

Rebel Youths

English-language anarchist periodicals of the Great Depression, 1932–1939

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Contents

Abstract	3
Rebel Youths	6
Anyone for tennis?	12
Networkers	16
Conclusion	20
Author biographies/Acknowledgements	21

Abstract

This article examines the function of anarchist periodicals in the United States during the Great Depression. Periodicals acted as forums for debate, where ideas were constantly challenged and important theoretical issues were aired. This was both within anarchism and between the wider radical movement. In addition, periodicals were important organisational tools, creating networks that connected activists across the country and helped to build the movement. Young anarchists identified English-language periodicals as vital for breaking through the linguistic barriers erected by the older generation of immigrant anarchists. The new cohort felt that the reluctance of older anarchists to engage in English-language organising was contributing to the stagnation of the movement and produced three periodicals – Vanguard, Spanish Revolution and Challenge – to address the problem. This article shows how these periodicals helped to reform and sustain anarchist militant identities in the U.S. in the 1930s. It highlights the importance of periodical networks in this process, emphasising their social and cultural value in addition to their political and financial significance. Although all the periodicals had folded by the end of 1939, they left an important legacy for the movement and provided an introduction to anarchist organising for a fresh cadre of activists.

Keywords: anarchism, Spanish Revolution, Great Depression, youth, networks, Vanguard, periodicals, Challenge

In May 1937, Henry Black, the librarian of Commonwealth College in Mena, AR, self-published a pamphlet outlining a debate at the American Library Association conference two years earlier in Denver, CO, which discussed ‘the place of radical periodicals in libraries’.¹ Black believed it was imperative that libraries stock radical periodicals, from both a practical and a moral standpoint. He argued that, regardless of what librarians may think of such publications, they ‘contain an immense amount of important reference material on labor unions, politics, civil liberties, negroes [sic], farm problems, literacy and artistic criticism, international relations, and other topics without which the library’s collection will be extremely deficient’. Even if radical publications appeared ‘biased’ – even dangerous – Black maintained that ‘No library can afford to ignore them merely because of their political complexion.’²

The place of radical periodicals in the library is now largely recognised, but their place in periodical studies, as a discipline, is less certain. I take my definition of ‘radical periodical’ from Dirk Hoerder: namely, any regularly appearing newspaper, newsletter, bulletin, magazine, journal or serial that was produced ‘in the avowed interest of the working class – where that class was thought to have interests different from those of other social classes or actively opposed to them’.³ What exactly is unique about ‘radical periodicals’ that differs from other periodicals, and

¹ Henry Black, “Radical Periodicals and their Place in the Library (May 1937),” reprinted in *Progressive Librarian* 17 (Summer 2000): 58; Black was a pioneer of left-wing librarians who were active in the 1930s and 1940s, most notably through the Progressive Librarians Council. He became librarian at the Jefferson School of Social Science in 1948 and, after it was forced to shut down due to government pressure in 1956, at the Social Science Library in New York City: U.S. Congress, *House Committee on Un-American Activities, Hearings 1959* (Washington: U.S. Congress, 1959), 1002–3.

² Black, *Radical Periodicals and Their Place in the Library*, 60–1.

³ Dirk Hoerder, “An Internationally Mobile Working Class and Its Press in North America: A Survey,” in *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s–1970: Vol. 1: Migrants From Northern Europe*, ed. Dirk Hoerder and Christiane Harzig (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 8–9.

what can they tell us about nineteenth and twentieth century history, print culture and publishing networks that others cannot? There has been a reasonable degree of attention in periodical studies paid to one sub-group of the radical milieu – anarchism – with a special edition on ‘Anarchism’s Modernisms’ produced by the *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* in 2013.⁴ As the title of the issue suggests, however, much of the literature on anarchist periodicals in recent years has attempted (somewhat) to shoehorn modernism into discussions of anarchism. Patrick Collier views this as part of a wider issue within periodical studies in that there is a tendency to ‘treat modernist literature and art as the central touchstones of the period’, even in periodicals that had little interest in artistic and literary experimentation.⁵ Kathy E. Ferguson shows that Emma Goldman’s *Mother Earth*, for example, was pioneering in its attempts to engage with modernist aesthetics.⁶ However, *Mother Earth* was pioneering precisely because it was different to most other anarchist periodicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in its attention to form as well as function.⁷ Goldman later complained that ‘Usually our comrades think the ugliest get up of a paper is good enough for the masses.’⁸ Anarchist publications in this period tended to eschew the formal innovations now associated with modernist aesthetics.

Anarchist periodicals generally had a more practical purpose: to expose the wider public to radical ideas; keep activists in different parts of the country (and, indeed, the wider world) in touch; update comrades with significant (particularly labour) news; and to raise support for various causes – ultimately, to build the movement. They provided a focal point for activity and a means of individual and collective self-expression, through both the editorial process and the submission of articles by activists. They functioned, to use the Austrian anarchist Max Nettlau’s phrase, as ‘spheres of intellectual exchange’, and were crucial to maintaining the movement’s intellectual vibrancy.⁹ In the United States, they also acted as networks for radical immi-

⁴ Allan Antliff, “Introduction: Anarchism’s Modernisms,” *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 4 (2013): iii–v; See also Linda L. Lumsden, “Anarchy Meets Feminism: A Gender Analysis of Emma Goldman’s *Mother Earth*, 1906–1917,” *American Journalism* 24 (2007): 31–54.

⁵ Patrick Collier, “What Is Modern Periodical Studies?” *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 6 (2015): 96.

⁶ Kathy E. Ferguson, “Assemblages of Anarchists: Political Aesthetics in *Mother Earth*,” *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 4 (2013): 171–94; Emma Goldman was born in the Russian Empire in 1869 and moved to the US in 1885, where she became an anarchist. Her firebrand style and fierce defence of individual liberty earned her a reputation as ‘the most dangerous woman in America’. She founded the anarchist journal *Mother Earth* in 1906, which ran until 1917 when the US Justice Department seized its contents. Goldman was deported for her anti-conscription activities the following year. She later toured Europe lecturing about anarchism and drama before working for the British anarchist movement during the Spanish Civil War. She died whilst on a tour of Canada in 1940. See Theresa Moritz, *The World’s Most Dangerous Woman: A New Biography of Emma Goldman* (Vancouver: Subway Books, 2001); Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

⁷ See Peter Glassgold, “Introduction,” in *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, ed. Peter Glassgold (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), xviii; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Cosimo, 2011), 395.

⁸ Emma Goldman (St Tropez) to Mercedes Comaposada (Madrid), 24 June 1936 (International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam (IISH), Emma Goldman Papers (EGP), 67).

⁹ In Davide Turcato, “Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement, 1885–1915,” *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007): 412; Nettlau was born in Vienna in 1865. He joined the Socialist League whilst visiting London, where he met William Morris, and later helped to found the Freedom Press. He was committed to preserving the literary heritage of anarchism, and spent several years cataloguing his extensive archive for the IISH in Amsterdam, where he died in 1944. See Bert Altena, “A Networking Historian: The Transnational, the National, and the Patriotic in and around Max Nettlau’s *Geschichte der Anarchie*,” in *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, ed. Constance Bantman and Bert Altena (New York: Routledge, 2015), 62–79.

grant communities, with different ethnic groups producing publications in their native tongue.¹⁰ This included the Spanish (*Cultura Obrera* (1911–27); *Cultura Proletaria* (1927–53)); Italian (*Il Martello* (1916–46); *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* (1922–71)); German (*Freiheit* (1879–1910)); Russian (*Delo Truda* (1927–39)); and Jewish/Yiddish (*Freie Arbeiter Stimme* (1890–1977)) movements.¹¹

These periodical networks (which were frequently transnational in nature) were an important link between anarchist activists across the U.S., both in terms of their politics and their home culture.¹² They allowed anarchists to maintain contact with their comrades in the diaspora and informed them of developments in the 'old country'. Nonetheless, the tendency of these immigrants to produce periodicals in their own language meant that organising amongst the 'native-born' English-speaking American working class was more difficult. An attempt to organise a Midwest Anarchist Conference in the late 1920s, for example, was scuppered partly by the insularity of the different immigrant communities present. The anarchist Rose Krutchkoff of Cleveland remarked of her own group during the conference: 'Well, the Italians don't believe in conventions and the two Jews are not on speaking terms.'¹³ By the onset of the 1930s, as Kenyon Zimmer highlights, 'the need for English-language literature was a constant topic of discussion'.¹⁴

This article focuses on the attempts of younger activists to break through the linguistic boundaries contributing to the perceived stagnation of the movement. It examines three English-language periodicals set up from their base in New York City: *Vanguard* (1932–9), *Spanish Revolution* (1936–8) and *Challenge* (1938–9).¹⁵ Through an analysis of these periodicals in addition to the correspondence, memoirs and oral histories of the participants, I will show how anarchist militant identities were reformed and sustained in the U.S. in the 1930s. Drawing on scholarship in social network theory and periodical studies, I define networks as 'sets of actors linked across country [or city/state] boundaries, bound together by shared values,

¹⁰ Paul Avrich maintains that anarchism, 'for all its international pretensions, for all its faith in the unity of mankind, has always been divided into national and ethnic groups': Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 315.

