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## Why the Blast?

Alexander Berkman

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1916

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the civil war he was involved in activities of the first importance; he was a member of the CNTs regional committee in Castile and of the commission given the task of preserving the national heritage. In February 1939 he joined the famous CNT Defense Committee of the Center. Later he fled to Alicante where he was arrested. He was shot on 27 April 1940. Although less well known than other Argentines, Benigno Mancebo was one of that legendary band of militants with connections to *La Protesta* who played such a decisive role in the Iberian peninsula in the 1930s.

icas. In April he sailed from Le Harve, bound for Ciudad Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. Later he moved on to Queretaro in Mexico in 1942, where he remained until 1965 when he smuggled himself to Portugal from where he was forced to flee to Mexico after a short while. In 1974, sorely disenchanted, he returned to end his days in his native land, working on the land. An indefatigable battler, not much given to writing (though he was friendly with well-known libertarian intellectuals) and a born activist, he was without doubt one of the greatest anarchists of his day and one of the ones who resisted the temptation to compromise which seduced lots of other CNT members in 1936. Among his friends were Carpio, B. Esteban, Odón, Tato, Lamberet and Mancebo. Yet he remains a little-known militant.

**Benigno Mancebo**

Born in Sanchorreja (Avila, Spain) in 1906 and died in Madrid in 1940 before a fascist firing squad. From an anarchist family, he spent fifteen years (1908–1923) in the care of his grandmother and separated from his parents who had emigrated to the Americas. By 1923 he was in Argentina where he was associated with revolutionary anarchist laborism and he quickly came into contact with the group publishing the legendary anarchist newspaper *La Protesta* (on which he worked as a typesetter) and improved his education. In Argentina he became a fan of the theater (the Arte y Natura group) and he belonged to the Booklovers Guild set up by Diego Abad de Santillán. Arrested by the Argentine military in 1930, he was interned on the island of Demarchi and then in Martín García and the prison in Ushuaia, only to be deported along with his father, Pedro, to Spain. He had scarcely arrived there when he was arrested as a draft-dodger and he was sent to Valencia to do his military service; right after discharge he joined the CNT and FAI and launched the important Madrid newspaper *El Libertario*. His journalistic activity was fleshed out with frequent pieces written for *CNT*, *Tierra y Libertad* and *Solidaridad Obrera* (as a result of which he saw the inside of the republics prisons fairly regularly). During

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(Morocco) and served for several years as a gunner in Africa (1921–25). Later he traveled to Havana and on to Mexico (1925–26) and worked in the United States (Pennsylvania). It was in the USA that he came into contact with A. Quintas who introduced him to anarchism. A short time after that he was deported to Spain over his involvement in the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign. He arrived in a Spain under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and spent several months in prison. Later he lived in hiding but was very active (helping to set up the social Ateneo in Madrid). During the republic he worked for the Transmediterranea shipping line (traveling to Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay) acting as a liaison between anarchists on both sides of the Atlantic (smuggling militants and propaganda materials). He gave up the sea after a trip to Fernando Poo when he nearly died of malaria. He was intensely active then in Barcelona and Madrid; the events in Asturias in 1934 found him up to his neck in the revolution and he was jailed along with Fosco Falaschi and Benigno Mancebo. He was released on parole in mid-1935 (although some people claim that he was sentenced to death and released under the amnesty in 1936). Thereafter he was active in the catering union in Madrid and in the FAI. When the civil war broke out, he joined the Galician column as its trade union delegate, fighting on the Madrid front — and rejecting promotion. He later joined the Investigation Branch (in Barcelona-Madrid) whose task was to counter the Stalinist counter-revolution (1937). At this time he was disappointed at the course being taken by the revolution and was bitter at the sight of yesterdays red-hot revolutionaries jockeying for ‘position’. He had a miraculous escape from capture by the Francoists at the end of the war and crossed into France via Matar and Camprodon, only to begin an odyssey through concentration camps in Argeles, Barcares, St Cyprien and Arles — from which he escaped several times (he was in Perpignan in February 1939), but to little avail. He was sent to punishment camps and assigned to the Sur-Niort labor battalion. Eventually he made it to Paris where, after some harsh confrontation with CNT leaders, he secured a passage to the Amer-

in Betanzos as a result of treachery and was wounded and arrested. He was executed in La Corunna on 26 July 1952. Of average height, well-built, full of energy and shrewd, he was the most feared of the Galician guerrillas, the undisputed leader of the guerrillas in Central Galicia. He achieved considerable popularity, so much so that the name Foucellas was used as a synonym for guerrilla.

