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Obituary: Albert Meltzer

Anarchist Communist Federation

1996

Albert Meltzer who died on 7th May this year aged 76, had been a class struggle anarchist from the age of 16. He took part in work around the Spanish Revolution and was a member of the editorial board of War Commentary, (which changed its name to Freedom at the end of the war). This anarchist fortnightly maintained a consistent revolutionary anti-war stand, and an outstanding quality and level of writing. During the fifties Meltzer retired from the movement, returning to edit a number of pamphlets produced by his Coptic Press and to work with the group producing Cuddon's Cosmopolitan Review which addressed itself to cultural as well as directly political issues. Together with Stuart Christie he began producing the monthly Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross in 1968 which later became Black Flag in 1970. This journal gave coverage to news of the international anarchist movement, in particular details of repression and info and support for class war prisoners. Indeed Meltzer's work in establishing the ABC has led to a legacy of a number of local ABCs throughout Britain and ABCs in other countries. Their support for class war prisoners is invaluable and their efforts should be supported. One of Meltzer's other achievements was his sizeable contribution to the Kate Sharpley Library,

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a valuable resource and archive of the British anarchist movement, as well as of course his publishing of many pamphlets.

Albert's commitment to class struggle Anarchism was an influence on several generations (indeed, it contributed to this writer's development of class struggle ideas). His loathing of the liberals in the anarchist movement, as he called them, particularly the likes of George Woodcock, were understandable, but his verbal opposition to them was sometimes vitriolic in the extreme, to the extent of calling them fascists. Now, they may be many things, but the misnomer of fascist was not one of them. His heartfelt disgust at the way that the revolutionary core of anarchism was distorted by those who talked about pacifism, denied the existence of class or class struggle, and espoused gradualism in opposition to revolutionism, sometimes led him to write in terms guided more by his heart than his head. This vituperative style of writing sometimes spilled over into attacks on those who did espouse revolutionary ideas. Albert was no friend of the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists or the Anarchist Workers Association in the seventies and there were attacks on these groups in the pages of Black Flag. At a time when the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists, then inside the Anarchist Federation of Britain, was developing ideas about the need for a revolutionary organisation Albert Meltzer was seen as a natural ally. He had recently written on the need for organisation in Black Flag. The ORA comrades were then told by Albert that he did not mean a specific revolutionary organisation but a vague "workers' organisation" based on non-existent workers' clubs. The ORA saw this as a brush-off, and that Albert had back-tracked on his previous pronouncements. Some ORA comrades engaged in some stupid name-calling with things like "Pope Albert" being thrown around. He quite understandably bore a grudge, when a search for possible areas of co-operation and convergence might have been more useful (true for both sides). Albert did not readily identify specifically with anarcho-syndicalism in the sixties and seventies, perhaps influenced by his friendship

with Ted Kavanagh with whom he had collaborated with on Cud-don's, and who had profound criticisms of anarcho-syndicalism. His later identification with anarcho-syndicalism translated into membership of the Solidarity Federation where latterly his ideas on "workers' organisation" have appeared to have been remarkably influential.

These criticisms should be weighed against Albert's important contributions to British revolutionary anarchism and to his lifelong devotion to the vision of a stateless and classless society.