¹¹ The strongest of these networks during the 1920s and 1930s were the Italian and Spanish movements, due primarily to their commitment to antifascism: see *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture*, ed. Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport: Praeger, 2003); Ana María Varela-Lago, "Conquerors, Immigrants, Exiles: The Spanish Diaspora in the United States (1848–1948)" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008), 245–70; The German anarchist Johann Most began producing *Freiheit* from London in 1879. He continued to publish the newspaper following his move to New York in 1882: see Tom Goyens, *Revolution and Beer: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); The Russian and Jewish movements became weaker following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the attraction of Soviet communism to the immigrant diaspora: see Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 315–90.

¹² The internationalist character of anarchism encouraged connections to be formed across state or national boundaries. Constance Bantman and Bert Altena even suggest that 'transnationalism seems to be a natural characteristic of anarchist movements': Constance Bantman and Bert Altena, "Introduction," in *Reassessing the Transnational Turn*, 7.

¹³ Sam Dolgoff, *Fragments: A Memoir* (Cambridge: Refract Publications, 1986), 49.

¹⁴ Kenyon Zimmer, "'The Whole World is Our Country': Immigration and Anarchism in the United States, 1885–1940" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2010), 395.

¹⁵ New York was historically the strongest area of American anarchism, primarily due to its function as the main port for migration from Europe. Of the 25 highest circulating anarchist periodicals from 1872 to 1940, almost half were produced in New York. Other important anarchist hubs included Detroit, Chicago and San Francisco, with smaller networks in Tampa, Boston, Los Angeles and Philadelphia: Kenyon Zimmer, "Anarchist Newspapers and Periodicals, 1872–1940," last modified March 2, 2018, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/anarchist_map-newspapers.shtml.

dense exchanges of information and services, and common discourses'.¹⁶ I argue along with David Featherstone that networks not only transmit information, but shape 'particular kinds of connection and radical identities'.¹⁷ Given the absence of concrete institutional links (e.g., political parties or trade unions) within the anarchist movement, periodicals were particularly important in forging links between activists and shaping activist identities.¹⁸

These periodicals signalled an important change in anarchist tactics in the U.S. Although all had folded through lack of funds by the end of 1939, they left an important legacy for the movement and provided an introduction to anarchist organising for a fresh cadre of activists. They were sites at which a new generation of anarchist activists and thinkers were forged, and where many personal relationships were cemented and, occasionally, broken. Although the 1930s is often seen as a period where anarchism was weak throughout the globe, these periodicals show a vibrant, if small, movement in the U.S. that sought tirelessly to bring anarchist ideas to the masses in a period where internal and external factors made this increasingly difficult.¹⁹

Rebel Youths

Piotr Kropotkin, the Russian anarcho-communist, described anarchists as constituting the 'left-wing' of the socialist movement.²⁰ Like others on the radical left, anarchists see capitalism as inherently malevolent, the effects of which cannot be ameliorated through reformist measures. Unlike Marxists, however, who seek to gain control of the state to establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and smash the capitalist class, anarchists reject both a bourgeois and workers' state.²¹ Instead, they desire 'a federation of free communities which shall be bound to one another by their common economic and social interests and shall arrange their affairs by mutual agreement and free contract'.²² During the 1930s, their hostility to authoritarianism and centralisation isolated them from the majority of the socialist movement, which looked to government programmes to ease problems of unemployment and economic distress. Many radical leftists viewed the 'economic miracle' in the Soviet Union as inspirational following the appar-

¹⁶ Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker and Kathryn Sikkink, "From Santiago to Seattle: Transnational Advocacy Groups Restructuring World Politics," in *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, ed. Sanjeev Khagram and Kathryn Sikkink (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 7.

¹⁷ David Featherstone, "The spatial politics of the past unbound: transnational networks and the making of political identities," *Global Networks* 7 (2007): 443.

¹⁸ Bantman and Altena note that, unlike other many other leftist movements, the anarchist movement was uniquely individualised, since its relations 'hinge on individuals and networks rather than on institutions': Bantman and Altena, *Introduction*, 9.

¹⁹ The 'heyday' of anarchism came around the turn of the twentieth century, with interest in anarcho-syndicalism peaking in the 1910s. By the 1930s, a combination of state repression, dwindling finances, the attraction of other ideologies (particularly Soviet communism after the Russian Revolution of 1917), and factional disputes led to the slow decline of the anarchist movement in all but a few countries. See George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1962); Richard Bach Jensen, "The International Campaign against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880s–1930s," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (2009): 89–109; James Joll, *The Anarchists* (London: Routledge, 1979); Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970).

²⁰ Piotr Kropotkin, "'Anarchism' from *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*," in *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, ed. Marshall Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 234–5.

²¹ Colin Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–3; Anarchist intellectual Diego Abad de Santillán argued that the 'state can no more fraternize with liberty than water with fire': Diego Abad de Santillán, *After the Revolution* (New York: Greenberg, 1937), 44.

²² Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2004), 1.

ent ‘collapse of capitalism’ after the Wall Street Crash of 1929.²³ While the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) eventually supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, anarchists continued to criticise increasing state interference in the economy as pernicious.²⁴ Vanguard group member Sam Dolgoff criticised liberals for failing to comprehend that ‘giving the state more power over the economic life of the people prepares the ground for Fascism’.²⁵ Ralph Chaplin, a leading member of the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies), later maintained that ‘We were indignant at the capitalists, disgusted with the conservatives, full of apprehensions about the Communist[s] boring from within, and fearful of the neoliberal bid for power. A little more of this, and we wouldn’t have friends anywhere.’²⁶

It was in this difficult atmosphere that *Vanguard*, *Spanish Revolution* and *Challenge* formed. They were produced in activists’ spare time, often after returning from work or on weekends.²⁷ Louis Genin, who wrote for *Vanguard* and *Challenge*, later remembered that ‘Thinking back on it, it seems fantastic how we did it! How could I – working, married... write a weekly column? Where did I get the time?’²⁸ Although the periodicals’ creators came from a similar social and ideological background, each had a different focus. *Vanguard*, the first endeavour, devoted a considerable amount of space to theoretical problems facing the movement, as well as wider issues such as the role of labour during the New Deal, relations with others on the left, civil rights and developments abroad. The Vanguard group formed at the end of 1931 and contained 10 young working-class anarchists from the New York area, along with Russian-American anarchist Mark Schmidt, who became the group’s mentor.²⁹ Excluding Schmidt, who was in his mid-30s, the average age of the group was just under 22.³⁰ Abe Bluestein, who joined the group in 1932, edited

²³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 96–7; Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1999), 117–28.

²⁴ During the so-called Third Period (1928–1935), the Communist Party advocated an ultra-sectarian ‘class against class’ policy that categorised all non-communists as ‘social fascists’ and a hindrance to the social revolution. This changed during the Popular Front era (1935–1939) to a policy of coalitions with liberal and bourgeois elements as a defence against the rise of fascism. As a result, the CPUSA supported the ‘New Deal coalition’, and its membership rose steadily during the mid-1930s. After the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 this policy changed again, and the party denounced the Second World War as imperialist, but when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, American communists reverted to their earlier antifascist tactic and supported the Allied war effort. See Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

²⁵ *Vanguard*, March 1935, 12.

²⁶ Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948), 356; For the IWW, see Eric Thomas Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday: The Rise and Destruction of the Industrial Workers of the World during the World War I Era* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014); Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

²⁷ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 172.

²⁸ In Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 441–2.

²⁹ Schmidt was a Russian Jew who travelled to Russia during the 1917 Revolution. He returned to the US an anarchist, although ‘with strong Marxist leanings’, and eventually abandoned anarchism: Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 186; Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 453–4.

