifying as a teacher, she taught in a number of elementary schools in the Abruzzo, before meeting her future partner Armando Borghi, the leading anarcho-syndicalist. She then began to give talks and write poetry and prose for the movement press, involving herself in anti-militarist and anarcho-syndicalist (USI) activity. Seeing fascism as a war of violence waged against civilisation, she advocated all-out struggle against it. "Attacking fascism amounts to a defence of humanity's present and future." She was committed to the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti. Driven into exile, she moved through Germany, Holland and France to the United States. She died of cancer in New York.
(Taken from a review by Giorgio Sacchetti.)

written propaganda and acts of violence they attacked fascism, the framing of Sacco and Vanzetti, the dictatorship and the entire capitalist order. Their uncompromising revolt led them into conflict with other anarchists – and to a final, fatal showdown with the state that they defied.

This pamphlet is a tribute originally published in *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, drawing on letters from comrades in Argentina who had escaped the final repression. A letter from América Scarfó – lover of Severino, sister of Paulo and comrade of both – is also included.

UNKNOWN ANARCHISTS

Aniela Wolberg

The death of Aniela Wolberg is a great loss to us and to the Polish Anarchist Movement. (1907-1937)

After serious study Aniela joined the revolutionary ranks in 1924. At the Cracow University she came in contact with a group of Bulgarian Anarchist students, among whom was Taczo Petroff, who since then found his death in prison.

Although coming from a wealthy family Aniela understood that the Polish Anarchist movement had to take root in the masses. Soon she secretly published the "Proletariat."

In 1926 Aniela was in Paris continuing her studies. She became the soul of "Walka" a Polish Anarchist monthly. When only twenty years old she sacrificed time and money for her ideal. At that time her sense of criticism and reality was highly developed; her heart was passionate for the masses, for the revolution. Her burning aim was to help the formation of an Anarchist movement in Poland; one that would not be locked up in groups, but powerful, popular, and able to materialize our aspirations.

Aniela received her degree of licentiate in science at the University of Montpellier, France. Here she cooperated with French and Spanish groups, yet never ceasing her activity with the Polish comrades in Paris and Poland.

Later Aniela found a position as a chemical-engineer in a Parisian automobile factory. But the French police had accumulated a heavy record of her activity and succeeded in deporting her from France.

In 1932 Aniela was secretly editing "Walka Klas," and acting as Secretary of the Polish Anarchist Federation. When arrested in 1934, she was immediately released because of lack of evidence. When reaction gained the upper hand Anarchist propaganda in Poland became nearly impossible. Zealously, she devoted herself to science. New hope came along: the Spanish Revolution!

And soon Aniela was in Spain among the most active comrades. She lectured on Oct. 9th and died Oct 11th from an urgent and unsuccessful operation.

We shall always be faithful to the memory of our dear comrade Aniela Wolberg.

Group Durruti.
Translated by J. S.

From *MAN!* January 1938, p. 6.
Provided by the Anarchist Archives Project,
Cambridge, MA.

Philip Grosser:

A True Rebel Passes Away

Philip Grosser, who attracted nation-wide attention as a Conscientious Objector in 1917 for his fearless and courageous stand against war, and survived untold sufferings and tortures in the military prisons of Leavenworth and Alcatraz, was killed here by an elevated train on October 18th. He was 42 years of age.

He was well known from coast to coast by all who were at any time interested in defense and relief work for class-war and political prisoners. Tirelessly, and in the Jimmie Higgins style, he was always doing something for somebody behind the bars, or for anybody who needed it on the outside.

Right up to the time of his death he was corresponding with Tom Mooney, McNamara, Billings, Shmidt, and many others in the different prisons.

Belonging to the Anarchist school, believing in the class struggle, Philip Grosser was a staunch union man. At one time he was a member of the I.W.W. In later years he was active in Local 11 of the Painters Union, where he was respected, feared and hated by the labor fakers. He was also a member of the Boston Central Labor Union, representing the Painters Local. He was always at odds with the politicians and labor skates. Though things looked dark at times and it seemed that he was fighting a losing battle, yet he never lost courage and kept up the fight to the last. He was well known and respected for his integrity and honesty, even by those who did not agree with him politically or otherwise.

He was laid at rest Friday, October 20th.

Appropriate speeches were made at the grave by Alice Stone Blackwell, noted liberal, and by Michael Flaherty, Secretary of the Painters' Union. The radical movement has lost one of its truest fighters and supporters. His untimely death is a terrible blow to all of us who knew him.

James Phillips, Boston, Mass.

From *Freedom* (New York) December 1933

You can never make Anarchism illegal. You can make membership of an organisation illegal, you can make it criminal to associate or to work for a change in society... but it is not yet possible to frame a law which will make people love the state.

Shih Fu

from *Black Flag* Vol. 2 #9 p22.

Bookfair

Comrades are reminded that the (London) Anarchist Bookfair is in November this year (Saturday the 27th) www.anarchistbookfair.org