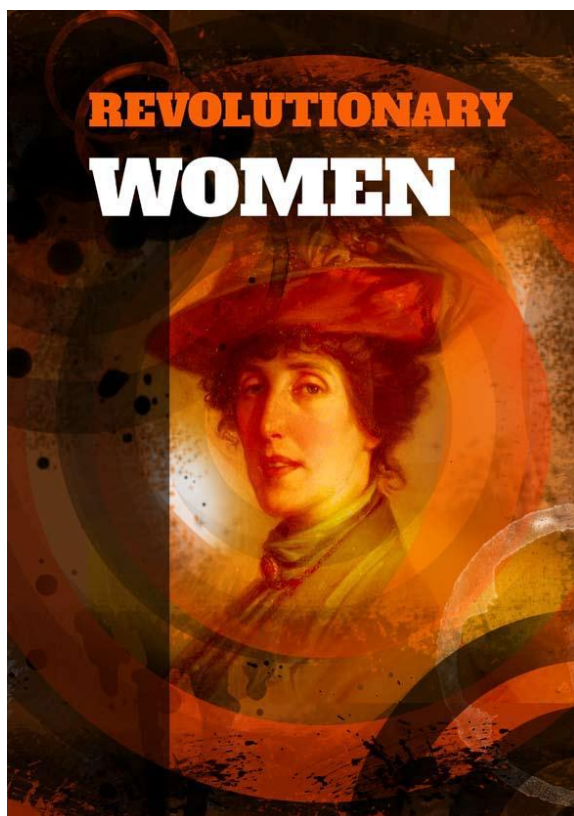


Revolutionary Women

Anarchist Federation



2015

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This pamphlet is dedicated to all those revolutionary women who have passed without mention in the history books. Thanks also go to Nick Heath for his attempts to uncover their stories, reminding us that beside every well-known individual there is a whole movement aiming towards libertarian communism.

Introduction

The compatibility of anarchism and women's liberation is clear: opposition to all hierarchy is a requirement of any movement demanding emancipation and equality. Despite this, everywhere that women joined the early anarchist movement they were forced to fight against the prejudices of their male comrades. Not only did they fight, they prevailed, becoming the spearhead of many revolutionary situations.

Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Louise Michel, and Lucy Parsons are often the names that come to mind when someone thinks of pioneering anarchist women, but there were many others just as determined, devoted and courageous. This pamphlet will highlight a selection of revolutionary women of the past, giving a short biography of each of their lives, and letting their politics speak through the tales of their actions.

Glossary

The following terms will be used in this pamphlet:

Anarchist Black Cross

An anarchist organisation set up to support anarchist political prisoners.

Circular

A letter or written document that is sent out to inform or notify the recipient in some way.

Cheka

Russian secret police under the Soviet Union. This later became the KGB.

Department

French regions are also known as departments.

Dreyfus Affair

A political scandal that split French politics of the time roughly into two camps; one camp being mainly Catholic and pro-military, the other being against the military and the church.

February Revolution

A revolution that led to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, the end of the Romanov dynasty, and the end of the Russian Empire.

First International

The International Workingmen's Association (IWA), often called the First International, was an international organisation which aimed at uniting a variety of different left-wing socialist, communist and anarchist political groups and trade union organisations across the world.

IWW

The Industrial Workers of the World. A union formed by anarchists, communists, and socialists in 1905 with the aim to end capitalism and the wage system.

Kronstadt Rebellion

An uprising of sailors in the Russian port-town of Kronstadt in response to the betrayal of the aims and ideals of the Russian revolution by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. Trotsky himself oversaw a propaganda campaign to discredit the rebellion before leading the brutal suppression of the sailors.

Machajski, Jan Wacław

A Polish anarchist whose ideas would predict the brutal outcome of any attempt to put in place a state socialist government or install a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', or workers' government.

Makhnovists

Anarchists following the ideas of Nestor Makhno. During the Russian revolution the Makhnovists were known as the Black Army and helped establish the Free Territories of the Ukraine.

Maximalist Socialist

A member of the Union of Socialists Revolutionaries Maximalists, a radical wing expelled from the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in 1906. Most later joined with Bolsheviks.

Mimeograph

A low-cost printing press that works by forcing ink through a stencil onto paper.

Misogyny

The structural oppression of women through giving of preference to people and traits seen as masculine over those that are seen as feminine. This is related to transmisogyny (the specific ways misogyny affects transgendered individuals) and misogynoir (the specific ways misogyny affects black individuals).

Partisan

A committed member of a political group.

Right SR and Left SRS

In 1917, the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party split between those who supported the Provisional Government (right), established after the February Revolution, and those who supported the Bolsheviks who favoured a communist insurrection (left).

Vis a vis

Meaning 'in relation to' or 'with regard to'.

Clara Gilbert Cole (1868–1956)

“Clara Gilbert, with her unusual slender loveliness, her deft fingers and vivid imagination, was like a caged bird in the post office.”

– Sylvia Pankhurst, ‘The Home Front’.

“A remarkable, sincere and much loved woman.”

– John Hewetson.

Clara Gilbert was born on the 4th of December, 1868. She was the daughter of a boot manufacturer who had got into financial distress because of his refusal to “produce anything save honest, hand-made all-leather wares”, according to Sylvia Pankhurst in her book ‘Home Front’.

Left an orphan and without means, she got a job as a postal worker in Manchester. Here she met her future husband Herbert Cole. Herbert Cole (1867–1930), like Sylvia Pankhurst, studied at Manchester School of Art and was heavily influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, William Morris and illustrators like Walter Crane who had volunteered their work for papers like the Socialist League’s ‘Commonweal’. Upon their marriage Clara became known as Clara Gilbert Cole. Both Clara and Herbert seem to have been involved in suffragism, Herbert becoming the staff artist for the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), later progressing to provide illustrations for ‘The Worker’s Dreadnought’. He was a prolific artist from the 1890s into the 1920s. His work, including that as an illustrator for children’s books, is unjustifiably ignored today.

Clara became a passionate opponent of the First World War; preempting the state call for conscription she founded a League Against War and Conscription in early 1915 which published an 8-page pamphlet written by her, ‘War Won’t Pay’, in 1916. In the same year, Clara, along with Rosa Hobhouse, walked through Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire distributing hundreds of anti-war leaflets. Rosa’s husband Stephen had been imprisoned as a conscientious objector that year. They were arrested after five days and convicted at Kettering Crown Court, both receiving five months imprisonment.

Clara was associated with the Workers Socialist Federation (WSF) of Sylvia Pankhurst and may have been a member of it. She produced a book of poems, ‘Prison Impressions’, based on her own experiences and those of others, in 1918.

She became involved in the early unemployed movement in the 1920s and was arrested after an action organised by the group Camberwell Organised Unemployed, on the 3rd of February, 1922, along with Stanley Dallas and Bill Rust (Rust was the noted Communist Party stalwart who remained true to Stalinism long after many other party members recognised it for the anti-worker movement that it is) for which she received a 40 shillings fine or 28 days imprisonment. She wrote ‘The Objectors to Conscription and War: a record of their suffering and sacrifice, their letters and tribunal appeals, their testimony for liberty of conscience’ in 1936.