³⁰ Also present at the founding meeting were Clara Freedman (17 years old), Sidney Solomon (20), Louis Slater (21), Louis ‘Whitey’ Genin (21), Eddie Wong (31), Violet González (?), Glenn Carrington (27), Tommy Dolgoff (19, brother of Sam (29)) and Ruth (20) and Zina Dickstein (18): Clara Freedman Solomon, ‘A memoir: some anarchist activities in New York in the thirties and forties,’ last modified May 3, 2015, <https://libcom.org/history/memoir-some>

the periodical, the first edition of which appeared in April of the same year.³¹ Like many youths in the movement during the 1930s, Bluestein was the offspring of anarchists who had migrated to the United States. They often attended anarchist-inspired rationalist schools, such as the Ferrer Modern School in Stelton, NJ or the Ferrer School in New York City.³² They were brought up in the anarchist milieu but, unlike their parents, their first language was not Yiddish, Italian or Spanish, but English.³³ From their point of view, publishing in English was the best way of expanding anarchism beyond the diaspora. This was particularly important after the imposition of restrictive immigration controls by Congress during the 1920s that significantly curtailed the influx of foreign-born anarchists entering the United States.³⁴ In its declaration of principles, *Vanguard* railed against older comrades who were ‘cooped up within the confines of little national colonies’ and risked the movement ‘being relegated to the museum of antiquities’. It argued that there was ‘a new type of youth coming to the fore in American life; Rebellious, critical, iconoclastic, and contemptuous of the smug generalities of the older generation’.³⁵

Originally subtitled ‘An Anarchist Youth Publication’, *Vanguard* changed this in its second issue to ‘A Libertarian Communist Journal’.³⁶ Whilst an important target audience, *Vanguard*’s creators realised that they did not want to appeal exclusively to the youth of the movement. The group’s name reflected the new generation’s ambitious programme for anarchism in the U.S. They proclaimed their intention ‘to revive here, in America, the great anarchist idea of a revolutionary Vanguard, the anarchist idea of the role and place of an active revolutionary minority in the great mass struggles of today and the near future’.³⁷ This emphasis on organisation and militancy alarmed some older comrades, who described the Vanguard group as ‘anarcho-Bolsheviks’.³⁸ The journal replicated this ideological firmness. *Vanguard* explicitly stated its commitment to anarcho-communism and rejected individualist strands of anarchism that were popular in other publications such as *Man!* (1933–40), produced in San Francisco.³⁹ By maintaining a consistent

anarchist-activities-new-york-thirties-forties-clara-freedman-solomon; Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 410–49; Cunard Anchor US Trans, *New York Book Indexes to Passenger Lists, 1906–1942* (New York: Cunard Anchor US Trans, 1936), 765; “United States World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938–1946,” Database: *FamilySearch*, June 14, 2016, <https://FamilySearch.org>; Cunard-White Star Line Anchor Lines, *New York Book Indexes to Passenger Lists, 1906–1942* (New York: Cunard-White Star Line, 1938), 29.

³¹ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 435–8. Bluestein was 22 at the time.

³² See Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Florence Tager, “Politics and Culture in Anarchist Education: The Modern School of New York and Stelton, 1911–1915,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 16 (1986): 391–416.

³³ His father Mendel (originally from Russia) was a leading activist in the ILGWU. Others include Clara Freedman, Audrey Goodfriend and Roman Weinrebe: Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State*, 186; See Rebecca DeWitt, “Abe Bluestein: An Anarchist Life,” *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* 2 (1998): 9.

³⁴ The Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 actively targeted immigrants from countries that had a history of radicalism, particularly from southern and eastern Europe: Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 56–90; Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America: Through Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 62–72, 209–32.

³⁵ *Vanguard*, April 1932, 3.

³⁶ *Vanguard*, July 1932, 1. *Vanguard*, appearing monthly and with longer and more in-depth articles, can be described as a journal, whilst *Spanish Revolution* and *Challenge* were primarily newspapers.

³⁷ *Vanguard*, April 1932, 2. Clara Freedman called the name *chutzpa* (cheek/audacity), and a reflection of Schmidt’s ‘Marxist background’: Freedman, “A memoir”.

³⁸ Irving Sterling in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 458.

³⁹ Sam Dolgoff outlined the group’s ideology in a series of three articles entitled ‘Anarchist Communism’: *Vanguard*, July 1932, 6–8; *Vanguard*, August–September 1932, 6–9; *Vanguard*, November 1932, 11–13.

editorial line, the periodical hoped to avoid falling into the trap of *Road to Freedom* (1924–32), which, according to Sam Dolgoff, tended to accommodate several conflicting viewpoints within the same newspaper. This led to a situation where ‘one page laughed at the other page’, which ‘was bound to confuse and alienate the potential members we so desperately needed’.⁴⁰

Initially 12 pages, this rose to 16 pages in *Vanguard*’s second issue. Two 32-page editions were printed in 1936, but the majority of issues retained the 16-page format.⁴¹ The price was five cents, rising to 10 cents in March 1935.⁴² Although published irregularly, rarely holding to its claim as a monthly publication, *Vanguard* claimed 3000 subscribers in 1936 and its circulation had doubled by 1938.⁴³ Writing to Emma Goldman in November 1938, Vanguard group member Roman Weinrebe boasted that:

Thousands of our magazines are being sold among the seamen, especially those on the Pacific coast, who, despite the theoretical slant of the magazine, show an avid interest in our ideas. There is no doubt that a renewed interest is being shown in the ideas of Libertarian Communism among people who two or three years ago were Marxists.⁴⁴

However, their bold approach failed to gain the expected recognition from veteran anarchists. Clara Freedman, secretary of the Vanguard group, complained in 1938 that ‘we still have to contend with the lethargy and aloofness on the part of most of the older comrades’.⁴⁵

As the name suggests, *Spanish Revolution* was a response to the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), and provided a biweekly summation of the most important events affecting the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (National Confederation of Labour, CNT), *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI) and the wider antifascist movement in Spain.⁴⁶ Printed over four pages, it was moderately priced at two cents, rising to three cents in its second issue and five cents in October 1937.⁴⁷ The newspaper was a collaborative effort involving several members of the newly-formed United Libertarian Organizations (ULO). Although Mark Schmidt of the Vanguard group oversaw the production of each issue, editorial responsibility was shared. Russell Blackwell, a later convert to anarchism, noted that the newspaper’s editorial policies ‘were the collective responsibility of all. Most articles were unsigned since they expressed the ideas

⁴⁰ Dolgoff, *Fragments*, 11.

⁴¹ Of the 30 issues printed, 18 were 16 pages. Two issues had 32 pages, one had 31 pages, and five had 24 pages.

⁴² *Vanguard*, March 1935, 1.

⁴³ Sidney Solomon in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 450; Roman Weinrebe (New York) to Emma Goldman (London), 1 November 1938 (IISH, EGP, 81).

⁴⁴ Roman Weinrebe (New York) to Emma Goldman (London), 1 November 1938 (IISH, EGP, 81).

⁴⁵ Clara Freedman (New York) to Emma Goldman (London), 11 April 1938 (IISH, EGP, 81).

⁴⁶ The CNT had its first congress in Barcelona in 1911. Established as an anarcho-syndicalist trade union confederation, it consisted of regional, district and local federations of unions. By 1936, it claimed between 500,000 and a million members. The FAI was founded in 1927 as a peninsular association of anarchist affinity groups. Its membership was smaller, with a pre-civil war peak of 5500 affiliates in 1933, but more radical and intransigent in its anarchism: Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868–1936* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977), 160–1; Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 67; José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution* (3 vols., Hastings: ChristieBooks, 2001), i, 97; Stuart Christie, *We, the Anarchists! A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), 1927–1937* (Hastings: ChristieBooks, 2000), 21, 78.

⁴⁷ *Spanish Revolution*, August 19, 1936, 1; *Spanish Revolution*, September 5, 1936, 1, *Spanish Revolution*, October 22, 1937, 1.

of many people and their line had been worked out in general editorial meetings'.⁴⁸ The ULO was a coalition of various anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist groups and periodicals, including *Vanguard*, *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* and the Spanish Labor Press Bureau, run by Spanish-American anarchist Maximiliano Olay.⁴⁹ Walter Starrett, a veteran of the Freedom group, briefly took over production duties from Schmidt in the summer of 1937, before being replaced by Olay.⁵⁰ Many articles concentrated on the constructive work of the CNT–FAI in Spain, particularly the progress of anarchist collectives in areas such as Catalonia and Aragón.⁵¹ *Spanish Revolution* also printed important statements of the CNT and FAI, including appeals for help from the labour movement outside of Spain.⁵²

American anarchist newspaper sales bloomed during the civil war period, increasing from just over 25,000 in 1935 to more than 40,000 in 1938. The English-language press rose from a circulation of 7000 to an all-time high of 20,000 in the same period.⁵³ This was a reflection not only of an increase in interest in anarchism, but a wider curiosity about the CNT–FAI and their role in the Spanish conflict. At its height at the end of 1936, *Spanish Revolution* sold 7000 copies per issue.⁵⁴ Subscriber Fairfield Porter wrote in March 1938 that the newspaper was the 'fullest news bulletin I know of from Spain, and so should be supported by all anti-fascists no matter what their affiliations are'.⁵⁵ It also achieved a circulation across the Atlantic. Comrades in Britain sold *Spanish Revolution* at their meetings and American anarchists reciprocated by selling *Spain and the World* (1936–9), produced by Vernon Richards in London.⁵⁶ Several copies were sent to Spain, where volunteers for the International Brigades and sailors docking in Republican ports

⁴⁸ Russell Blackwell, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: Greenwood, 1968), in *Spanish Revolution: English Language Periodical of the United Libertarian Organizations in New York City*, last modified January 16, 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/history/spain/spanishrevolution/index.htm>.