### **Juan Brell Piñol**

Born in Valencia in 1908 into an anarchist family, his childhood was 'eventful' due to the banishments and harassment inflicted on his father. He belonged to the CNT's Woodworkers' Union. By 1936 he was general secretary of the Foyos comarcal federation and he enlisted in the anarchist militias, commanding the Puebla de Farnals centuria which eventually joined the Iron Column; after some time in the rearguard, he returned to the front; he fought in Somosierra right up until the end of the civil war, at which point he was captured (in Loma Quemada). This marked the start of a long calvary through concentration camps and prisons... the monasteries of Santa Espina and Puig, Las Corneras (Valladolid), Madrid, Valencia and San Miguel de los Reyes (in the latter prison he was on death row, having been sentenced in 1941). In October 1946 he was released on parole, but was back in jail by March 1947; he managed to break out shortly afterwards and, under an assumed name, threw himself into intensive work on behalf of the underground CNT; this ended with his being arrested in 1958. He was released on bail and rejoined the struggle until his advancing years ruled him out of positions exposing him to danger. With the collapse of Francoism, he, like many another aged CNT member, devoted his efforts to championing the cause of pensioners.

### **José Ledo Limia**

Galician anarchist born in Lugo (some sources say in Orense) in 1900. He emigrated to Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) around the time of the great war and later popped up in Argentina, Chili, Uruguay and Peru. He returned to Spain as a stowaway and was arrested in Vigo. He joined the army in the wake of the Anual military disaster

*Alexander Berkman died 61 years ago on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1936. We enclose here his editorial for the first issue of The Blast published in San Francisco on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1916.*

## **Why The Blast?**

Do you mean to destroy?

Do you mean to build?

These are questions we have been asked from any quarters, by inquirers sympathetic and otherwise.

Our reply is frank and bold:

We mean both: to destroy *and* to build.

For, socially speaking, Destruction is the beginning of Construction.

Superficial minds speak sneeringly of destruction. O, it is easy to destroy — they say — but to build, to build, that's the important work.

Its nonsense. No structure, social or otherwise, can endure if built on a foundation of lies. Before the garden can bloom, the weeds must be uprooted. Nothing is therefore more important than to destroy. Nothing more necessary and difficult.

Take a man with an open mind, and you will have no great trouble in convincing him of the falsehood and rottenness of our social structure.

But when one is filled with superstition and prejudice, your strongest arguments will knock in vain against the barred doors of his bigotry and ignorance. For thousand-year-old superstition and tradition is stronger than truth and logic.

To destroy the Old and the False is the most vital work. We emphasize it: to blast the bulwarks of slavery and oppression is of primal necessity. It is the beginning of really lasting construction.

Thus The Blast will be destructive.  
And The Blast will be constructive.  
Too long have we been patient under the whip of brutality and degradation. Too long have we conformed to the Dominant, with an ineffective fist hidden in our pocket. Too long we have vented our depth of misery by endless discussion of the distant future. Too long have we been exhausting our efforts and energy by splitting hairs with each other.

Its time to act  
The time is NOW.

The breath of discontent is heavy upon this wide land. It permeates mill and mine, field and factory. Blind rebellion stalks upon highway and byway. To fire it with the spark of Hope, to kindle it with the light of Vision, and turn pale discontent into conscious social action — that is the crying problem of the hour. It is the great work calling to be done.

**To work, then, and blasted be every obstacle in the way of the Regeneration.**

## **In memoriam Alexander Berkman**

### ***Vanguard* Volume 3, No 3 Aug-Sept 1936**

*(Ed. note: this brief but vivid account of the life and work of Alexander Berkman was written for the Vanguard by one of Berkman's intimate friends who prefers to remain anonymous.)*

When Alexander Berkman's tragic end was announced, many of the older comrades, who knew him personally, felt that his death had left a space which would never be filled. This was the logical fate of a man who, when a mere youth of twenty-two, was ready to take the life of another whose brutal egotism brought misery and suffering to thousands of people. At sixty-six, he brought his life to an end when he felt he could serve life no longer.

forces with other guerrillas (Medina, Salcedo, Villa, El Tito.) The fourth guerrilla brother, Francisco, was beaten up by the victors in the civil war, until he took to the hills in 1941. The four Quero brothers were joined by others unhappy with Francoism; people like Antonio Velázquez (from Guéjar), Morales etc. The Queros guerrilla band commanded the respect of the Francoist forces of law and order, so much so that they often could live fairly openly in Granada. Among their more outstanding actions were several robberies carried out in La Zubia and Granada in 1942–43, the kidnapping of General Estrada in 1943, and numerous gunfights with police detectives and Civil Guards, the execution of informers, etc. Nevertheless, from 1945 onwards, the police noose was tightening and the band began to suffer losses; Velázquez and Mecánico died in January 1945 when the Civil Guard dynamited their hide-out in Granada; in July it was Modestro's turn. After a fierce gun-battle in Granada itself, the Queros managed to escape but within days 36 year old Pedro took his own life when surrounded on Sacromonte, taking two of Francos goons with him. In 1946 Morales and Francisco Quero (23) were killed. Antonio Quero died on 22 May 1947. It seems that the fourth brother was killed in a shoot-out on 2 November 1944. By 1947 the Los Queros' guerrilla activity in Granada, the most significant libertarian guerrillas alongside El Raya's band, was over.