She gravitated towards the anarchist movement and remained a supporter until her death, providing “vigorous” support during the Spanish Revolution and in anti-war agitation, according to Albert Meltzer in his ‘The Anarchists in London’. She wrote anti-war articles in Freedom Press’s ‘War Commentary’, Scottish anarchist Guy Aldred’s ‘The Word’, and Labour’s ‘Northern

Voice'. The last publication did not have an anti-war policy but nevertheless opened its columns to her.

Clara died on the 4th of February, 1956, at the age of 87. An obituary by the Freedom editor Dr. John Hewetson appeared in Freedom on the 11th of February of the same year in which Clara was described as "one of the oldest comrades of the anarchist movement". Hewetson remembered visiting her in 1943 in her very small cottage at Kirby-le-Soken in Essex and how popular she was with the village children who regularly visited her to hear her story-telling, for which she apparently had a flair. He also recounts the tale of a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (incidentally Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin's favourite music!) at the Queen's Hall in London when the orchestra followed up with God Save the Queen. The audience was electrified to hear Clara shouting from the gallery "God Save the People!"

Hewetson also described her as a "most determined opponent of all established religion, concurring with Bakunin that acceptance of a heavenly authority was not compatible with rejection of earthly authority".

Unhappily, and against her clearly expressed wishes, a religious service was performed at her funeral.

Virginia Bolten (1870–1960)

Virginia Bolten was the daughter of a German street vendor. She was born in Uruguay, either in San Luis, according to some, or in San Juan, according to the researcher Placido Grela, and moved to Rosario in Argentina.

Rosario was known as the “Barcelona of Argentina” at this point in time because of its concentration of industries, the radical ferment there, and the political influence it had over the rest of the country. She worked making shoes for workers and then later in the Refineria, the huge sugar factory that employed thousands of workers, many of them European immigrants and many of them women. She married Marquez, an organiser of a shoe workers’ union and a fellow Uruguayan.

In 1888 the bakery workers paper ‘El Obrero Panadero’ of Rosario became one of the first voices of anarchism in Argentina, with many bakery workers attracted to anarchist ideas. It had a key role in organising the first May Day demonstrations in 1890. Activists like Virginia Bolten and Francisco Berri appear to have been associated with it. In 1889 Virginia helped organise the seamstresses’ strike in Rosario, believed to be the first strike of women workers in Argentina.

Anarchists and socialists whether French, Italian, Spanish or German-speaking had started meeting at La Bastilla (The Bastille Café) among them French and German internationalists and the Catalan Paulino Pallas. Virginia frequented this café and it was one of the places where the plans to celebrate May Day were hatched. Among other anarchists who contributed to discussions there were Romulo Ovidi, Francisco Berri, Domingo Lodi, Juan Ibaldi, Rafael Torrent, Teresa Marchisio and Maria Calvia (who were both later involved in setting up La Voz de la Mujer and its paper with Virginia).

The day before the demonstration Virginia was detained by the police for distributing leaflets outside the Refineria. Not to be deterred, she was at the head of a march of thousands of workers which proceeded to the main square of Montevideo, the Plaza López, on the First of May. She carried a large red flag with black lettering proclaiming: “Primero de Mayo – Fraternidad Universal” (First Of May – Universal Brotherhood). At the Plaza López her fiery speech entranced the crowd. She is credited as being the first woman in Argentina to address a workers rally (it should also be kept in mind that she was twenty years old at the time).

Juana Buena, in her autobiography ‘Historia de una ideal vivido por una mujer’, remembered the strength and tenacity of Virginia in propagating anarchist ideas including in the pages of the anarchist papers ‘La Protesta Humana’ and ‘La Protesta’ and especially in ‘La Voz de la Mujer’, (‘Woman’s Voice’, 1896–1897). This was a paper which explicitly described itself as anarchist communist, with a subtitle ‘Dedicated to the advancement of anarchist communism’. It was the first publication edited by women for women in the whole of Latin America, fusing class struggle anarchist ideas with the liberation of women. It was supported by the meagre wages of Virginia and her women comrades in the shoe and sugar industries. It was an anarchist publication that was typical of the period, small and ephemeral and semi-clandestine. Its descriptive sub-title summed it all up: ‘Appears when it can’. Only nine issues appeared, although it is believed that

Virginia edited another issue in Montevideo. Issues 1–4 had a print run of one thousand copies, which went up to two thousand for the following four issues whilst the last appearance of the paper merited a print run of 1,500.

‘La Voz de la Mujer’ published many articles from Spanish anarchists on the subject of the liberation of women. Contributors included the great anarchist organiser Teresa Claramunt, Soledad Gustavo. The support of Emma Goldman and Louise Michel was actively sought and secured. It deplored the action of the anarchist F. Denanbride in shooting his lover five times because she was leaving him. This woman, Anita Lagouardette, was a contributor to ‘La Voz de la Mujer’ and miraculously survived the attack. ‘La Voz de la Mujer’ railed against the hypocrisy in male anarchist ranks where freedom was denied to women (see the full quote in the appendix of this pamphlet).

Virginia undertook speaking tours throughout Argentina, speaking at meetings in San Nicolás, Campana, Tandil, Mendoza and many other towns. The police intervened on many occasions to stop her speaking. Her main topics were the situation of the working class and in particular the various oppressions suffered by working class women. In November 1900 she and Teresa Marchisio organised a counter procession against the parade of the Catholic establishment in Rosario, the procession of the Virgen de la Roca. She and Teresa were arrested with four other anarchists.

In the same year she was actively involved in the setting up of the Casa del Pueblo (the House of the People) with other anarchists. This housed political, social and cultural events with many conferences, debates, discussions, poetry readings and theatre pieces; it had an orchestra and a library of 380 books. She was one of the speakers at its inauguration. On the 20th of October, 1901, she was arrested for distributing anarchist propaganda outside the gates of the Refineria in the course of a strike. During this incident, she witnessed the cold-blooded murder of the immigrant worker Come Budislavich by the police. She helped set up an anarchist women’s group with other anarchist militants like López and Teresa Deloso that year.

In 1902 she was one of the main speakers at the First of May rally in Montevideo, using it as an occasion to denounce the situation in Argentina. In 1904 she was forced to move to Buenos Aires where she was active in the Comité de Huelga Femenino (Women’s Strike Committee), which with the Federación Obrera Argentina organised the women workers in the port fruit market of Buenos Aires and brought them out on strike. Her intensive activity began to affect her health. The comrades of the anarchist theatre group Germinal issued an appeal to all libertarian groups, unions and societies to take part in a benefit to aid her. The great Italian anarchist Pietro Gori introduced her to anarchist intellectual circles in Buenos Aires and helped her found an organisation of anarchists and socialists focussed on attacking legal marriage and other authoritarian concepts.

The failure of the civil-military uprising of Hipolito Irigoyen against the conservative government in 1905 was used as a pretext to attack the workers’ movement. Despite the fact that the anarchist movement had no kind of alliance with Irigoyen its principal activists were arrested, prosecuted and even deported. Virginia was arrested along with her partner and detained for two days. Marquez was expelled to Uruguay under the new Residency Law.

In 1907 she was one of the initiators of the Centro Femenino Anarquista (Anarchist Women’s Centre) and through it was one of the principal organisers of the tenants’ strike of that year. Following her speech during this strike, the Residency Law was used to deport her to Montevideo

in Uruguay, where she was reunited with Marquez and their young children. She was the first woman to be deported under this law.