⁴⁹ *Spanish Revolution*, September 5, 1936, 2; Dolgoff, *Fragments*, 17. Olay was born in Oviedo in 1893 and moved to the US aged 11. After working in cigar factories in Florida, he moved to Chicago in 1920 to work for a translation company. He set up his own translation business after the company went bankrupt. During the Spanish Civil War, he became chairman of the Committee for the Defense of Spanish Liberties, as well as the secretary of the CNT-FAI North American Bureau: Illinois Works Progress Administration (WPA), "Interview with Mr Maximilian Olay," December 22, 1936, last modified February 7, 2018, https://flps.newberry.org/article/5423405_1_0274.

⁵⁰ Walter Starrett (New York) to Abe Bluestein (Barcelona), 12 August 1937 (Joseph A. Labadie Collection, Special Collections, University of Michigan Library (LC), Van Valkenburgh Papers (VV), Correspondence, outgoing, SCW); Nemesio Galve (Paris) to Maximiliano Olay (New York), 16 December 1937 (IISH, CNT (*España*) Archives (CNT), 62B.3). Starrett struggled with drink during his later years, which may have been why he relinquished editorial duties in favour of Olay.

⁵¹ For more on the collectives, see Frank Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Management in Revolutionary Spain* (Oakland: AK Press, 2013); *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Free Life Editions, Inc., 1974); Yaacov Oved, "'Comunismo Libertario' and Communalism in the Spanish Collectivization (1936–1939)," in *Anarchism: Community and Utopia*, ed. Laslo Sekelj and Václav Tomek (Prague: Filosofický ústav, 1993), 167–95.

⁵² *Spanish Revolution*, August 19, 1936, 4.

⁵³ Zimmer, *The Whole World is Our Country*, 424.

⁵⁴ Dolgoff, *Fragments*, 19.

⁵⁵ *Spanish Revolution*, March 21, 1938, 4.

⁵⁶ Jack White (New York) to Tom Keell (Stroud), 18 January, 12 May 1937 (IISH, Freedom Archives (FA), 517).

such as Barcelona bought them.⁵⁷ The newspaper was published fairly regularly in comparison to *Vanguard*, publishing biweekly almost 60 per cent of the time until January 1938.⁵⁸

The Spanish Civil War was also a major reason for the creation of *Challenge*. Former *Vanguard* editor Abe Bluestein travelled to Barcelona in the spring of 1937 to work for the CNT–FAI Foreign Language Division. Whilst there, he edited the English-language bulletin, in addition to speaking on the English slot of Radio CNT–FAI. By the end of 1937, however, Bluestein had become disillusioned with the conduct of his comrades in Spain (see below) and returned to the U.S. keen to establish a newspaper critical of the Spanish anarchist leadership.⁵⁹ Back in New York, Bluestein found that people ‘who have always been Bolsheviks, Stalinists at first, then Trotskyists, are now turning to us. People who never went beyond the Socialist Party and reformistic [sic] parliamentarians today listen to us with sympathy, eager to learn – and to act’.⁶⁰ He created a periodical that drew inspiration from his time in Spain, but also from his comrades’ experiences in publishing earlier in the decade.

Challenge described itself as ‘the fighting organ for those workers who do not want to be hoodwinked, oppressed by “Economic Royalists” or dominated by dictators and politicians – left, right or center’.⁶¹ Like *Vanguard*, it sought to appeal to groups beyond the anarchist youth movement, although it did incorporate a youth section giving details of activities in the U.S. and information on how to participate for potential recruits. It also encouraged readers to send correspondence and suggestions regarding the establishment of a ‘Libertarian Youth Federation’ – a clear imitation of the Spanish anarchist *Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias* (Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth, FIJL).⁶² Published weekly, most of the work of assembling the four-page periodical was carried out by Bluestein. He remembered that it was ‘a very intense period... The publication was almost a one-person job. I had very little collaboration or assistance from other people. It was hard work’.⁶³ He was not alone in producing the newspaper, though: it was co-edited by Jean Mendez and Siegfried Nacht (under the pseudonym ‘Arnold Roller’). Lisa Luchovsky served as secretary and occasionally wrote poems appearing in the newspaper.⁶⁴ Louis Slater dealt with administration and fundraising issues in addition to supplying articles under the pseudonym ‘David Lawrence’. Slater later felt that it was ‘an exceptionally good piece of work by a group of young people who worked hard, after our regular jobs, put our all into it, wrote the paper, edited it, distributed it, and so on’.⁶⁵ Priced at five cents, the newspaper had

⁵⁷ Abe Bluestein (Barcelona) to Selma Cohen, 12 October 1937 (LC, Abe and Selma Bluestein Papers (ASBP), Box 1, Bluestein, Abe (to Selma Bluestein), 1937); Abe Bluestein (Barcelona) to Mark Mrachnyi (New York), 3 June 1937 (LC, Mark Mrachnyi Papers (MM), Box 1, Bluestein, Abe).

⁵⁸ The biggest delay was three weeks between printings, which happened on five occasions.

⁵⁹ For more on the Spanish anarchist movement during the civil war, see Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*; Robert Alexander, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War* (2 vols., London: Janus, 1999); Christie, *We, the Anarchists*; Abel Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ Abe Bluestein (New York) to Emma Goldman (London), 16 April 1938 (IISH, EGP, 58).

⁶¹ *Challenge*, May 28, 1938, 3. ‘Economic Royalists’ was a favourite phrase of President Roosevelt to criticise opponents, generally within finance and industry, who did not support the New Deal: G. William Domhoff and Michael J. Webber, *Class and Power in the New Deal: Corporate Moderates, Southern Democrats, and the Liberal-Labor Coalition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1–3.

⁶² *Challenge*, June 18, 1938, 2.

⁶³ Abe Bluestein Oral History, ‘Side A: Stelton, Spain 1937’ (LC, ASBP, Box 2, Biographies – Oral transcription – Abe Bluestein (1 of 2)).

⁶⁴ *Challenge*, April 30, 1938, 3.

⁶⁵ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 445–6.

a circulation of around 5000 during its one-year run.⁶⁶ In terms of regularity, *Challenge* was a resounding success compared to both *Spanish Revolution* and *Vanguard*. On only two occasions out of its 68 issues did the periodical appear late – one of these because Bluestein was ill.⁶⁷

Although these periodicals illustrate the productivity of anarchist youths during the 1930s, they also highlight some of the most enduring problems of organising radical movements with the onset of the Great Depression. Foremost among these were financial. The main source of funding for periodicals was through selling newspapers, donations or publishing other radical publications for sale.⁶⁸ This funding stream was notoriously unreliable and was the primary reason for delays between publications. *Vanguard* ran out of money in mid-1933 and ceased production for almost two years.⁶⁹ During this time, the group used the offices of *Il Martello*, the Italian-language anarchist newspaper edited by former IWW organiser Carlo Tresca. From July to November 1934, Tresca let the Vanguard group publish an English-language page in his own newspaper.⁷⁰ *Spanish Revolution* also struggled to maintain financial solvency and held regular appeals for funds.⁷¹ Although the newspaper helped raise a significant sum for Spain, these funds could not be converted directly to sustaining the newspaper, since they were sent in explicitly to aid the Spanish comrades. By November 1937, the newspaper warned that ‘Our deficit is growing and unless all those that realize the supreme importance of the libertarian cause in Spain come to our aid immediately, the situation may become critical beyond any remedy.’⁷² From then, there were only seven more issues, the last being a May Day edition six weeks after the previous one. The newspaper’s large deficit was left to the ULO to deal with.⁷³ Both *Vanguard* and *Spanish Revolution* had to increase their prices during their runs in an attempt to raise more money, and *Challenge* was unable to expand to an eight-page format despite the appearance of a fighting fund dedicated to this purpose.⁷⁴ They ultimately succumbed to the pressures of the capitalist magazine market. Their short runs provide an insight into the mechanics of anarchist organising during the Great Depression.

