

Obituary: Albert Meltzer

British anarchist

Aileen O'Carroll

1996

Albert Meltzer, English Anarchist, died in May aged 76. His coffin was carried by a horse driven glass hearse through the streets of London, preceded by a brass band and followed by 300 flag carrying anarchists decked out in black and red. At the wake friends and comrades giving tributes were joined by a stand up comedian (as per Albert's instructions). The celebratory nature of the event was increased further when a two minute video clip of Albert convulsed in laughter was also shown, causing those present to join in the joking.

A lifelong trade unionist, he fought Mosley's blackshirts; actively supported the Spanish revolution's anarchist communes and militias; and the German anti-Nazi resistance. During the second world war he was one of the key players in the Cairo Mutiny. Post-war he worked with Spain's anti-Franco resistance and the international anarchist movement.

His achievements include Cuddon's *Cosmopolitan Review*, a satirical magazine first published in 1965, and the founding of the Anarchist Black Cross, a prisoners' aid and pressure group. Perhaps his most enduring legacy is Britain's most comprehensive anarchist archive, the Kate Sharpley Library.

I only met Albert once, when last summer I attended the British Northern Anarchist Network conference as an observer. I remember him telling me how Emma Goldman once referred to him as a "young hooligan", and I remarked how, for all the work she did, Emma Goldman was never much of a team player. He agreed, adding that she could be quite a cantankerous person.

I know Albert would turn in his grave, but I found this funny, because to me the two of them were quite similar. Both were dedicated activists, continually on the go, always working for the anarchist cause. However both also had a reputation for being difficult and intolerant of other anarchists.

My second memory of Albert is of him snoring loudly as we watched a video of the EZLN in Mexico, which unfortunately was missing the soundtrack. I was quite impressed by this and hope that I manage to be as active as he was ..and look forward to the day when I too can fall asleep at meetings.

The one thing about Albert that can not be disputed is his dedication to anarchism and his belief that a better world could be built, better than the one that we now live in. His autobiography is testament to the energy and spirit he brought to the struggle, and indeed how anarchism enriched and brought vitality to his own life.

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