Her home in Montevideo became an operational base for the anarchist exiles deported from Argentina. In Montevideo she collaborated with Juana Buena in 1909 in the anarchist feminist newspaper 'La Nueva Senda' (The New Path, 1909–1910). The same year she was involved in the international agitation around the trial and execution of the Spanish anarchist educationalist Francisco Ferrer. This was linked up with the brutal repression of demonstrators in Buenos Aires on the 1st of May in Buenos Aires in the same year. At the hour on which Ferrer was executed in Barcelona on the 13th of October a large demonstration of more than ten thousand people organised by workers' organisations, anarchists, socialists and liberals, with the participation of many students and university teachers ended in the main square of Montevideo, the Plaza Constitución. Here it was addressed by a host of speakers, among them Virginia and her fellow anarchist Juana Buena. In the repression which followed she was one of the anarchists most harassed by the authorities, along with others like Juana Buena and María Collazo.

In early April 1911 she was involved in the setting up in Montevideo of the Asociación Femenina-Emancipación which sought to unite all anti-clerical women in Montevideo. She and María Collazo were influential in this organisation. It appealed to working class women and held its meetings at the offices of the Electrical Workers Union. It made strong efforts to organise among telephone operators, at this time made up mostly of native women workers. It rejected the overtures of the reformist Pan-American Federation, Virginia speaking out against appeals for female suffrage.

All of the above was a remarkable life achievement for the cause of anarchism. Unfortunately, she was to be involved in an episode referred to as "Anarcobatlismo" which caused the first important rift within the anarchist movement in Uruguay. She and other anarchists like Francisco Berri, Adrian Zamboni, Orsini Bertani, and Clerici organised around the anarchist communist paper Idea Libre began to give critical support to the regime of President Batlle y Ordóñez.

During his second term in office in Uruguay Batlle initiated a huge reform programme. This was not just far-reaching for Latin America but on an international level. He separated Church from State, banned crucifixes in hospitals, removed references to God and the Bible from public oaths, gave widespread rights to unions and political parties and organisations, brought in the eight-hour day and universal suffrage, introduced unemployment benefits, legalised divorce, created more high schools, promised and practised no residency laws against exiled anarchists and other radicals, opened universities to women, and led a campaign to take away the control of industry and land from foreign capitalists (the British capitalists had huge influence in Uruguay) and nationalised private monopolies.

This seems to have disoriented some elements in the anarchist movement, Virginia included. In the process, sections of the Uruguayan anarchist movement were neutralised. The emerging Socialist Party had supported Emancipación but now turned against it. Their paper 'El Socialista' attacked Virginia in July 1913, reproducing alleged statements from her in which she praised Batlle as 'progressive' and 'unlike anything we have ever had in this country'. By the end of the year 'El Socialista' had heightened its critical tone, insisting that Virginia and her associates had betrayed the workers' movement, that workers reorganise their movement and "send anarchism to the devil". This brought about the collapse of Emancipación and the working class women's movement in Uruguay, as well as doing damage to the anarchist movement and bringing about the ascendancy of the Socialist Party.

In 1923 she was involved in the setting up of the Centro Internacional de Estudios Sociales (a libertarian literary association) in Montevideo and in the same year spoke at the 1st May rally in Montevideo.

While the authors can find little after this point, it appears that she continued to live in the working class district of Manga in Montevideo until her death in around 1960 and that she remained attached to anarchist ideas.

Victorine Brocher-Rouchy (1838–1921)

Victorine Malenfant was born in Paris in 1838 into a family with a long revolutionary tradition. Her father was a republican shoemaker and freemason.

She became involved in republican and socialist activities in the 1850s. She married Jean Rouchy, an artisan shoemaker, in 1861 and along with him took part in several socialist groups in Orleans and Paris, becoming involved in the First International from very early on.

In 1867 she participated in the founding of a cooperative bakery and a cooperative shop. During the Franco-Prussian War her husband fought as a franc-tireur (irregular troop) in the Loire and she engaged as an ambulance driver. She lived with her mother who helped her raise her two sons and the son of a neighbour they had taken under their wings. These three children were all to die within a few years.

She was active in the Paris Commune, joining the Battalion for the Defence of the Republic with her husband on the 20th of March, 1871. They were in charge of the officers' mess, but with the outbreak of fighting, she returned to her post of ambulance driver. She fought on the barricades during the whole of the Bloody Week. With the savage repression that followed, she was arrested and condemned to death for burning down the Court of Accounts (Cour des Comptes).

Thanks to her friends, she managed to escape first to Switzerland and later to London, while her husband was imprisoned and died in captivity. She returned to Lyon and then to Paris in 1878, and became very active in the anarchist movement. She was a member of the group that published the anarchist paper 'La Révolution Sociale'. She met Gustave Brocher whilst attending the International Anarchist Conference in London as a Parisian delegate in 1881. They later married and adopted five orphans of the Commune.

In 1909 she wrote her memoirs up to 1871, 'Souvenirs d'une morte vivante' (memories of one of the living dead). She died in Lausanne on the 4th of November, 1921.

Anastasia Ivanovna Galaieva, a.k.a., Anastasia Ivanovna, Nastia & Stepanova (1885–1925)

Anastasia Galaieva was born into a workers' family in Ekaterinoslav, Russia, in 1887. Through her own strenuous efforts and perseverance she became a primary school teacher. She became a revolutionary in 1904, first of all propagandising the ideas of Machajski and in 1905 active in the Anarchist Communist Workers' Group of Ekaterinoslav. She was arrested by the Tsarist police in 1908 and finally brought before a military court on the 24th of September, 1911. She was sentenced to four years hard labour for involvement in the anarchist movement. Already fragile by nature, the appalling conditions in prison led to her contracting pulmonary tuberculosis.

After her sentence, she was deported to exile in Irkutsk province. Released from there by the February Revolution, she returned to the Ukraine. Her husband Pavel Arsentiev (a.k.a. Stepanova) who was well known in anarchist circles, was murdered in front of her by the Ukrainian nationalists of Petliura. Despite this traumatic incident and her serious illness, she continued to be active in the anarchist movement in Kiev and in Kharkov, above all in the Anarchist Black Cross groups in those towns.

With the Bolshevik attacks on the Nabat Confederation of Anarchists, she was arrested by the Kharkov Cheka on the 25th of November, 1920. She was released in early 1921, arrested again in March of the same year, and again in November 1921. From 1922 to 1924 she was exiled to Veliky Ustiug and then Arkhangelsk. Each time she was arrested without charge. This in spite of the dozens of Bolsheviks that she helped in prison through her work with Taratuta in the Political Red Cross.

A member of the Society of Ex-Political Prisoners and Exiles, she resigned from it along with Olga Taratuta in 1924 in protest against increasing Communist Party control of this organisation.

It was only the intervention of doctors in Moscow who told the authorities that she was dying of a terminal illness that she was freed under special surveillance of the Cheka in Moscow.

She died on the 27th of October, 1925.

Anna Garaseva (1902–1994) and Tatiana Garaseva (1901-after 1997)

Anna Garaseva and her older sister Tatiana were the daughters of a teacher who taught in a gymnasium (high school) in Ryazan. Tatiana was born in 1901 and Anna on the 7th of December, 1902.