Anyone for tennis?

Periodicals acted as forums for debate within anarchism, dealing with a variety of issues affecting the wider movement in the U.S. Contributors discussed the rise of fascism, the place of anarchists within trade unions, the principles of the International Workingmen’s Association (IWMA) and what a future anarchist society might look like.⁷⁵ To borrow a term from Ezra Pound,

⁶⁶ *Challenge*, April 30, 1938, 1; Zimmer, *The Whole World is Our Country*, 481.

⁶⁷ *Challenge*, December 24, 1938, 1.

⁶⁸ The periodicals rarely printed advertisements of a non-anarchist nature. The only exceptions were two advertisements in *Vanguard* for the International Press of Brooklyn, which was described as a ‘Union Printer’ and also printed the journal: *Vanguard*, June 1937, 2; *Vanguard*, August 1937, 15.

⁶⁹ Abe Bluestein (New York) to Tom Keell (Stroud), 7 March 1934 (IISH, FA, 426).

⁷⁰ Nunzio Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel*, ed. Sidney Solomon (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 333; Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 451.

⁷¹ *Spanish Revolution*, December 23, 1936, 23.

⁷² *Spanish Revolution*, November 22, 1937, 4.

⁷³ *Vanguard*, November 1938, 13.

⁷⁴ *Challenge*, September 10, 1938, 2.

⁷⁵ *Vanguard*, July–August 1935, 3–5; *Vanguard*, May–June 1935, 11–3; *Vanguard*, May–June 1933, 3–5; *Vanguard*, August–September 1936, 2.

they provided ‘a place where the tennis about these ideas could be played’.⁷⁶ One of the most contentious issues amongst anarchists during the 1930s was the relationship of the movement with government institutions, especially after the CNT–FAI entered the Catalan regional (*Generalitat*) and central Spanish Republican governments in September and November 1936. For anarchists, the state was ‘the personification of injustice, oppression and monopoly’.⁷⁷ Participating in government marked a sharp *volte-face* from historic anarchist thought. The issue highlighted ideological tensions within the U.S. anarchist movement. *Spanish Revolution* was very supportive of the Spanish anarchist leadership. The October 1936 edition reprinted an article from the French anarchist newspaper *Le Libertaire* (1895–1939) calling the entrance of the anarchists into the *Generalitat* ‘normal’ and relegated the CNT–FAI joining the central government to a footnote in its November 1936 issue.⁷⁸ Indeed, Maximiliano Olay, who regularly translated articles from his Spanish Labor Press Bureau for publication in *Spanish Revolution*, told Nemesio Galve of the CNT–FAI Paris Bureau that it was ‘a newspaper of information and not of criticism [...]’.⁷⁹ The newspaper was a platform for the CNT–FAI in the U.S. and contained very little criticism or analysis of the actions of the Spanish anarchists, unlike some other non-Spanish publications. In its May 1937 issue, for example, *Spanish Revolution* declared the internecine fighting between anarchists and communists in Barcelona known as the ‘May Days’ as ‘a distinct success’, despite other damning reports to the contrary, notably from the IWMA.⁸⁰

This raises the question of the role of anarchist periodicals within the movement: should they act as forums for critiquing other anarchists or should they be used to further the movement’s agenda by presenting a united front against criticism from non-anarchists? Abe Bluestein certainly thought that *Challenge* should be able to criticise anarchists who were perceived to deviate from the core principles of anarchism. Writing to Emma Goldman in January 1938, he claimed that ‘one cannot plead the exigencies of a specific crisis for a permanent line. An entire philosophy of social thought must underline social action’.⁸¹ Many older anarchists were unhappy with the more critical stance that *Challenge* took towards the CNT–FAI in Spain. Rose Pesotta of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) told Emma Goldman that most of the older comrades ‘look askance at this new venture but I have encouraged the younger crowd not to give any heed and try to carry on’.⁸² Harry Kelly wrote to Goldman in June 1938 expressing outrage at one editorial in the newspaper. The editorial alleged that the CNT–FAI’s ‘mistakes have been many, their compromises suicidal, their present participation in the [Juan] Negrin Government beyond understanding’.⁸³ Kelly fumed that ‘literally the whole of Europe and America are against the Loyalists and this boy [Bluestein] talks about their compromises being suicidal. Honestly it makes me boil’.⁸⁴ However, whilst *Challenge* was not as complimentary to the CNT–FAI as *Spanish Revolution* had been, it did not become the dissenting voice in the American movement

⁷⁶ Ezra Pound, “Small Magazines,” *The English Journal* 19 (1930): 691.

⁷⁷ Piotr Kropotkin, “The Conquest of Bread,” in *The Conquest of Bread*, 37.

⁷⁸ *Spanish Revolution*, October 19, 1936, 1; *Spanish Revolution*, November 25, 1936, 3.

⁷⁹ Maximiliano Olay (New York) to Nemesio Galve (Paris), 29 November 1937 (IISH, CNT, 62B.3).

⁸⁰ *Spanish Revolution*, May 21, 1937, 1; Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 413–4.

⁸¹ Abe Bluestein (Paris) to Emma Goldman (London), 4 January 1938 (IISH, EGP, 58).

⁸² Pesotta was an important figure in the history of *Challenge*: she paid for its first issue and gave regular advice to its editorial team: Rose Pesotta (Boston) to Emma Goldman (London), 23 April, 12 May 1938 (IISH, EGP, 129).

⁸³ *Challenge*, June 18, 1938, 4.

⁸⁴ Harry Kelly (New York) to Emma Goldman (London), 25 June 1938 (IISH, EGP, 108).

that Bluestein had intended it to be. Overall, *Challenge* restricted its attacks to other members of the Popular Front in Spain, such as a critique of the Communist International (Comintern)'s control of the International Brigades.⁸⁵ Bluestein eventually resigned himself to write that 'we cannot find it in our hearts to condemn [the CNT-FAI] so long as we, and the workers of all countries outside of Spain, failed to help them as they deserved'.⁸⁶ There was a tension, then, between individual editorial intentions and the perceived damage that this could do to the wider anarchist movement.

Visually, the periodicals also tried to further the movement's agenda. Anarchist groups rarely had the funds to maintain a high level of graphic quality in their publications, particularly in the early 1930s, and when images were included they served a specifically political purpose. *Vanguard*'s first issue was mimeographed and crude in its style. There were spelling mistakes, with the same font throughout the whole issue save for the periodical's subtitle, which was handwritten. Nevertheless, it attracted enough attention within the movement to enable the group to publish a typographic printed version from July 1932 to June 1933.⁸⁷ An understated but sleek format replaced the unpolished appearance of earlier editions, with a printed, rather than hand-drawn, letterhead. *Vanguard* seldom produced images or cartoons in its early editions, the only exception being a small illustration of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti accompanying a poem entitled 'Sacco-Vanzetti: Salute to Liberals' in the August-September 1932 issue.⁸⁸ By 1936, however, the periodical's attention to visual propaganda was growing. Drawing inspiration from events in Spain, the front cover of the August-September 1936 issue contained a striking woodcut cartoon of armed workers outside a factory.⁸⁹ Later editions had cartoons ridiculing the religious justification for General Francisco Franco's military rebellion, whilst others praised the new Spanish Republican figure of the female militia member or *miliciana*.⁹⁰

Most early issues of *Challenge* had a cartoon of some kind, often drawn by Bluestein's companion and future wife, Selma Cohen.⁹¹ These cartoons were social realist in visual style, attempting to draw attention to the everyday struggles of the working class. They targeted American labour leaders, European dictators, the New Deal and the communist movement.⁹² One appearing in June 1938 criticised Congress by showing two politicians handing out bags of money to two figures: \$1 billion for the 'Army' and 25¢ for the 'Forgotten Man'. The accompanying editorial elaborated that 'the New Deal was only interested in the maintenance of the capitalistic profit

⁸⁵ This included raising the question of possible murders of IWW members in Spain by the brigade command: *Challenge*, August 27, 1938, 3.

⁸⁶ *Challenge*, August 6, 1938, 4.

⁸⁷ Marc Epstein, who lived in the anarchist commune at Mohegan Colony, NY, ran a printing press in New York that printed *Vanguard*: Louis Slater in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 445. Later editions were linotyped by Jimmy Mangano, the son of Italian anarchists: Freedman, "A memoir".

