

The Purpose of History

Albert Meltzer

1991

The Kate Sharpley Library, created some years ago but dormant for want of premises, has been revamped and will be operative from November 1991.

It will contain the archives of domestic and international Anarchist activism and research into its past history with a view to influencing its future.

Details of its progress will be given in this and future bulletins

Draft Statutes at the (reconstituted) Kate Sharpley Library

1. The library; originally set up in 121 Railton Road by comrades since moved to Australia, and named in memory of a working-class anarchist militant, is for the preservation of records of the anarchist struggle in Britain and so far as possible elsewhere. It aims to help activists in their current struggles, to diffuse the knowledge of anarchism, and to help prepare for genuine anarchist research and a comprehensive history of anarchism.
2. To prevent its becoming either a personal library or to be used for the building of an esoteric cult, trustees will ensure continuity of the original policy and the assets of the library.
3. The service will be free to members of various activist groups wishing to make use of same. All however are invited to pass over books, records and ephemera in the knowledge that this will be preserved as part of the records of the movement.
4. Material cannot be lent by post but studied at any time convenient to whoever is staffing the library at the time, and the user. Photocopying will be possible when resources allow. It is hoped to begin in November 91.
5. Individuals and institutions wishing to engage in academic anarchist research but not involved in anarchist struggle may have access to the archives as Outside Subscribers on the some conditions on payment of £10 p.a (£50 to Institutions). In the interests of security, certain material may be classified and withheld from all viewers, and will be kept elsewhere.
6. The range of the library will be anarchism, syndicalism, libertarian and council communism, class struggle history, and related subjects where helpful to the study of same — e.g. Marxism, Fascism (history where relevant), Suffragism Capitalism and Imperialism (history in particular) and resistance.

7. In addition to the Trustees there will be a list of Sponsors who will be asked to attend an annual meeting to confirm the Library is fulfilling its originally intended function. Such Sponsors need not necessarily be in agreement with the principles or programme of anarchism but should wish to preserve its history and prevent its becoming a cult interest.
8. Among the Trustees there will be a working committee.
9. Purchases to the library will be made from time to time, and to avoid any appeals for financial contributions, other than from Subscribers, for the maintenance, upkeep, acquisitions to and insurance for the library, books redundant to requirements will be sold. It is hoped that all those anxious to preserve the history of the struggle will contribute books, videos, documents, posters etc and also sociological books which may supplement our list.
10. An occasional bulletin (of which this is the first) will be published to keep all informed of our activities, for which a small subscription will be made.
11. The library will be kept separate in a private room. Its whereabouts will not be publicly advertised until it has its own premises, and is insured, but may be viewed in the meantime, by appointment (after November 91).

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The draft constitution of the KSL speaks for itself. What is the necessity for a library? The purpose of this library is to make history as well as record it. The distortion of what has happened in the past, the deliberate neglect of the working class contribution to its own theory and history, means that the academics can mould a new and different and reactionary movement out of the debris of our ideas. The anarchist movement has suffered most from this but we will not let them get away with it any longer.

Real Anarchism it not the cult of a few 'well known' quasi-father figures of the past, any more then real Buddhism it the worship of Gautama Buddha as a god. Anarchists in practice do no more care about what such persons said or wrote unless they happen to have said something with which they agree. The cult of researching their acquaintanceships, personal life and influences upon them is a deliberate, ploy by State-sponsored academics, but it has nothing to do with us. The personality cult, the worship of individuals and the imposition of bourgeois ideas lead to a phony anarchism which may flourish but is not the real thing.

We need to record and research the history of anarchist working class movements, and have already gathered material (yet to be classified) on the history of the anarchist movement in countries as far apart as Rourmania and China, incidents ranging from the Italian struggles against Mussolini to the time Cerrada Santos tried to bomb Franco from the air at a fishing fleet regatta, from the spread of syndicalist ideas in Britain to the rise and fog of the movement in Korea. Publishing it all to a wider audience is a far greater task then we could achieve at the KSL (as at present constituted) but the material will be there for those who can do it

It is sometimes said that if you don't learn from history you make the same mistakes again. But it is also true that if you are taught your own history by outside influences, you are doomed to make the mistakes they want you to make.

The Anarchist Library
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