In 1917, Tatiana was admitted to Moscow University, where she attended the lectures of the anarchist professor Alexei Borovoi. Tatiana joined the student anarchist club mostly made up of young women. She saw herself as an anarcho-syndicalist.

With the death of Kropotkin, his family and associates demanded that the Bolshevik government release imprisoned anarchists. Among these were Aron Baron, Topilin (himself from Ryazan, subsequently shot in 1921 for arranging a prison escape) and other anarchists, Left SRS and Makhnovists. The university teachers Borovoi and Karelin asked the leader of the Cheka, Dzerzhinsky, to release the prisoners but he refused. Borovoi then went to Lunacharsky, who prevailed upon Lenin to release six of the prisoners on parole, the rest remaining in prison.

At the funeral of Kropotkin there was a large turnout from the universities and Tatiana was one of those who carried a wreath from the Nabat confederation (even though as an anarcho-syndicalist she disagreed with their strategies) to lay on his coffin. She returned to Ryazan, where her sister still lived, after mass arrests of Anarchists and Left SRS and the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion. Anna entered the Ryazan Pedagogical Institute, and joined the anarcho-syndicalist group there.

The two sisters then moved to Petrograd where they worked as nurses. They continued to participate in the anarcho-syndicalist movement. Tatiana kept in contact with exiled revolutionaries in Finland and rented a room in a house which happened to be opposite the windows of Grigori Zinoviev. She was arrested there on the 22nd of May, 1925. Anna, who had returned to Ryazan, was arrested the following year and a picture of Topilin along with their real name was found at her apartment. The two sisters were reunited in the Lubyanka prison.

They were accused of belonging to a terrorist anarchist organisation and of plotting to kill Zinoviev. At this time the interrogation of political prisoners did not involve beatings or torture. The sisters were sentenced to three years in the political-isolator prison followed by three years of internal exile. They served their time at the prison of Verkhneuralsk, where they met and became friends with many other political prisoners, joining them in collective protests and hunger strikes. Among these were the Right SR Katarina Olitskaya, the anarchist Vsevolzhsky, who was the nephew of the Red Army marshal Tukhachevsky and the anarchist Kira Arkadevna Sturmer, who was the niece of a minister of the Tsar. In Sverdlovsk they met Berta Brodova, wife of Yuri Podbelsky, an SR involved in the Antonov uprising in Tambov (his brother Vadim was Commissar of Post and Telegraphs in the Communist government).

In 1928, Tatiana contracted tuberculosis and was sent to Chikment. She filed a petition for a transfer home to Ryazan. The authorities agreed to this if she ended her political activities. She

signed a statement to this effect to this whilst maintaining her beliefs. Tatiana returned to Ryazan in 1929, joined there soon by a recently released Anna.

In exile, Tatiana married Nikolai Semenovich Doskalov, a Belgian-born ex-Bolshevik who in the mid 1920s had changed his politics to anarcho-syndicalism. Together with her husband she moved to Maikop, where in 1935 she was arrested. After the first spell in prison she returned to Moscow and began working in the Lenin Library. The director of the Library was Nevsky, a former People's Commissar of Labour. According to Tatiana he was the only decent Communist they ever met. He was not afraid to argue with Stalin, and he employed people expelled from the Communist Party after the wave of purges. He hired Tatiana and the old SR Kolosova. Nevsky was arrested in 1935 and shot in 1937. After his arrest, Tatiana and her husband fled to Maikop, but the secret police caught up with them. Nikolai was beaten to death during interrogation, and Tatiana received five years at the Kolyma camp.

There were many Communists at Kolyma, including Trotskyist oppositionists, but they all refused to have anything to do with anarchists who they regarded as enemies of the revolution. Tatiana met Katya Olitskaya again at Kolyma.

Tatiana with her tuberculosis would not have survived long at the dread prison camp of Kolyma if she had not started work at the camp hospital after one of her feet was amputated as a result of frostbite whilst working in the forest. Tatiana returned to Ryazan before the war. During the war, the sisters worked in a military hospital, and in 1949 Tatiana was again sent to Kolyma, where she remained until 1954.

The two sisters were rehabilitated in 1958. From 1962 onwards Anna made contact with the writer Solzhenitsyn who was compiling his huge book on the Gulag archipelago. She acted as his "illegal secretary", helping compile information on the camps, putting him in contact with others who had suffered in the camps and hiding documents for him. The sisters felt that there was not enough information in the book on Kolyma which was "our Auschwitz".

In her last years Anna, disillusioned by the many years of suffering and repression, rejected her anarcho-syndicalist beliefs and began to see herself as an anarchist individualist. The anarchist journalist Igor Podshivalov conducted an interview with the sisters in 1994. They were living in Ryazan on small pensions. Six months later Anna died on the 11th of December, 1994. Tatiana died some time after 1997. In 1997, Anna's memoirs of her activities in the anarchist underground were published.

Johanna Lahr (1867–1904)

“The journeymen bakers of London are at last making themselves heard, being urged on by the lessons taught by the skilled and unskilled Labour Strike of the dockers, and the sweated tailors in the East End, which showed what can be done if workers are united and organised...do you toil and suffer such lives under these wretched conditions for yourselves and your families, or your masters?

Where are the fruits of your labour?...what hopes have you when you are past work?...Have no trust in your Houses of Parliament. The sooner they are turned into a washhouse or bakehouse the better for the workers. I am with you heart and spirit, and will never tire of helping you to a brighter future, where freedom, love and harmony shall reign; where the dawn of the morning shall be greeted with gladness, and work be only a pleasure; and where the burden of life and sorrow-stricken faces shall disappear like a snow-white mist in the morning.”

– Johanna Lahr ‘The Poorest of the Wage-Slaves’.

Johanna Lahr was one of many women who were active in the anti-parliamentarian and anarchist movement, like Agnes Henry, Lilian Evelyn, Edith Lupton and others who deserve to be rescued from obscurity.

She was born Anna Klebow in Germany in 1867, the daughter of Karl Klebow, a cabinet maker. She appears to have emigrated to England between 1885 and 1887. By the latter year she was active in the Socialist League. She appears to have formed a relationship with the journeyman baker Philip Lahr, born in Ecklesheim, in the State of Hesse in Germany in either 1854 or 1857, according to different sources. Incidentally, Philip Lahr was not a relation of Charlie Lahr, who was also a German anarchist who had come to Britain. It appears that Philip came to London to avoid conscription around 1874/5. He was an avowed anarchist, and probably a member of the Socialist League, and knew Edward Carpenter and Kropotkin well, and had even seen Karl Marx at meetings, but it is unclear whether Johanna was herself already an anarchist before she met him. She began to use the surname of Lahr, although the pair were not formally married until the 1st of June, 1895, in Croydon.

She spoke at many meetings, and she is listed as speaking at 13 meetings in March 1889 alone! That year she spoke to two meetings of the Leicester branch of the Socialist League, at Russell Square and Humberstone Gate, alongside the anarchists George Cores and Tom Pearson. On Sunday the 29th of June, 1890, she spoke for the East London Anarchist-Communist Group at Victoria Park alongside Edith Lupton, Henry Davis, R.W. Burnie and Brooks at two meetings. She is recorded at speaking in the same location on Sunday the 13th of July that same year, with R.W. Burnie and Davis. She spoke at a commemoration meeting organised by the League for the Chicago Martyrs in November 1890 at Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town. She was described as a “stately woman with a strong foreign accent”. She was certainly associated with the anarchist wing of the League along with Kitz, Mowbray, W.B. Parker and Burnie. She was one of those who attended the Anarchist Conference organised at the Autonomie Club at 6 Windmill Street in 1890.