### **Benigno Andrade Garcia**

Known as Foucellas after the village in La Corunna where he was born. In 1936 he was working with a locksmith in Mesia and was a CNT member. Come the fascist uprising, which succeeded in Galicia, and after fighting the forces of repression in Cambruy, he joined the rural guerrillas (Negreiro's group in the mountainous Chamarde district). With the end of the civil war, he carried on with his guerrilla activities alongside an autonomous band based in the Bacelo hills, fighting in the area around Betanzos, Ordenes, Guitiriz and Arzua, with forays into La Corunna and El Ferrol (in 1948), striking fear into the fascists. Early in 1952, he was ambushed

violent conflict (with Communists and anarchist fighting for control of the Seville CNT and in clashes with the bosses). There is no doubt that he took part in many operations against the Communists and that he assassinated the president of the Andalusian employers, Caravaca, when the latter refused to recognize the CNTs union. In 192, he was present at an FAI rally in Seville with Durruti and others. In the ensuing months he came in for a lot of harassment, as a result of which he extended his operations outside of Seville, before eventually being forced to flee to Morocco and Algeria. He died in Oran following a gun battle with French gendarmes. He was the most celebrated of the activists in southern Spain prior to the civil war.

#### **The 'Los Queros Guerrilla' band.**

The Los Queros group operated in the city of Granada and in its environs in the years following the end of the civil war, inflicting heavy losses on the Francoist government forces and their collaborators. The main members of the group were the four Quero Robles brothers (Antonio, Francisco, José and Pedro) and they had plenty of back-up. The Queros brothers were the sons of a farm laborer who went on to become a watchman and eventually a butcher in Granada. This latter trade was plied in Albaicin and he had the help of his older sons. When the civil war erupted in 1936, and after Granada fell to the rebels, the family was targeted for persecution. A brother in law was shot, the father was jailed, etc. and some of the brothers (Pedro, Antonio and Jos) escaped into the republican zone. When the civil war ended, Pedro wound up in the Benalua de Guardix concentration camp, returning to Granada after he was released. However, he was soon forced to go into hiding after suffering persecution when it became know that during the civil war he had served with a special services (guerrilla) unit, and the family had to put it about that he had fled to France. Years later he emerged from hiding to join his brothers in their guerrilla activity. José and Antonio had also been jailed after the war ended but had successfully broken out of the La Campana prison in Granada and joined

When Berkman started to avenge the Homestead strikers forty-four years ago he knew a deed like that could only be paid for by his death and he was ready to sacrifice his young life without hesitation for his outraged sense of justice.

No matter how one evaluates his deed, none would doubt his sincerity if one only had the patience to delve into the complicated soul of humanity and guess its secrets. When a person, particularly a young man whose life still has everything to offer, is ready to risk his all without hope of return, he must not be evaluated by ordinary standards. This is a deed which can only be explained when its motives are appreciated. He who does not understand how one could give everything for a cause which bore for him the whole meaning of life, will never understand a person like Berkman. The average philistine who calculates his life by profit and loss, and whose hardened soul cannot understand any action which is not motivated by the desire for profit, will never see in people like Berkman other than brutal force who menace the existence of society. They will never comprehend that it was not crudeness of sentiment that made Berkman commit his deed, but that it was his love for humanity, his respect for human life, that impelled him to take a life. This rare trait was characteristic of Berkman to his very end and was the key to his personality.

It is not one's political beliefs but the inner feelings which shape character. Berkman was everything but a man of force: he was a man of great kindness, a sincere friend and a splendid comrade, one who lived through the happiness and sorrows of his fellow humans. His clear thinking, colored by a somewhat naive sentimentality, made everybody love him. In this lies the elementary greatness of his personality, the root of his moral influence. He was no sectarian and could tolerate any sincerely presented opinion, but he always knew how best to express his own ideas when the occasion arose.

Berkman came to America as a very young man in a period in which the young workers movement had one of its tragic moments.

Like Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, and so many others, he was drawn into the revolutionary movement as a result of the Haymarket tragedy in Chicago. It was the fiery agitative powers of Johann Most which attracted him to the printing shop of Mosts Freedom where he learned typesetting. At that time he carried with him the thought of returning to Russia to fight in the underground movement, but the bloody happenings in Homestead brought a sudden end to his plans. Berkman was sentenced to twenty-two years, a tremendous sentence which had been applied only by a merciless stretching of the law.

