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Louis Lecoin

May Picqueray

My enthusiasm for anarchism went in all directions. I was at risk of becoming inefficient, spreading my energies too thin. Chance made me cross paths with Louis Lecoin. It was in 1921 that I first met him. From that moment on, I spent most of my time making war to war.

Louis Lecoin was just out from the prison of Albertville after an eight-year sentence for antimilitarism. What stroke me first were his blue eyes which glistened with intelligence, with a touch of mischievousness, but also his goodness, his energy, and his courage. He even courted me for a short while. But, at 20, I thought this great man was too small. This did not stop us from being good friends all our lives.

I was not disappointed, the legend about him seemed justified. I knew him well from what Sébastien Faure, Pierre Le Meillour and other people had told me, with such warmth, such love! I knew all the things for which he had been imprisoned: his refusal, as a young soldier, to march against train workers on strike, and to shoot at them, defying the military machine of which he was a part. His campaign against the war, in 1914, the thousand leaflets he had distributed, his long years in jail, punctuated with hunger strikes to demand the reestablishment

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of the status of political prisoners, and for it to be granted to the anarchist comrade Jeanne Morand, unjustly suspected of intelligence with the enemy.

Louis Lecoin was to us, young libertarians, young syndicalists, an example to follow. He had proven us that we could be at the same time syndicalists, libertarians, and antimilitarists.

When he got out he became the administrator of *Le Liberaire*, the newspaper of the Union Anarchiste, which did not prevent him from being a militant in his union (the builders' union) and to intervene energetically and efficiently at the Lille congress in 1921 and Saint Etienne in 1922.

Like most of us, he felt enthusiastic about the Russian revolution, from which we expected great things, and which only brought us disillusion, but he resisted being enrolled into the Communist Party, unlike some other comrades.

In 1921, he led a campaign to avoid the extradition of three Spanish men: Ascaso, Durruti, and Jover, sentenced in Argentina pretendingly for some robbery, but in fact for being anarchists. Their extradition was imminent: a cruiser was coming to get them. He reached out to the highest political and judiciary figures, and, finally, won their case.

He also worked to avoid the deportations of Camille Berneri and Nestor Makhno and managed to save them.

But his biggest case was the Sacco and Vanzetti affair.