In April of 1889 she wrote to Friedrich Engels and asked him for an interview, asking his advice on which works on socialism to read. This correspondence continued for a few weeks, although there is no evidence that she actually met him.

In the same month of the same year she began a campaign to set up a bakers union. Her companion was one of over 2000 German bakers based in Britain, mostly in London, between 1880–1910. This organisation probably had contact with the International Bakers Union, but was only one of several in London. She spoke at a meeting of this group, the Amalgamated Union of Bakers, in October of that year, urging them to be “men not slaves” and calling on them to boycott scabs. In autumn 1890 she was involved in supporting the bakers strike in London. She wrote a two-page leaflet for it in October, titled ‘The Poorest of the Wage-Slaves’. The strike was successfully completed in November. In the leaflet which bore her name she urged that it was not enough to be content with a strike but to continue organising among the bakers and not to rely on Parliament which should be converted into a bakery!

Johanna had three children, the first Philip, born in 1899, the second Victor Hugo, born in 1902 and the third, Bruno Edgar, born the following year. Sheila Lahr, writing about her father Charlie, mentions the unrelated Johanna and that Charlie told her: “Explaining the difference in appearance between the siblings, my father blithely tells me ‘their mother Johanna was an anarchist and she had a number of lovers and children by all of them. None of them are really Lahrs.’”. Whether this is true is in doubt, as Philip Lahr had three further sons by a second wife Wilhemina Schumacher.

She died in September 1904 of what was listed as a “breast infection” but was possibly cancer.

Ito Noe (1895–1923)

Ito was born in 1895, to a family of landed aristocracy, on the southern island of Kyushu, in the village of Imajuku. After graduating from Ueno Girls High School, she was forced against her will into an arranged marriage in her native village. She soon ran away to Tokyo.

In Tokyo, women had been developing progressive ideas since the 1870s. Hiratsuka Raicho founded the Seitosha (Blue Stocking Society) and brought out its magazine 'Seito' (Blue Stocking) which gave space to women to develop their literary, aesthetic and political capabilities. Ito joined this group in 1913, at the age of 18, and became one of its editors from 1915 to 1916. Skilled in several languages, including English, she translated articles by the anarchist, Emma Goldman, on the situation of women.

Ito later married the writer Tsuji Jun (1884–1944), who had taught her at school in 1912, but left him in 1916 to have a passionate love affair with the charismatic anarchist firebrand Osugi Sakae.

Ito and Osugi believed in the concepts of free love. Osugi at this time was conducting an affair with the leading woman anarchist, Ichiko Kamachika. Unfortunately, the theoretical concepts of free love collided with jealousy and Kamachika attacked Osugi with a knife and severely wounded him. The mass media used this incident to attack Ito, Osugi and Kamachika for their 'immorality' and the anarchist movement in general. This caused problems in the anarchist group in which Ito and Osugi were involved and many comrades split with them.

Ito worked with Osugi in promoting the anarchist movement, as well as developing her ideas on women's liberation. She helped found the socialist women's group Sekirankai in 1921. She produced over 80 articles for different publications, as well as translating the work of European anarchists like Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman. In addition, she produced several autobiographical novels, which charted her life from adolescence, through breaking with tradition, to reaching her emancipated and anarchist outlook. They included Zatsuon (Noises) in 1916 at the age of 21, and Tenki (Turning Point) in 1918.

In 1919, with Osugi, Wada Kyutaro and Kondo Kenji, she brought out the first Rodo Undo (Labour Movement) magazine, which sought to link anarchism to the industrial working class and many branches of an organisation with the same name were set up.

Two years later, in September 1923, shortly after the birth of her seventh child, the Great Kanto Earthquake hit Japan.

As often happens in the aftermath of an earthquake, many fires broke out and more people were killed by these than by the quake. A total of 100,000 died and as many as two million were left homeless.

Rumours began to spread, encouraged by the authorities, that various 'unpopular' groups were responsible for starting fires and causing other mischief to aggravate the situation. As a result, mobs attacked many immigrant Korean and Chinese workers, and the police used the opportunity to murder anarchist and socialist militants. Thousands were killed. Among them were ten socialists in Kameido in Tokyo, as well as Ito Noe, Sakae Osugi and his six year old

nephew, Tachibana Munekazu. They were taken into custody on the 16th of September and all were beaten and strangled in the cells of the dreaded Kempei-tai secret police. Osugi had been #1 on their death list for a long time.

Several days later, the bodies were found in a well, where they had been left to decompose. A trial followed after the murderer was discovered to be a secret policeman named Amakasu Masahiko, who had acted on orders from Emperor Hirohito. The policeman was sentenced to just ten years' gaol, then released by personal order of Hirohito four years later before being assigned to 'special duties' in Manchuria. He committed suicide in 1945, before his crimes could be avenged by the many anarchists after his blood. The assassination of the anarchist family and its aftermath subsequently became known as the Amakasu Incident.

Ito had been well aware of the consequences of being an anarchist in Japan at that time. In 1911, the leading woman anarchist Kanno Suga, Kotoku Shusui and ten other anarchists were framed on flimsy charges of attempting to kill the Emperor and subsequently executed.

In his autobiography, Bertrand Russell recounts how he met Ito Noe in Japan in 1921. "She was young and beautiful... Dora [Bertrand Russell's wife] said to her: 'Are you not afraid that the authorities will do something to you?' She drew her hand across her throat, and said, 'I know they will sooner or later'."

Séraphine Pajaud (1858-after 1934)

“You cannot tell me you’ve never heard of Séraphine Pajaud! ... Séraphine Pajaud Is an anarchist who holds meetings against the Army, against religion and for the emancipation of women. Last year, four hundred and fifty people, of whom two hundred were women, listened to her speaking at La Roche Sur Yon on the inexistence of God. The non-existence of God, nothing but that!”

– from Michel Ragon’s novel ‘Le Cocher de Boiroux’.

“Madame Séraphine Pajaud could always count on having plenty of women in her audience; she even told me that if there were as many anarchist women as men, the social revolution would have operated already, because women are less selfish, less cowardly and more ready for sacrifices than men.”

– Article in ‘Le Revue Mondiale’ 1904.

Julie Louise Pajaud was born in 1858 in the Charentes-Maritimes department of France. She appears to have substituted Séraphine as a first name when she became an anarchist. She lived with the anarchist Marie-Georges Sandré and a police report of the 25th of June, 1898, describes their relationship and that they had a son.

She became an active anarchist propagandist and make frequent speaking tours. At the time the Dreyfus Affair (which began in 1894 and rumbled on until its resolution in 1906) coincided with a wave of anti-clerical agitation by radicals, socialists and anarchists. This culminated in the separation of Church and State in 1905. Pajaud was one of those anarchists who actively participated in this social ferment. In 1899 she gave a series of meetings in Limoges, then moving on to speak at the nearby town of St Junien, which was in the process of becoming a stronghold of anarchism. On the 17th of February 1900, she spoke at Moulins at a meeting with the following themes: “The truth to the people – There is no God – Ways and means to achieve complete emancipation – The positions of Anarchists vis a vis capitalism, nationalism and anti-Semitism”.

