The Welsh Anarchists

Jim Colton

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Impossible to say when the idea of Anarchism first came into Wales. It was certainly in the 19th century because in the 1890s the London group was explaining that though it had such a cosmopolitan membership it could deal with correspondence in every European language and many Asiatic ones, "Welsh unfortunately is not one of them, and we have had to ask our comrades to write in English," (according to the late George Cores' letters).

Around the turn of the century there were numerous Anarchist groups. The most prominent speaker was a miner named Sam Mainwaring, who was one of the most active advocates of what became the "Triple Alliance" unionism and introduced Syndicalism.

Mainwaring, who came from Neath, Glam. – near Swansea – was known throughout Wales as the pioneer of revolutionary syndicalism, even more than Tom Mann. He wrote many pamphlets, all in Welsh, none of which appear to be extant.

He it was (according to Matt Kavanagh) who first used the term "anarcho-syndicalism" to explain his difference with Tom Mann, Guy Bowman and others. This did not prevent them working together, as all were undoubtedly revolutionary syndicalists.

His nephew, also Sam, carried on the Anarchist movement amongst the Welsh miners, almost alone towards the finish, until his death in about 1942. Time and again during the Spanish War he raised at the miners' conference the fact that the OP leadership of the NUM was discriminating against the CNT miners in Spain.

Another active Anarchist miner in the '20s was James Colton, whose militancy and record has been overshadowed by the fact that he married Emma Goldman.

(On a tour of the mining areas, extremely unpopular because of her stand on Russia, she was facing both constant threat of deportation and the impossibility of leaving England: at that time it was easy for a woman, by marriage, to acquire British nationality).

She was the first to admit that his record in the movement outstripped hers. In the days of the syndicalist movement he had been a popular orator, speaking to thousands of miners with fervent oratory and applause.

Because he opposed the Russian dictatorship, he was all but thrown out of the union and his job; faced abuse and ostracism and doggedly kept on speaking.

These are only three of the "old brigade". The young Welsh comrades should take pride in following their tradition.

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