The failure of the attentat saved a precious life which in the terrible years of imprisonment matured to greatness. Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* is one of those rare books which once read is never forgotten. In this book all the suffering and pain of a courageous spirit struggling against great odds is told in a background of drab prison life. Most of those upon whom fate has placed such trials break down under the pressure of personal sorrow. But a man who can survive the long years of hopeless imprisonment without swaying from his opinions, or being morally extinguished is a character of unconquerable integrity and inner strength. Berkman was such a man. In the gray, evil-foreboding days there was nothing to console him. He experienced things which the average man would hardly believe possible. Only very few realize how sadistically man can behave towards man.

For fourteen years he remained in that hell. Fourteen years! Very few can imagine what an accumulation of pain and sorrow are hidden beneath this dry number. On returning to life, he found everything changed. It was not easy to find a pathway in this new world. Notwithstanding, he found it and again distinguished himself in the fight for freedom.

Together with Emma Goldman he published *Mother Earth*. He worked principally in the ranks of organized labor and among the unemployed of the metropolis. Berkman had no illusions about the moral qualities of the worker. He knew that the majority of them

### **Joaquin Pallarés Tomás**

Joaquin Pallarès Tomás was born in Barcelona-La Torrasa in 1923 and was the leader of an action group which started its operations almost as soon as the civil war ended in 1939, in and around Hospitalet, Santa Eulalia, Sans and La Torrasa (these being villages and districts in and around Barcelona). Among the operations credited to it was the execution of the chief inspector of the Hospitalet police (on 30 April 1939), as well as a number of incidents in which police were disarmed or shot, and robberies were carried out. His group was made up of Catalans, plus some Aragonese from around Huesca. In addition to guerrilla activity, they did remarkable work on the reorganization of the Libertarian Youth of Catalonia, setting up the first postwar regional committee and Barcelona local committee. At the time of their arrest, three of the groups members (Pallars, Alvarez and Ruiz) held positions on the Libertarian Youth regional committee. They were captured by the police in March 1943 and tortured; within days, Joaquin Pallarés – who displayed great integrity – was executed (on 29 March 1943) alongside Francisco Alvarez, Fernando Ruiz, Francisco Atares, José Serra, Benito Santi, Juan Aquilla, Arguelles and Tresols; other members of the group – Vicente Iglesias, Jos Urrea, Manuel Gracia, Rafael Olalde and Hilaria Foldevilla – had their lives spared. The Pallarés group was one of the very first anti-Franco urban guerrilla groups.

### **José Siliceo Victorio**

Born in 1906 in Bienvenida (Badajoz province, Spain) and died in 1934 in Oran (Algeria). Member of the anarchist action groups in Andalusia. It seems that while he was living in his native village he took no part in the libertarian activities which had been initiated by Olegario Pachón; his commitment to anarchism came when he moved to Seville shortly before the coming of the Republic. Almost immediately after settling there he joined the attack groups, joining one that also included Miguel Arca and Jeronimo Misa. They soon became the most formidable anarchist group /confederal defense group in the years when the CNT in Seville was caught up in



was shut down under the Republic, he transferred to an engineers regiment, first as a drummer and later as a rifleman. Posted to stand guard on the prison in Zaragoza, he found himself jailed for talking to the inmates, and a short time later he happened to attend a CNT meeting in the city (in 1932). This made a deep impression on him and decided to join the anarchist ranks. A little later he crossed swords with his sergeant and was discharged from the army. In 1933 he was living in Vitoria, a CNT member and when the fascists captured the city in 1936 he fled (24 July) into the mountains and made his way to Bilbao. He fought in San Sebastian, Tolosa and Irun and later, having enlisted with the Bakunin Battalion, in Chivarte, Sollube and Murguia as well, right up until the Bilbao front collapsed, at which point he left for Santander where (thanks to treachery by the Basque nationalists) he was arrested along with several thousand others in August 1937 and taken to Santoña. This was the start of a lengthy series of calamities (which included being sentenced to death) and a voyage through the prisons of Bilbao and Burgos, until he was released on parole in March 1943 and banished to Benicarló (Cervera) where he became a goatherd. After some months he made his way back to Vitoria, tried his hand at a number of trades and threw himself into the underground struggle (becoming a member of the Alava comarcal committee). In 1947 he tried to escape to France but was arrested in Navarre and was jailed for some months in Pamplona and Vitoria. Sickened by the workers lack of fight, he decided to switch trades and became a boot-black, keeping the torch of anarchism aloft for many a year in Vitoria, where he became an exceptionally popular figure. From 1967 on, a series of thromboses sapped his strength but this did not stop him from being one of the first to volunteer his help when the CNT started to rebuild in Vitoria. A Tolstoyan advocate of a pacifist libertarianism, tremendously strong-willed and impervious to loss of morale, he was unbending in his principles which led him to repudiate consumerism. He was the very symbol of the tireless militant of indestructible faith.

shared the social prejudices of other classes. But he also recognized that the social position of the worker was the creative power in life, that it made him the most important factor in any social change and that this was the lever to be used to pry up the decaying social system.