She spoke in the mining area in northern France in March of that year, where she introduced the mining communities to radical ideas like birth control, free love and the liberation of women in society. These advanced ideas for the time did not appear to act as a deterrent, as she had crowds of around 250 at Autun, Le Creusot and Montceau, the same number as reported for other socialist and anarchist speakers. In February-March 1901 she toured western France, visiting Le Mans, Brest, Morlaix, and Rennes. The same year she spoke to the freethought societies of Lens and Hénin-Liétard. She conducted a trial of God, denounced the “clerical sore” and distributed a tract by the German anarchist Johann Most entitled ‘The Religious Plague’.

On the 1st March, 1902, following a conference on “the non-existence of God”, she was convicted in absentia by the Criminal Court of Boulogne-sur-Mer to six months in prison and a fine of 100 francs for “incitement to murder, looting and burning.”

In 1904 Séraphine participated in a new lecture tour. She was now based in the Isle of Ré, Sandré having died. She returned to St Junien in June to give another speech at a crowded meeting. Speaking in Bressuire in the department of Deux Sevres on the 11th of September, she began her lecture with an attack against God. “God does not exist, cannot exist, we are now far from the

idea of God”, and continued to wild applause, “How can it be argued, citizens, that this so good and flawless being allows a heap of meanness and a heap of atrocities to be committed on earth? How is it that he can be so unjust as to let proletarians die of hunger, whilst the bourgeois and the capitalists die of indigestion?”

In 1905 she addressed a meeting of 300, which included 50 women who were given free entry, men paying 30 centimes. She was there at the invitation of an anti-clerical society, set up three months before. The theme of the meeting was ‘The Non-Existence of God’ and ended with a mass singing of The Internationale.

In October of that year she presented a number of anti-war meetings in the Allier department including at Montluçon, Commentry, Desertines and Domerat, which had been organised by local anarchist groups. The meeting at Montluçon, on the 20th of October, according to a local police report, was themed “War is a crime, desertion in an inconsequence, revolutionary government is a stupidity”. It had an audience of around fifty people. She also mentioned the recent arrest of the anarchist Louis Grandidier and announced the opening of a defence fund. The following day at Commentry she called the Army a school of vice and defender of the strong-boxes of the bourgeoisie, called the officer class bandits and assassins, incited to desertion and called for anti-militarist propaganda in the barracks, ending up by calling for the suppression of the Armies, countries, and governments “even” revolutionary ones (according to another police report). The meeting ended up with the singing of the anarchist song *Supprimons les Patries* (Suppress Countries).

After the law of the Separation of State and Churches was passed on the 5th of December, 1905, she toured the Périgord. At Montignac sur Vézère she was cheered by a crowd of one thousand, whilst at Saint Léon-sur Vézère, women banging cooking pots and saucepans welcomed her.

In 1906 she was arrested in Ales in the Gard in southern France for the double charge of “apology for crime” and “insulting the army.”

Martial Desmoulins, who mistakenly gives her the first name Amélie, recounted how he met her at the home of a friend the Jewish anarchist Alexandre Jacob in Nice at the beginning of the 1930s. Sébastien Faure, another anarchist veteran came down on a visit, and the pair recounted their memories according to Desmoulins. She arranged her meetings from town to town “often not having enough money to go to a hotel and take the train, sleeping in barns and going on the tramp”. She had visited every department in France bar two. She had welcomed the birth of the CGT with wonder, had taken part in its birth and organisation, and had then believed that the revolution was days and months away. Desmoulins went on to say that she retired to her home area of Charentes-Maritimes in 1934 and indeed the anarchist André Lorulot ran into her at La Rochelle in that year.

Maria Roda (1877–19??)

“Who knows poverty more than woman?”

– Maria Roda.

“Let’s show to the man who suppresses our will, who does not allow us to think and act freely, who considers us inferior to him, imposing on us his authority, as father, brother and husband, and, believing himself stronger than us, tramples us, oppresses us, and sometimes even hits us Let’s show him that we want freedom and equality too.”

– Maria Roda.

“Maria Rodda (sic) was the most exquisite creature I have ever seen. She was of medium height, and her well-shaped head, covered with black curls, rested like a lily of the valley on her slender neck. Her face was pale, her lips coral-red. Particularly striking were her eyes: large black coals fired by an inner light...Maria proved a veritable ray of sunlight to me.”

– Emma Goldman ‘Living My Life’.

Maria Roda was born in the town of Como in the Lombardy region of Italy in 1877, the daughter of Cesare Balzarini Roda and Monti Luigia. She learned silk weaving from her father, who was a textile worker and militant anarchist, one of the most active in Como. She found work as a teenager in the local mills. Her father’s house was a meeting place for local comrades or anarchists just passing through, recorded the police who had it under surveillance. Cesare had encouraged his four daughters to interest themselves in the ideals of anarchism, and they sang anarchist songs as they walked on the streets.

The family eventually moved to Milan, a city that offered better wages and employment opportunities. Though only in her teens, she was fined and imprisoned for a period of three months for her activity during a strike she had helped organise in the mill where she worked. The French anarchist Zo d’Axa, on the run from the French authorities wrote about the trial of the young anarchist girls, Ernesta Quartirolo aged 14 and Maria aged 15 saying that they had incited the demonstrators to attack the police. Maria said in court in reply to the court: “I pity this guard. I pity him because he barely earns his bread, because he’s a poor devil. But it impresses me to see him go after other poor devils, his brothers...let him think about this.” They each received three months imprisonment for this as well as heavy fines. Zo remarked, “It is said over and over that Milan is a little Paris. The magistrates of Milan prove this, at least on one point; they are every bit as repugnant as their Parisian confreres”.

In Milan, Maria met Malatesta at an anarchist congress, as well as the Spanish Catalan anarchist Pedro Esteve, who was later to be her life long companion. At some point Maria moved to France. There she was arrested along with other members of an anarchist group, following the assassination of President Sadi Carnot of France by one of the group’s members, Sante Caserio. Maria had gone to school with Caserio where both had been taught by the fiery socialist poet Ada Negri. On her release, she immigrated to the United States, arriving there with her father and a younger sister in 1892 after stays in Portugal and England. She and her father joined the Gruppo Diritto all’Esistenza which included Maria Barbieri and other Italian anarchist im-

migrants. She began to organise textile workers in Paterson. Emma Goldman heard her speak alongside Voltairine de Cleyre and the English anarchist Charles Mowbray at a meeting set up to welcome Goldman home following her release from Blackwell's Island. Roda addressed the Italian comrades present in the hall to welcome Emma home after her term of imprisonment. A skilled orator and organiser she also wrote for 'La Questione Sociale', organ of the Paterson group.