⁸⁸ *Vanguard*, August-September 1932, 1; Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were two Italian-American anarchists accused of murder and armed robbery in 1920. Despite strong evidence of a miscarriage of justice, and an international campaign for clemency, the pair were executed in 1927: see Bruce Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind* (London: Viking Penguin, 2007).

⁸⁹ *Vanguard*, August-September 1936, 1.

⁹⁰ *Vanguard*, December 1936, 1.

⁹¹ Cohen worked as an illustrator for the WPA during the 1930s, and participated in solo and juried exhibitions across the US: *The Eye of the Collector: The Jewish Vision of Sigmund R. Balka*, ed. Jean Bloch Rosensaft (New York: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institution of Religion, 2006), 50.

⁹² *Challenge*, June 4, 1938, 1; *Challenge*, May 14, 1938, 1, 4; *Challenge*, May 7, 1938, 4.

system, not in providing for the well-being of the American people'.⁹³ Sometimes readers sent in cartoons to be published, such as one sixteen year old comrade who drew a worker at a crossroads between a factory and a jail with the caption: 'Hardly Any Difference'.⁹⁴ After December 1938 no more cartoons appeared, which may have been because Selma was heavily pregnant with her and Bluestein's first child.⁹⁵ *Spanish Revolution* eschewed cartoons in favour of photographs, but the content of these changed throughout the war. In the initial stages, the newspaper focused on the anarchist militias, with several photographs of *milicianos* at the front.⁹⁶ Later images reflected the steady worsening of the Republican war effort, focusing instead on images of towns and cities suffering from Nationalist bombardment or distressed children.⁹⁷

Occasionally, *Vanguard* reprinted images from other newspapers, such as Robert Minor's cartoon 'The East-Side Jew That Conquered Europe' that surfaced in a 1919 issue of *The Liberator*.⁹⁸ Appearing in the February–March 1937 edition of *Vanguard*, it showed Russian Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky standing ominously over the leaders of Europe to emphasise the power of the Red Army over its class enemies. Far from being complimentary to the artist, however, the cartoon was used as a political attack on Minor's conversion from anarchism to orthodox communism. The caption reads 'Minor, a real Communist Party hack, is forced in his declining years to outdo his Party comrades at the game of Trotsky-baiting and falsifying history.'⁹⁹ This was a critique of Minor's earlier support for Trotsky, contrasted with his current anti-Trotskyist stance. The journal was in conversation with the anarchists' most formidable adversary on the left, the Communist Party. This was a consistent theme of the content of the three periodicals.

Although the main enemy of anarchists during the 1930s was capitalism, they were also in a constant battle for influence within the socialist movement itself. The most important of these struggles was with the CPUSA.¹⁰⁰ Periodicals were important mouthpieces, both to attack and defend themselves from communists. Anarchists called orthodox communism 'Fascisized Socialism' and regularly critiqued the policy of the party in the U.S. in addition to the Comintern.¹⁰¹ *Chal-*

⁹³ *Challenge*, June 25, 1938, 4.

⁹⁴ *Challenge*, August 13, 1938, 3.

⁹⁵ Selma Cohen to Mollie Steimer and Senya Fleshin (Paris), 27 July 1938 (LC, ASBP, Box 1; Bluestein, Selma Cohen).

⁹⁶ "Militia of the C.N.T. and F.A.I. at the Arragon [sic] front," *Spanish Revolution*, November 6, 1936, 1; "Revolutionary Militia in the Trenches," *Spanish Revolution*, December 9, 1936, 1; "Manning the Madrid Trenches," *Spanish Revolution*, January 8, 1937, 1.

⁹⁷ "The Cry of Civilization," *Spanish Revolution*, December 20, 1937, 1; "In the Wake of Fascist Bombardment," *Spanish Revolution*, February 23, 1938, 1. The Spanish Republican war effort deteriorated steadily throughout 1937, with the loss of the northern territories by October. The Aragón Offensive from March–April 1938 was a further blow to those hoping for a Republican victory, as was the defeat at the Battle of the Ebro in the second half of 1938. The Munich Agreement in September 1938 effectively sealed the fate of the Republic, with Franco's Nationalist forces emerging triumphant in April the following year.

⁹⁸ *The Liberator* (1918–1924) was a monthly socialist magazine produced by Max and Crystal Eastman to replace *The Masses* after it was shut down by the federal government for conspiring to obstruct conscription. Robert Minor (1884–1954) was a radical political journalist and cartoonist and drew for both periodicals. He became a leading member of the CPUSA after 1920 and helped organise the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of American volunteers who fought in the Spanish Civil War. He served as acting general secretary of the party during the Second World War.

⁹⁹ "The East-Side Jew That Conquered Europe," *Vanguard*, February–March 1937, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Other socialist groups, such as the short-lived Workers Party of the United States, were also critiqued, but the CPUSA was the most consistent target: *Vanguard*, April 1935, 4–10.

¹⁰¹ *Vanguard*, November 1938, 14; For the Comintern, see Kevin McDermott and J. Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996).

lenge often used humour to denigrate communists. One regular section, ‘The Cockeyed World’, written by Louis Genin (as ‘Gike Mold’) offered readers a five-dollar prize for coming up with the best way to describe those intellectual ‘fellow travellers’ swelling the ranks of the newly-fashionable CPUSA. Genin suggested either ‘the rearside of the vanguard’ or ‘the ivory tower moves down to the penthouse’.¹⁰² Genin’s pseudonym was itself a ‘takeoff’ from ‘Mike Gold’, the pen name of the Jewish communist Itzok Isaac Granich.¹⁰³ Another section entitled ‘Studies in Stalinsanity’, written by Daniel Thorpe, attacked the Comintern and CPUSA for their regular changes of the party line.¹⁰⁴ *Challenge* also highlighted the loss of the hammer and sickle on the masthead of the CPUSA’s newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, suggesting some of its revolutionary intensity had been lost.¹⁰⁵ The true revolutionaries, by this logic, were the anarchists who made no attempts to disguise their own views. Attacking communist periodicals thus reinforced anarchists’ own sense of radical identity. Communists sometimes responded by physically attacking anarchists selling their newspapers. One article in *Challenge* recounted the story of CPUSA members molesting its activists. The communists reportedly cried ‘You’re lucky you’re not in Soviet Russia, We’d put you up against the wall there’ and ‘Don’t you ever try to come to our demonstrations again, you Trotskyite fascists, or you’ll get worse.’¹⁰⁶ The periodicals were thus a weapon and a target of the attempted communist dominance of the American left in the 1930s.

Networkers

As important as the themes discussed or represented visually in them were, radical periodicals had functions beyond their content. They were a vital component in the growth of anarchist networks during the 1930s. Initially, articles in *Vanguard* were written largely by members of the Vanguard group itself, such as Mark Schmidt, Abe Bluestein, Sam Dolgoff and Louis Genin.¹⁰⁷ As the journal established itself, *Vanguard* attracted contributions from an impressive array of anarchist thinkers and activists. Articles by Alexander Schapiro, Gregori Maximoff and Rudolf Rocker all appeared in the journal’s first sustained run from April 1932 to June 1933.¹⁰⁸ Read-

¹⁰² *Challenge*, June 25, 1938, 3.

¹⁰³ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 442; Granich co-founded the leftist *New Masses* in 1925 and wrote for the *Daily Worker* from the 1920s until his death in 1967.

¹⁰⁴ *Challenge*, May 7, 1938, 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Challenge*, May 7, 1938, 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Challenge*, June 18, 1938, 2.

¹⁰⁷ The use of pseudonyms makes it difficult to state conclusively the identity of all contributors, but they appear to have been largely male and white, except for Goldman and Glenn Carrington, an African-American who wrote on race issues as ‘George Creighton’: *Vanguard*, January–February 1936, 20–2.