Then came the period when he edited the Blast on the Pacific coast. In connection with this, it should be remembered that Berkman was the first to come to the aid of Mooney and Billings. He traveled all over the country, spoke at innumerable meetings and moved heaven and earth to arouse the workers to protest. At this time none dreamed of using the case for party propaganda. In their dedication articles Berkman's name is not mentioned. Perhaps someone felt that this man who had suffered fourteen years imprisonment for his principles was too exalted to be turned to the uses of narrow political interests which stood to profit by the misfortune of others.

Then came the years of the World War when Berkman and his friends tried their best to stir up public opinion against the prevailing hysteria. But the untiring efforts of this small minority could not conquer the overwhelming tide of misdirected human passion, and it was not long before Emma Goldman, Berkman and so many others were sent to prison for their anti-conscription campaign. Followed two terrible years at Atlanta penitentiary. Berkman mentioned many times later that his two years in that prison were worse than those he had spent in the jail at Pittsburgh. It was because our brave comrade could not tolerate the injustices done to others that he suffered so much during this incarceration. It was his temerity in championing the cause of oppressed Negro prisoners in a lynch state like Georgia that led to his disfavor with the prison authorities. But he took every slap of fate with stoic resignation.

Under the blows of the enraged masses Czarism broke its terrible hold on Russia. The heart of Berkman beat with hope when he with Emma Goldman and the rest of his comrades were deported from America and started the trip to his native home on that renowned

death ship. They all wanted to cooperate in the building of a new world, of socialism and freedom. But the experiences of our comrade in Russia were the greatest disappointment of his unselfish life. He saw the dictatorship of the proletariat grow into the dictatorship of a party over the proletariat and all Russian peoples. Long he fought against the suspicions which stirred within him. He sought to understand, to rationalize, to comprehend and explain these happenings which were in conflict with his free spirit. Finally the cold-blooded slaughter of the sailors of Kronstadt put an end to all his doubts. His place could not be on the side which ruthlessly killed the pioneers of the Russian Revolution, as did the French bourgeoisie the 35,000 men, women and children of the Paris Commune. His book *The Bolshevik Myth* renders his inner conflicts in an expressive and striking portrayal. It was a terrible shock to Berkman.

When Emma Goldman and Berkman came to Europe from Russia, they found themselves in a new world fundamentally different from that which they had known in America. The terrible ravages of the war were everywhere manifest and all of the countries were shaken with revolutionary convulsions. It is not easy to live in strange surroundings but here again Berkman did the best he could. After a short stay in Sweden, he went to Germany and contacted the young Anarcho-Syndicalist movement there. His works, *The Russian Tragedy*, *The Kronstadt Rebellion*, *The Russian Revolution and the Communist Party*, and his *Prison memoirs* were all translated into German. Together with Emma Goldman he participated in the Congress of Anarcho-Syndicalists in Erfurt and established close relations with his comrades. Most of his work at this time was for the imprisoned comrades in Russia. He organized the International Aid Fund and edited the *Bulletin* in behalf of the Anarcho-Syndicalists in the prisons of the Soviet Union.

Finally he went to France but the revolutionary situation in that country precluded his doing open work forcing him to resign his position as secretary of the Russian Aid Fund. He was deported

his many wounds and we saw less and less of him until he died in 1934.

**Itineraire** — You did see your father again, in 1940, in Marseilles. What was he up to then?

**Leo** — That's right. Demobbed in August 1940 (I had belonged to a ski troop unit in the Alps), I met up with my father in Marseilles on 28 October. In the interim, waiting to see how things would turn out generally (Paris was occupied by the Germans) I had gone grape-picking and various other things. There were a million and a half refugees from the occupied zone in the Marseilles area. Work was very hard to come by. My father, already hard hit by my mother's death and living from day to day, was still active: meetings, lectures, propaganda. We talked about it a bit, but, because of my reserve we did not get too far.

Communication between father and son is not very easy: I still felt too much of a child beside him. It was a lot later on, once I had gained some experience and greater knowledge of people, that I should have liked to chat with him. But by then he was no longer around. Taken in by one of his best friends, Francisco Botey, who (along with his wife Paquita) had fled Spain for the Marseilles area, he had company and care in those tough times, but passed away, exhausted and gravely ill, in September 1945.