Maria helped found a gruppo anarchico femminile (anarchist women's group) called the Gruppo Emancipazione della Donna (Women's Emancipation Group) in 1897. Announcing that women were meeting separately in 'La Question Sociale' she wrote "and it is right because we feel and suffer; we too want to immerse ourselves in the struggle against this society, because we too feel from birth, the need to be free, to be equal". It had connections with French feminists through a journal called 'Feminist Action' started by Louise Réville. Over the next decade into the early 1900s the group established links with a similar woman's group in New York City and established a network with other women workers throughout the States and internationally. This included in Philadelphia and Boston and among the mining communities of Pennsylvania, Illinois and Vermont.

They discussed and wrote about the specific problems and struggles of women whilst uniting with men in the common struggle of the workers movement and the anarchist movement. Italian anarchist women formed one of the first locals of the Industrial Workers of the World in Paterson.

Maria moved in with Pedro Esteve who along with the Italian Pietro Gori had established 'La Questione Sociale'.

While raising eight children and working in the silk mills, Maria and Pedro became leading lights within the anarchist and workers movement in Paterson. Maria and Pedro regularly went to Tampa and New York City to help the struggles of Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, Spanish, and Italian textile, cigar, and dock workers.

According to her son Sirio she turned to Rosicrucianism in later years.

Maria Zazzi (1904–1993)

“The anarchist movement is always my point of reference, the idea is always the same and I am happy to see young comrades work with conviction”

— Maria Zazzi.

Born on the 10th of June, 1904, at Coli, in Italy, Maria Zazzi emigrated to France at the age of 19 to join her brother Luigi, whose wife had just died. Luigi was a maximalist socialist and had fled Italy to escape fascist persecution. Maria then moved to Paris, where she moved in Italian exile circles. She moved towards anarchism, and established a relationship with the Bolognese anarchist Armando Malaguti. Her involvement in propaganda and solidarity work was much appreciated in this exile community, among which she had a good friendship with the Berneri anarchist family.

She was among the few anarchist women activists and gained respect for her energetic activity and her strong personality. The French authorities expelled Malaguti at the beginning of 1927 and she moved with him to Luxembourg, and then to Belgium. At Brussels, Maria got to know Russian anarchist Ida Mett and her companion Nicolas Lazarevitch, and then Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco Ascaso. One member of the group in which she was involved was the university professor Giulio Manon, who was sentenced to 10 years for putting a bomb in the house of a judge who had handed out a heavy sentence to a young anarchist.

She was heavily involved in propaganda work and visited prisoners, pretending to be their aunt, earning her the nickname of Aunt Marie!

She was active in Brussels, alongside Angelo Sbardello and Bruno Gualandi in the defence campaign of Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, which ended on the day of their execution with a general strike in Belgium in which workers turned out en masse despite the disapproval of the union officials. This was in no small way thanks to the activities of the three comrades who had heavily leafleted the trams in Brussels at rush hour time, whilst the union bureaucrats did little to mobilise.

Hunted down by the Belgian police, Maria and Armando left for Paris in 1932. There they met Ukrainian former guerrilla Nestor Makno and Volin. Up until 1936, the couple went between Brussels and Paris. Maria remarked about all these outstanding anarchists that she had met that they were all extraordinary, all modest and sharing an exceptional camaraderie. The press depicted them as people of action, but they were as at home with ideas and were all able to defend themselves well in debate.

In August 1936, after the start of the Spanish Civil War and Revolution Armando enrolled in the Ascaso Column in Spain and he fought at Monte Pelato on the Aragon Front. Maria moved to Barcelona to take part in the Revolution. For Maria arriving in Barcelona was like entering another world where one lived in full solidarity and comradeship. Malaguti was arrested in France in March 1937 whilst on leave in France and Maria returned to Paris to arrange support for the returning comrades, finding shelter and documents for them.

With the German invasion Maria was arrested by the Gestapo and interrogated for three days about the whereabouts of Armando, which she refused to divulge. Armando was soon arrested and deported to a concentration camp in Germany, and later moved to Ventotene in Italy. In 1942 Maria herself tried to cross the Italian border and eventually got to Ventotene. Subsequently Armando was transferred to Ustica and then to the concentration camp of Renicci d'Anghiari from which he escaped on the 8th of September, 1943. The couple then worked in Bologna in anti-fascist activity.

Armando died in 1955 and Maria established a relationship with the anarchist Alfonso "Libero" Fantazzini, who had fought as a partisan and who she was already acquainted from her exile years. Their home became an important reference point for anarchists living in Bologna or visiting, thanks to the hospitality of the two old militants. Despite her fragile appearance Maria maintained a contagious energy. She had a quasi-maternal role for the young militants of the new generation and became a tutor of Libero's son, Horst – later famous for his exploits as "the gentleman bank-robber" and his long periods of imprisonment!

During the 1970s she was active in agitating for the release of framed anarchist Valpreda. She took part in the conferences and meetings of the Italian Anarchist Federation up till the 80s when she was struck down with a grave form of paresis. Her illness and the imprisonment of his son caused a rapid psycho-physical deterioration in the health of Fantazzini and he died on the 14th of December, 1985. Maria spent the last years of her life in a hospice, dying in Bologna on the 5th of January, 1993.

Appendix: Women and Anarchism

“[We] women must simply take our place without begging for it.”

– Louise Michel.

At first sight, the compatibility of anarchism and women’s liberation seems clear. Anarchism proclaims itself against all hierarchies which would include the oppression of women.

Michael Bakunin, a founding figure of Anarchism, was to say: “Oppressed women! Your cause is indissolubly tied to the common cause of all the exploited workers – men and women!” and calls for the emancipation of women are included in the various programmes developed by Bakunin and his associates in the 1860s and 1870s. For instance, we can read in the Principles and Organisation of the International Brotherhood (1866) that:

“Woman, differing from man but not inferior to him, intelligent, industrious, and free like him, is declared his equal both in rights and in political and social functions and duties.” He was to note that “In the eyes of the law even the best educated, talented, intelligent woman is inferior to even the most ignorant man.”

Bakunin argued for the sexual freedom of women, remarking that the Law subjects women to “the absolute domination of the man”¹. However, Bakunin himself was as much a peddler of outmoded views as others. At a dinner in Zurich, he noticed a woman drinking a glass of wine and remarked that he did not approve of women drinking. A discussion on women’s rights followed with Bakunin still maintaining that he did not like to see women drinking and smoking! This graphically illustrates the clash between theories of emancipation and the dead weight of antiquated ideas enshrined as custom and stereotype. Fortunately, women in the main from the Russian aristocracy and intelligentsia had begun to take an active and courageous part in revolutionary movements and were pioneers in emancipated behaviour.

While at least Bakunin had, in theory, enlightened views on the liberation of women, his precursor the Frenchman Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was deeply reactionary in this respect. He blustered that “Genius is virility of spirit and its accompanying powers of abstraction, generalisation, creation, and conception; the child, the eunuch, and the woman lack these gifts in equal measure.” Woman was created by nature merely as a organism for reproduction, and she was physically inferior to Man. Proudhon backed these views up with various pseudo-scientific theories. Outside of a reproductive role woman had no reason to exist and cost more to Man than he earns. Woman had only two roles open to her “housewife or harlot”. He went on to say that the killing of wives was justified for such things as “adultery, impudence, treason, drunkenness or debauchery, wastefulness or theft, and persistent insubordination.” Proudhon laced these fulminations with tirades against lechery and pederasty (Above quotes from *La justice dans la revolution et dans l’église*, 1858).