¹⁰⁸ *Vanguard*, April 1933, 4–8; *Vanguard*, February 1933, 5–8; *Vanguard*, May–June 1933, 3–5; Schapiro was a Russian anarchist who took part in the Russian Revolution of 1917. He initially cooperated with the Soviet government, serving in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, but became disillusioned with the Bolsheviks and went into self-imposed exile in 1922. He then moved to Paris before eventually settling in New York in 1941. Maximoff also took part in the Russian Revolution and was involved in the Ukrainian anarcho-syndicalist movement during the Russian Civil War before being captured by the Bolsheviks. He later moved to Chicago and wrote a scathing critique of the Soviet government in 1940 entitled *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty Years of Terror in Russia*. Rocker was a German émigré active in the Jewish anarchist movement in London at the turn of the twentieth century. He was deported to Germany as an enemy alien during the First World War but fled after the Reichstag Fire in 1933, moving to the US. He wrote several important books outlining the anarchist position, including *Nationalism and Culture* (1937) and *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (1938).

ing the May–June and July–August 1935 issues (which she called ‘splendidly done’) encouraged Emma Goldman to contribute articles for publication and use her extensive list of contacts to extend networks for *Vanguard* to maintain its good work.¹⁰⁹ The British literary anarchist Herbert Read, for example, wrote an article for the periodical in May 1939 after an introduction from Goldman.¹¹⁰ Abe Bluestein’s time in Paris en route to Spain allowed him to make links with the French movement, which also sent articles for publication in *Challenge*.¹¹¹ Articles were often shared between periodicals, such as when *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* editor Mark Mrachnyi distributed another piece by Goldman that appeared in *Vanguard* and *Challenge* in early 1939.¹¹² Networks allowed periodicals to expand their subject matter through greater engagement with the wider anarchist movement and, simultaneously, periodicals alerted both existing and unfamiliar comrades to the existence of burgeoning or resurfacing networks.

The periodicals also reprinted translated articles from the international (non-American) anarchist press. Regular reports of anarchist activities came in from Europe and South America. For example, A significant proportion of articles in *Spanish Revolution* were taken directly from Spanish or French anarchist periodicals.¹¹³ This strengthened transnational networks and allowed activists to keep abreast of developments overseas, particularly in countries such as Spain from where a significant proportion of the anarchist movement in the U.S. drew its recruits. However, the practice occasionally attracted criticism. One *Challenge* reader complained that the newspaper ‘takes up too much space with foreign affairs, and too little with the doings right here in our own backyard’.¹¹⁴ *Spanish Revolution*’s reliance on the foreign press also meant that the stories it printed were often slightly out of date or absent altogether. Jack White, secretary of the ULO, wrote to Augustin Souchy of the CNT–FAI Foreign Language Division in February 1937 that the group had ‘attempted on numerous occasions to be placed on the mailing list of the various anarchist [newspapers] but, as yet, our corespondence [sic] and requests have gotten us not one paper’.¹¹⁵ As a matter of fact, the ULO had been sending its requests to the wrong address in Barcelona.¹¹⁶ Efficient networks were a prerequisite for publishing an anarchist periodical successfully, particularly one focused on developments within another country. This was also a problem for *Vanguard*. White wrote to Emma Goldman in 1938 that one of the ‘great difficulties we experience in publishing the *Vanguard*, besides financial, is our lack of correspondents’. He claimed that this was ‘also an indication of the disorganization of our movement’.¹¹⁷

Sean Latham and Robert Scholes note that periodicals ‘are frequently in dialogue with one another’ and can thus ‘create and occupy typically complex and often unstable positions in some-

¹⁰⁹ Emma Goldman (Paris) to Vanguard group (New York), 30 October 1935 (IISH, EGP, 81).

¹¹⁰ *Vanguard*, May 1939, 8–9; Emma Goldman (London) to Roman Weinrebe (New York), 24 November 1938 (IISH, EGP, 81).

¹¹¹ Mollie Steimer (Paris) to Abe and Selma Bluestein, 17 April 1939 (LC, ASBP, Box 1, Steimer, Mollie).

¹¹² Emma Goldman (London) to Mark Mrachnyi (New York), 30 January 1939 (LC, MM, Goldman, Emma, 1869–1940, 1931–1940).

¹¹³ Articles from the *CNT-FAI Boletín de Información* (1936–1939), *Solidaridad Obrera* (1907–present) and *CNT* (1932–1939) were common in the initial stages of the war, as well as *La Revolution Proletarienne* (1925–1939), *L’Espagne Antifasciste* (1936–1937) and *Le Libertaire*.

¹¹⁴ *Challenge*, November 12, 1938, 3.

¹¹⁵ Jack White (New York) to Augustin Souchy (Barcelona), 26 February 1937 (IISH, *Archivo de la Propaganda Exterior CNT-FAI* (FAIPE), 11Ba). White was requesting *Acracia* (1933–1938), *Fragua Social* (1936–1939), *Solidaridad Obrera* and *Tierra y Libertad* (1904–1939).

¹¹⁶ Augustin Souchy (Barcelona) to Jack White (New York), 12 March 1937 (IISH, FAIPE, 11Ba).

¹¹⁷ Jack White (New York) to Emma Goldman (London), 11 April 1938 (IISH, EGP, 81).

times collaborative and sometimes competitive cultural networks'.¹¹⁸ For the English-language anarchist periodicals of the 1930s, these were largely collaborative. Periodicals advertised books and pamphlets by significant anarchist thinkers such as Goldman, Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta, Mikhail Bakunin and Élisée Reclus, as well as other anarchist newspapers.¹¹⁹ Whenever a new edition of *Vanguard* was published, *Challenge* did its best to lavish it with praise. Commenting on the July 1938 edition of *Vanguard*, *Challenge* maintained that 'this interesting theoretical organ of the Libertarian Movement of America outdoes itself this time in its collection of articles of interest to all thinking workers and intellectuals'.¹²⁰ Publications were an important theoretical stimulant for potential anarchists. Audrey Goodfriend was a member of the Rebel Youth, the teenage wing of the Vanguard group. They were also known as the Vanguard Juniors and published their own newspaper *Rebel Youth* between 1933 and 1934.¹²¹ She and her comrades used *Vanguard* alongside other anarchist literature to promote discussion: 'We would read [Alexander Berkman's] *The ABC of Anarchism*; we would read an article from the *Vanguard* and discuss. And we read some Kropotkin or talked about Kropotkin.'¹²² This was one of the key tasks of the journal – to encourage and widen exposure to anarchist ideas. Periodicals allowed younger anarchists to learn from the experience of older anarchists as well. *Challenge* held 'reader's conferences', which were designed to offer 'constructive criticism of our weekly by its readers'.¹²³ Attendees freely discussed issues such as layout, content and finances. Rose Pesotta attended one of these conferences in the summer of 1938. She made several suggestions, which the younger comrades took 'very much in earnest', it being clear that Bluestein and others hoped to learn from more experienced activists about the particulars of the anarchist newspaper business.¹²⁴

One of the most important functions of these periodicals during the civil war period was fundraising for Spain. When Walter Starrett suggested to English anarchist Tom Keell that *Spanish Revolution* should be discontinued in favour of selling *Spain and the World*, he replied that 'the collection of funds & clothing for Spain is helped considerably by the publicity given by *Spanish Revolution*'.¹²⁵ The periodical was a vital link between the American and Spanish anarchist movements. Between the founding of the ULO in August and the end of September 1936, the organisation collected \$2171.20 for Spain. Donors included individuals, trade unions and anarchist groups from across the country. The bulk of donations came from New York and surrounding states, but there were also contributions from California, Illinois, Iowa, Ohio and Canada.¹²⁶ *Spanish Revolution* was the most important source of news about ULO fundraisers, highlighting events around the country. One meeting at Irving Plaza in New York in October 1937 managed to raise \$123 for the cause.¹²⁷ Salespeople publicised the newspaper at political gatherings and meetings

¹¹⁸ Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies," *PMLA* 121 (2006): 529.

¹¹⁹ *Vanguard*, March 1935, 16; *Vanguard*, November 1938, 24; *Spanish Revolution*, September 5, 1936, 4, *Challenge*, May 7, 1938, 3.

¹²⁰ *Challenge*, July 9, 1938, 2.

¹²¹ Irving Sterling in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 457.

¹²² In Andrew Cornell, *Unruly Equality: U.S. Anarchism in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California, 2016), 124.

¹²³ *Challenge*, May 21, 1938, 3.

¹²⁴ Rose Pesotta (Boston) to Emma Goldman (London), 5 July 1938 (IISH, EGP, 129).

¹²⁵ Starrett believed that the British newspaper was 'superior in every respect' to the American version. This was before he assumed editorial duties: Walter Starrett (New York) to Tom Keell (Stroud), 20 June 1937 (IISH, FA, 516); Tom Keell (Stroud) to Walter Starrett (New York), 20 July 1937 (LC, VV, Box 2, Correspondence, incoming SCW).

¹²⁶ *Spanish Revolution*, September 25, 1936, 4.