Leo Voline interviewed by Itineraire editors. ITINERAIRE 13, pp 21–24.

### **Some Militants of the CNT**

In line with its policy of rescuing militants from the oblivion of history, the KSL is proud to present these brief life summaries of some CNT activists. Any extra information on these — or other — comrades is welcome.

#### **Macario Illera Tejada**

Born in Vitoria in 1913, into a very poor family, he spent some time in the workhouse. At the age of 14 he joined the army as a drummer boy and was based in the Zaragoza military academy in the days when Franco was the director there; when the academy

**Itineraire** — Some of these people would have been freemasons like your father was?

**Leo** — Yes, maybe. By nature I am very reserved. So there are topics that I never broached with my father, except one time when I asked him why he was a freemason. He replied that he had hesitated on account of certain rites with which he was not in agreement, but reckoned that those were the circles in which one might spread one's ideas widely, given that his lodge was already very leftist. I also happen to know that through those connections he was able to give lots of people a helping hand. When comrades in difficulty showed up, my father would use his connections to straighten things out for them, find them papers, residence permits, lodgings and work. It was often very hard. Sometimes people lived with us while they waited. Luckily there were also genuine friends who did their damndest discreetly to look after the children, lay on a party, dress up as Father Christmas. I recall especially the Goldenbergs, Senya Fleshine and Mollie Steimer, the Doubinskys, Arshinov and others.

**Itineraire** — And did Makhno and Arshinov come too?

**Leo** — Yes, Arshinov and his wife, along with their little lad, André, visited for years right up until they left for Russia. My father used to say to him: Marin... I have no idea why he called him that. I remember especially one song that they used to sing together with Makhno, which referred to Batko (Makhno), Uncle Marin (Arshinov) and Voline. When Arshinov called to the house in Gennevilliers in 1927, pining for home — I was just a kid of about ten — my father used to say over and over to him: Marin, you must not go. They will shoot you. Do not kid yourself, they will never forgive you. But he went all the same in 1932, and they shot him in 1937. Makhno used to come often when we lived in Berlin in our attic. I used to listen keenly to him, for all his talk was of his battles, his daring coups, his guile in dealing with the enemy — a real western for a lad of between 7 and 9 like me. The, in France, we lived way out on the outskirts: he was worn out, ailing and handicapped by

from France and only the help of influential friends made possible his return. It was a tortured existence. Even the most beautiful surroundings of the French Riviera lost all their glamour for him, living as he was, like a prisoner at the mercy of the slothful bureaucracy which might at any moment chase him across the border. Yet, he wrote ABC of Anarchist-Communism and conducted a prodigious correspondence with his friends in Europe and America. Then came illness and the constant fight for material existence. A few months ago he was recuperating from a painful and dangerous operation, he had a sudden relapse and felt that the best thing he could do was to make his adieu to the world. We must emphasize here his unwavering friendship with Emma Goldman who lost in him her best and oldest friend. What that means can only be understood by those who know that wounds exist that never can be healed.

A rare person has left us, a great and noble character, a real man. We bow quietly before his grave and swear to work for the ideal which he served faithfully for so many years.

#### **Interview with Leo Voline**

Third son of Voline, Leo Eichenbaum (better known as Leo Voline) was born on 4 January 1917. From early on he shared his father's ideals and at the beginning of 1937, he made his way to Spain, there to join a confederal column of the CNT. His account of the death of Durruti is most interesting. Is any further information on this commando available? or is it all part of the myth?

**Itineraire** — How did your father sample the Russian Revolution?

**Leo** — As ever, as was his lifelong habit, he gave himself up completely to it: he was always the same way, whether it was family matters or anyone in need. He would not allow himself any excuse or weakness, even if his life depended on it. Sentenced to death by the Bolsheviks, he refused to renege upon his ideas and go over to them in order to win a pardon. He never wanted to play the leader and stay behind in Moscow with the salon anarchists. Luckily, he

used to say they are not the one's who will make the revolution. And so it was that he set off to join the Makhnovist insurgent movement in the Ukraine, once he got wind of it. My father was always a bit backwards in coming forward, telling the masses: I count for nothing. It is up to you to act, to decide, to organize yourselves. You know your problems best. I can merely offer advice. His respect for every single individual was total. In his view, everyone was good, and, if someone was not, that was the fault of society. As I see it, even if there is a kernel of truth in that, he was very often too forgiving. He never forced his opinion on anybody. One time- I must have been about fourteen – I asked him: What are your beliefs? and he replied: Never mind about my opinions, search out your own truth (...) I only got to know my father when I was about five years old and he was held in the Butyrky prison in Moscow under sentence of death. He was released on condition that he leave the country – and that thanks to a campaign launched by a delegation of French revolutionary syndicalists led by Gaston Leval: it kicked up a real stink. So I cannot remember anything about my father before that time. The only memories I have are left are of our everyday life, with a village as a backcloth – a village called Bobrow, in the northern Ukraine – and the tears of my mother, on her own with three children, and without any news of my father, no news of whether he was alive or dead. And the hunger... Food was our main worry, our sole topic of conversation. I recall one old peasant woman who lived with us and helped my mother. One day, our cat, which ate nothing but mice- and there were plenty of those – turned up with a great hunk of meat in its jaws, filched from who knows where. The babushka ate well that day.