Proudhon’s views on women were to be strongly contested by Juliette Lambert (Adam) who replied with her book *Idees Anti- Proudhonniennes sur la femme, l’amour et le mariage*, Anti-

¹ Quoted in Dolgoff, Bakunin on Anarchy,

Proudhonist ideas on Woman , Love and Marriage (1858), who castigated “men like Proudhon, who want to return us to patriarchy by imprisoning women in the family”, by Jenny d’Héricourt who stated that Proudhon saw Woman as a “a perpetual invalid, who should be shut up in a gynoeceum in company with a dairy maid” (La Femme Affranchie, 1860) and by Joseph Déjacque, who had far more revolutionary and advanced views than Proudhon. As Déjacque remarked in 1882:

“Is it possible, great publicist, that under your lion’s skin so much of the ass may be found? [...] Father Proudhon, shall I say it? When you talk of women you appear like a college boy who talks very loudly and in a high key, at random and with impertinence, in order to appear learned, as you do to your callow hearers, and who like you knows not the first thing of the matter he is talking about [...] Listen, Master Proudhon! Before you talk of woman, study her; go to school. Stop calling yourself an anarchist, or be an anarchist clear through. Talk to us, if you wish to, of the unknown and the known, of God who is evil, of property which is robbery; but when you talk of man do not make him an autocratic divinity, for I will answer you that man is evil. Attribute not to him a stock of intelligence which belongs to him only by right of conquest, by the commerce of love, by usury on the capital that comes entirely from woman and is the product of the soul within her. Dare not to attribute to him that which he has derived from another or I will answer you in your own words: “Property is robbery” [...] Raise your voice, on the contrary, against the exploitation of woman by man”². As the anarchist Elisée Reclus was to later say disapprovingly about Proudhon “...his words on women are still for all of us those which weigh most heavily.”

Women were to enter the anarchist movement precisely because they were attracted by these new liberating ideas of emancipation and equality. Everywhere they were forced to fight against the hidebound attitudes and prejudices of their male comrades. Nevertheless they persisted. Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Louise Michel, and Lucy Parsons are the names that come to mind if one thinks of anarchist women but there were many others just as determined, devoted and courageous. This pamphlet makes an attempt to illuminate the lives of these lesser known women anarchists (and precisely because they have received so much attention elsewhere is the reason for biographies of Goldman et al not to be included here).

The great French anarchist and Communard Louise Michel was to say:

“The first thing that must change is the relationship between the sexes. Humanity has two parts, men and women, and we ought to be walking hand in hand; instead there is antagonism, and it will last as long as the ‘stronger’ half controls, or thinks it controls, the ‘weaker’ half.”³

While a modern understanding of gender contradicts the idea of there being two essential genders, the core of this idea that we must fight against systems of oppression based upon gendered traits holds true.

When women in the anarchist movement began to organise independently, as in Argentina and Spain, they met with opposition from some of their male counterparts. In Argentina, anarchist women organised around the newspaper ‘La Voz de la Mujer’ (Woman’s Voice). To quote ‘No God, No Boss, No Husband’⁴: “La Voz de la Mujer described itself as “dedicated to the advancement of Communist Anarchism.” Its central theme was that of the multiple nature of women’s oppression. An editorial asserted, “We believe that in present-day society nothing and nobody has

² On The Human Being, Male and Female, 1857

³ Memoirs of Louise Michel

⁴ libcom.org group

a more wretched situation than unfortunate women.” Women, they said, were doubly oppressed – by bourgeois society and by men”. This was greeted enthusiastically in some quarters of the Argentinean movement. However, an article in ‘La Voz de La Mujer’ indicated fierce opposition too:

“When we women, unworthy and ignorant as we are, took the initiative and published La Voz de la Mujer, we should have known, Oh modem rogues, how you would respond with your old mechanistic philosophy to our initiative. You should have realized that we stupid women have initiative and that is the product of thought. You know – we also think ... The first number of La Voz de la Mujer appeared and of course, all hell broke loose: ‘Emancipate women? For what?’ ‘Emancipate women? Not on your nelly!’ ... ‘Let our emancipation come first, and then, when we men are emancipated and free, we shall see about yours.’”⁵.

The emergence in Spain of the libertarian women’s organisation Mujeres Libres during the Revolution and Civil War brought similar controversies. As Martha A. Ackelsberg noted in ‘Separate and equal: Mujeres Libres and anarchist strategy for women’s emancipation’⁶:

“While committed to the creation of an egalitarian society, Spanish anarchists exhibited a complex attitude toward the subordination of women. Some argued that women’s subordination stemmed from the division of labour by sex, from women’s “domestication” and consequent exclusion from the paid labour force. To overcome it, women would have to join the labour force as workers, along with men, and struggle in unions to improve the position of all workers. Others insisted that women’s subordination was the result of broad cultural phenomena, and reflected a devaluation of women and their activities mediated through institutions such as family and church. That devaluation would end, along with those institutions, with the establishment of anarchist society.

But the subordination of women was at best a peripheral concern of the anarchist movement as a whole. Most anarchists refused to recognise the specificity of women’s subordination, and few men were willing to give up the power over women they had enjoyed for so long. As the national secretary of the CNT wrote in 1935, in response to a series of articles on the women’s issue: “We know it is more pleasant to give orders than to obey.... Between the woman and the man the same thing occurs. The male feels more satisfied having a servant to make his food, wash his clothes.... That is reality. And, in the face of that, to ask that men cede [their privileges] is to dream.”

The attitude of Saturnino Carod, a leader of an anarchist column on the Aragon front, sums up the attitudes of many male anarchists to the question of women’s liberation in a society deeply infused with attitudes of machismo and male superiority. He was to say: “Despite everything that is said about the liberation of women, one must take into account woman’s social role, particularly as mother, and protect her from the sort of work that requires great strength. It was not right that a single woman who needed to earn her living had to work the land like a man...”⁷

Today we are still faced with many problems that have to be overcome. Recent revelations within the authoritarian left have revealed a culture that is predisposed to the cover-up of rape and abuse against women and a subsequent closing of ranks by the leadership and a large part of the party membership. We should not be so smug as to think that similar problems do not ex-

⁵ See the biography of Virginia Bolten in this pamphlet for

⁶ libcom.org

⁷ Interviewed in *The Blood of Spain*, Ronald Fraser,

ist within the anarchist movement and that women do not face problems of sexual harassment, belittling from male comrades, not being taken seriously, and so on. If we are to construct a relevant anarchist movement then we must take up the call for women's liberation. This means not just around the question of collective child care, the need for socialised crèches both within the movement and in society as a whole, birth control and contraception, for the rights of bodily autonomy the whole question of unwaged work, the need to transform housework, the struggle around equal pay, but also against the objectification and role stereotyping of women in advertising and the media, against sexual harassment in the street, at work and in the home, for open access to medical aids to transition; all told, the struggle against structural misogyny and its intersecting forms such as transmisogyny and misogynoir.

These are concrete struggles that must be seriously addressed within our movement.

Without such developments any attempt at social revolution will be inadequate and ignored by women looking for a radical break with this corrupt, oppressive and hierarchical system.

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more information

[separate-equal%E2%80%9D-mujeres-libres-anarchist-strategy-women%E2%80%99s-emancipation](#)

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Further Reading

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