¹²⁷ *Spanish Revolution*, November 6, 1936, 4.

in the face of hostility from other leftist groups.¹²⁸ Here there is a clear connection between the newspaper and the wider radical movement. Distribution of the periodical was frequently face-to-face at these meetings, allowing for dialogue between vendors and readers and the opportunity to recruit further activists to the cause. The ULO also organised a Speakers Bureau, designed to furnish speakers on anarchism and the political situation in Spain to sympathetic organisations, which served a similar function.¹²⁹

In addition to their fundraising and propaganda value, the periodicals were significant cultural and social centres for young anarchists. *Vanguard* maintained a high emphasis on culture by publishing poems, book and play reviews, as well as advertising its own collection of anarchist literature: the Vanguard Library.¹³⁰ Books reviewed were often political tracts, like Stuart Chase's *A New Deal* (1932), but also included novels such as Ignazio Silone's *Fontamara* (1933) and John Dos Passos's *1919* (1932).¹³¹ *Challenge* reviewed Herbert Read's *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938) in September 1938, calling it 'the perfect handbook for the young revolutionary groping through the muddle and confusion of contemporary politics'.¹³² The reviewer was Ethel Mannin, an English writer and friend of Emma Goldman in London. Goldman forwarded the review from Britain for publication in *Challenge*, highlighting the transnational nature of these anarchist cultural networks.

In addition to advertising weekly forums and lectures, periodicals gave details on dances, socials and picnics organised by different groups. These were an important means of fundraising for periodicals and the wider anarchist movement, but they were also celebratory, such as a dance in March 1935 marking the reappearance of *Vanguard*. This particular dance promised a 'Hot Jazz Band', a 'Fine Concert' and 'Exotic Refreshments' for a mere 25¢ entrance fee.¹³³ Events like these formed an important part of anarchist culture and identity during the 1930s. They allowed activists to relax and gave the movement visibility amongst the wider left-wing movement.¹³⁴ Tom Goyens notes that picnics 'were as good an occasion as any to stage a politically subversive exhibition, to state the groups' oppositional character in an open space, and to display solidarity and defiance'.¹³⁵ *Challenge* advertised events arranged by a variety of anarchist groups across the country, including ones organised by *Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista* (International Antifascist Solidarity, SIA), an international aid agency set up by the CNT.¹³⁶ When the Brooklyn SIA youth section held a picnic at Ulmer Park on 4 September 1938, the CPUSA boycotted the event, distributing leaflets attacking SIA and setting fire to a tree at the entrance to try to scare

¹²⁸ Walter Starrett had to appeal for help from other anarchist groups after a ULO meeting was attacked by members of the CPUSA and their stall smashed: Walter Starrett (New York) to Maximiliano Olay (Chicago), 15 September 1937 (LC, VV, Correspondence, outgoing, SCW); *Industrial Worker*, September 25, 1937, 4.

¹²⁹ *Spanish Revolution*, December 23, 1936, 4.

¹³⁰ *Vanguard*, June–July 1936, 20, 29–32.

¹³¹ *Vanguard*, February 1933, 15–16; *Vanguard*, March 1935, 15; *Vanguard*, January 1932, 15–16.

¹³² *Challenge*, September 10, 1938, 4.

¹³³ *Vanguard*, March 1935, 16.

¹³⁴ Avrich notes that these socials 'enhanced their feeling of solidarity while enriching their daily existence': Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 319.

¹³⁵ Goyens, *Revolution and Beer*, 180.

¹³⁶ SIA was set up by the CNT in June 1937 to provide apolitical, non-partisan aid to the Spanish people in their struggle against Franco. The organisation had several international affiliates, including the US, where dozens of SIA locals raised funds throughout the country: *IWMA Bulletin of Information*, October 15, 1937; *Challenge*, September 3, 1938, 2; Valentin Cionini, "Solidarité Internationale Antifasciste, ou l'humanitaire au service des idées anarchistes," *Diacronie: Studi di Storia Contemporanea* 7 (2011): 1–17.

people from attending. This did not stop *Challenge* from labelling the picnic modestly as ‘one of the greatest ever given’.¹³⁷

Clara Freedman, who met her future husband Sidney Solomon at an anarchist social, remembered it as ‘an exciting period’ when several ‘long-time relationships were started’.¹³⁸ This passionate atmosphere did have drawbacks, however, when several Vanguard members left the group after Mark Schmidt ‘stole’ Solomon’s previous girlfriend, Elsie Milstein, another group member. It was the breakaway group that eventually produced *Challenge*. Abe Bluestein maintained that the ‘two papers didn’t disagree or fight with each other’ and that the main difference between the two was ideological, with *Challenge* wanting to work with the unions and *Vanguard* being ‘a theoretical journal exclusively’.¹³⁹ Irving Sterling, however, called the split ‘strictly personal’ and Louis Slater broke off all contact with Sam Dolgoff, who sided with Schmidt in the dispute.¹⁴⁰ Anarchist networks relied heavily on personal connections. This allowed a certain intimacy and fluidity between activists, but also meant the networks themselves were fragile. They could be disrupted over disagreements, either ideological or personal. Periodicals were one way in which anarchist networks held together during the Great Depression, even if sometimes this was only temporary.

Conclusion

In April 1939, representatives from the various sections of the anarchist movement (Russian, Italian, Spanish, Jewish and native-born American) held a conference on the future of anarchism in the United States at the Libertarian Center in New York. They agreed that with ‘the ever increasing restriction of immigration and the rising generation attending public schools where English is the common language it is a question of years, and very few at that, when the necessity of a foreign language press will cease to exist’.¹⁴¹ *Vanguard*, *Spanish Revolution* and *Challenge* were forerunners of a wider tactical shift in the anarchist movement in the United States. Zimmer maintains that anarchists in the 1930s who emphasised English-language organising ‘veered toward a shallow universalism that attempted to ignore cultural difference’ and were largely unsuccessful in their aims.¹⁴² It is true that all three of the periodicals under discussion had shut down by the start of the Second World War. Zimmer’s characterisation, however, overlooks the importance of these periodicals as sites where anarchist identities were shaped and sustained. They acted as forums for debate, where ideas were constantly challenged and important theoretical issues were aired. This was both within anarchism and between the wider radical movement. Through trial and error, *Vanguard*, *Spanish Revolution* and *Challenge* produced an impressive array of publications that introduced a new generation to anarchist theory and practice.¹⁴³ This was despite the

¹³⁷ *Challenge*, September 17, 1938, 3.

¹³⁸ Freedman, *A Memoir*.

¹³⁹ Abe Bluestein Oral History, ‘Side A: Stelton, Spain 1937’ (LC, ASBP, Box 2, Biographies – Oral transcription – Abe Bluestein (1 of 2)).

¹⁴⁰ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 445, 451, 458.

¹⁴¹ Circular of Conference Committee for Anarchist Propaganda in English, 1 May 1939 (LC, Subject Vertical Files – Anarchism – Conference Committee for Anarchist Propaganda in English).

¹⁴² Zimmer, *The Whole World Is Our Country*, 403.

¹⁴³ Abe Bluestein, for example, later became a reporter for the *Jewish Daily Forward* (1897–present) and edited *News From Libertarian Spain* (1977–1980) in the 1970s: DeWitt, *Abe Bluestein*, 9.

often-hostile atmosphere to which some of their elder comrades subjected them. Indeed, the opposition that the anarchist youth movement faced in producing these periodicals may even have helped to solidify their own sense of identity: one of revolt, opposition to established authority and commitment to grassroots agitation.

These radical periodicals also highlight the network-based nature of anarchism during the Great Depression. They were important in maintaining social and cultural ties between activists throughout the country. This could be through the exchange of articles between periodicals, advertising events staged by different anarchist groups or reviewing and critiquing others' work. These networks could be transnational, as highlighted by the close connection between *Spanish Revolution* and the Spanish anarchist movement or Emma Goldman's collection of contacts in London. Periodical networks frequently outlived their specific periodical: the anarchist youth movement that produced *Vanguard*, *Spanish Revolution* and *Challenge* continued to publish periodicals during and after the Second World War in the form of *Why?* (1942–7), which later became *Resistance* (1947–54).¹⁴⁴ The production of these periodicals and the maintenance and expansion of the networks they relied on for content and distribution were vital in constructing and sustaining a sense of radical identity in the anarchist youth movement during the 1930s. As Sidney Solomon described later, 'It was writing and working, it was personal involvement, it was hitchhiking and travel, it was organizing and demonstrating – it was all the energies of our youth.'¹⁴⁵

Author biographies/Acknowledgements

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¹⁴⁴ Andrew Cornell, "For a World without Oppressors': U.S. Anarchism from the Palmer Raids to the Sixties" (PhD diss., New York University, 2011), 324, 374.

¹⁴⁵ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 452.

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