**Itineraire** – How come your father, who came from a bourgeois family, wound up becoming a revolutionary?

**Leo** – He told me how, at the age of about 14, generally outraged by the fate of the common people and in particular by that of their own maid, Anita, a 16-year-old girl who was always the first to rise and the last to retire at night, and who was only entitled to venture

**Itineraire** – And how did your father stand with regard to the war in Spain?

**Leo** – My father was totally committed to action alongside the Spanish movement. He was in ongoing contact with officials, especially as he was busy editing the newspaper *L'Espagne antifasciste* from Paris. Thus every day he received reports on current developments. And so, on 21 November 1936, he got a telegram which read: Durruti murdered on the Madrid front by Communists. One hour later, a second telegram arrived (just as my father was setting out for the printshop) saying: Cancel first telegram, in order to preserve unity of action. Which was the absolute obsession of the time. Later, in prison in Cerbre, I came across a young Corsican lad, making his way home as I was, disheartened by the Communists, and he admitted to me that he had been a member of the commando that slew Durruti. He was very emotional and shouted to me: But I swear to you, Leo, I never fired a shot! His name was Andre Paris.

**Itineraire** – Lots of people used to visit you in order to see your father?

**Leo** – There was a never-ending stream, a terrible situation for my mother. Where my father was concerned, our door was never shut. Lots of freeloaders used to come, basically to cadge a free meal, without a thought for the problems that posed for us. Some made a habit of it and used to turn up regularly for a meal. I have never forgotten my mother's look when she saw them coming. Sometimes they were foreign fugitives, persecuted for their beliefs, sent to Voline by French comrades. There was a number of reasons for that: my father spoke several languages, and he also had connections which he never called upon for his own benefit but which proved very useful in pulling others out of a hole. He knew Henri Sellier, the senator-mayor of Suresnes; and Leon Blum; and the Paris prefect Jean Chiappe (whose life one of my father's friends, Paul Fuchs, had once saved and who had promised him help any time he might need it). There was the lawyer Henry Torres too.

could countenance the victory of a predominantly libertarian force. Later I saw just how accurate that was. They all betrayed us: from the Republican government that withheld arms from the people, through the Communists who had our units encircled by the fascists when they opened up the front lines. Only 532 of us out of my unit of 4000+ men were left to break out of the encirclement on 6 February 1938, after 24 hours of battle. Not enough has been made of the American supplies that went to Franco, whilst England and France, in cahoots with Russia, preached nonintervention. (...)

When we reached Barcelona, our little group was surrounded by a gang of Communists as soon as we stepped off the train: they welcomed us with open arms and shepherded us into their units. Luckily, a group of the Libertarian Youth — who were very strong in Catalonia — were also waiting for us and saw them off. Given my background as a radio- navigator, I had it in mind to join the Republican air force. After a few overtures were made, I was sent to Valencia for induction. Presenting myself in the appropriate office, I was greeted by a civil servant sitting behind his cash register. Just then, three superior officers who had arrived overheard me and, smilingly, clapped me on the shoulder and told me in French: ‘Great! We’ll take you right now!’ I very quickly retorted: ‘Take me where?’ Answer? ‘To the International Brigades!’ I leaned back towards the door, saying ‘With the Communists? No Way!’ Having taken some soundings, I learned that an anarchist column was due to go to the front very shortly to relieve the Iron Column which had been pretty well decimated during a six month tour of duty at the front. So I reported to an official in order to enlist in a CNT column, the Confederal Column, under the name of Leo Voline. They were pleasantly surprised that I was one of the sons of my father. And so, at the end of February 1937, with hundreds of young people packed into lorries, I was off to the Teruel front along impossible roads, singing anarchist anthems and revolutionary songs.

outside for two or three hours every Sunday, he asked his mother how she was supposed to make something of her life and meet boys. To which his mother replied: Don’t you concern yourself with that or you’ll wind up in Siberia! Which is precisely what happened nine years later, during the 1905 revolution. He was deported for life at the age of 23.

**Itineraire** — How did you live as exiles?

**Leo** — We left Russia carrying the mark of privation, in straightened circumstances, with just two suitcases for all our worldly possessions. You had to have been there to know what famine is, you had to have seen the corpses in the streets, perished of hunger. Poverty accompanied us into Germany. There were five of us children, the eldest two belonging to my father’s first wife. We settled in two rented rooms near Berlin. We saw very little of my father because he worked in the capital as a bookkeeper, I seem to remember. To supplement his earnings, he gave language lessons (in Russian, French, German). Those were tough times but we were happy. My father seemed to be living out his dream of a better society and was always in good form and optimistic. Harmony reigned within the family and there was never an angry word. Then, after three years, we moved to Berlin. My father made arrangements to leave Germany for France. We were beginning to see Hitler Youth marches, rallies and street brawling. My father was often away giving lectures. My mother fretted about him. and lived on her nerves. We stopped going to school, being on the point of departure. We spent the whole day outside, as we had only one attic room in which we all — except for my two older brothers who were staying with friends — spent the night. Along with my sister Natasha, we spent a lot of our time on the tennis courts adjoining our building. Wealthy Berliners used to use them and we would be scampering about all day picking up balls, which gave us some exercise and enabled us to contribute a little money to the household. Our father kept a record for us. Later, in France, in 1929, it paid for my first bicycle.

It was 1925 by the time we finally got permission to go to France, from where my father had once been expelled.

**Itineraire** — That was back in 1916, I believe?

**Leo** — That's right. Discovering that he was due for arrest and internment, having been reported for drafting a leaflet against the war, he had fled, reaching Bordeaux and finding work as a coal-trimmer on the Lafayette, under the name of Francois-Joseph Rouby. During the voyage, exhausted and with hands bloodied, he thought of going to the captain but, with help from the other coal-trimmers, he held out until they docked in the United States, staying there until the Russian revolution broke out. He let my mother back in Paris know that he would make his way back to Russia via Japan and China, and asked her to meet up with him there. And so we set sail from Brest aboard the Russian vessel Dvinsk, part of a convoy, on 5 August 1917. The convoy made a lengthy detour, steaming first towards the Equator before swinging out widely northwards, only to sail past the north of England, the seas and oceans being infested with German U-boats. There was one ship even sunk en route and we arrived in Arkhangelsk on 20 August 1917.

**Itineraire** — And how did things go in France?

**Leo** — When we returned to France in 1925, at first we had to be taken in by some old friends of my fathers, the Fuchs, in the Rue Lamarck in Paris, just long enough for us to find lodgings. My father never fancied living in large cities on account of the children's health. Thanks to Henri Sellier, the mayor and senator for Suresnes, we found lodging in the newly-built garden city of Gennevilliers. Our living conditions were still quite straightened. I remember that one day my father burst out laughing: Were five centimes short of the price of a loaf! But he insisted that we stay at school no matter what, especially as some of his comrades reproached him for having children, and him a militant! The two oldest boys — none too fond of school — true, they had arrived at the ages of 13 and 15 in a land whose language they did not know — opted to learn a trade in a school for mechanics. Natasha opted to be a dancer: her

teacher was the famous Russian ballet star who went on to become the Princess Ksishinskaya, mistress of czar Nicholas II. My father met her, and after a lengthy conversation was much taken by her, but told her: 'My beliefs do not come into it. My daughter wishes to dance.' As for me, I was a great handyman and I used to take everything to pieces, even my mother's sewing machine, just to see how it worked. So I was steered towards technology and proved a dab hand. My father worked as a bookkeeper: he supplemented that with some morocco leather work from home. He and my mother frequently sat up through the night finishing an order. So, being a quick learner, I used to lend them a hand of an evening, until the day came I made up my mind to quit studying and look for work. I was a radio technician for several firms until the war broke out in Spain.

**Itineraire** — And you fought in it. How did that come about?

**Leo** — For me the issue was straightforward: since I was campaigning for a libertarian form of society, joining those fighting for just such a society was the logical next step. Some Spanish officials came to the house and I was present at their meetings with my father. Often the topic was arms purchasing, but the money had first to be raised from the sale of bonds and other valuables retrieved from Spanish banks. I wound up strolling around Paris with the bearers of these valuables, with a gun in my pocket. It was all very Hollywood. In November 1936, seeing that this war was no trifling affair, I decided to set off for it. My father told me: Now think this through, because it will turn your whole life upside down. It took some time to make all my arrangements and off I set on 14 January 1937. I had just turned 20. In fact, virtually the whole of the small libertarian group in the 15<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris set off: five guys and one girl. The CGT-SR saw to the travel arrangements. There was a so-called identity check at the border, but the French police had been ordered to let all these undesirables slip across.

I had no belief at all in the success of the Republican forces. I always reckoned that no political party, no government, no country