

Jack Grancharoff (June 7, 1925-May 5, 2016)

Obituary

Danilo Sidari, Sid Parissi and Peter Sheldon

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Known in Australia as Jack the Anarchist, Jelesko Grancharoff, his real name, was born in Malko Tarnovo, Burgas, in southeastern Bulgaria (Thrace), to a family of shepherds and peasants. Curious and rebellious in spirit, from the age of 13 he began to experience the hard, repressive methods of 'Tsarist' schooling under the monarch Boris III, and fought against it.

After finishing school at Burgas, he joined the Agrarian Party, founding its Malko Tarnovo section. During a debate between the Communist Party and the Agrarian Party, he was greatly impressed by the words of the Agrarian representative, a socialist revolutionary: "Land to the peasants and factories to the workers." In the same period, he began attending meetings of local anarchists, who had been active in Bulgaria for some decades.

1944 saw the monarchist regime ally itself with the German-Italian Axis, but the regime was in disarray and was brought down by pro-Soviet forces. The new government consisted of pro-Soviet elements, Agrarian Party elements and all the parties hostile to Nazi Germany. During this time Jack, as a youth representative of the Agrarian Party, collaborated with the Bulgarian Communists but was wary of their sectarian methods. He read news from the USSR that spoke of repression against the Bulgarian emigrants, and he always maintained a cautious attitude towards them.

In late 1944, after the German army retreated before the Russian advance, and with a large anti-fascist guerrilla force attacking them that included a formidable anarchist partisan militia, an area of Bulgarian Macedonia was organized along anarchist lines for about nine months, somewhat like in Spain in 1936. Jack was a militant in the anti-fascist movement. Then the Russians moved in, crushed the revolution, and set up a fully pro-Soviet government, as allowed for in the Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin agreements for a post-WWII Europe.

Because of the intensification of the authoritarian Communist regime, Jack was interned for seven months in a concentration camp in 1947 and sentenced to hard labor. He was released thanks to his past militant anti-fascist activity, but was constantly stalked by the regime and was considered a provocateur and an 'enemy of the people.'

In November 1947, following a tip-off from a family friend who had enlisted in the militia, he escaped a new arrest and probable summary execution in prison by fleeing to Turkey with a companion. After about two years, the first six months in solitary confinement, he was able to move to Italy thanks to the International Refugee Organization.

Still without a passport, he responded in 1950 to one of the many calls that the Australian government made to facilitate immigration of cheap labor. After an initial period of isolation in Australia, he began to make contact with libertarians and, more generally, the left, particularly among ethnic groups of Slavs, East Europeans and Italians. Because of his activism, he was constantly under surveillance by the A.S.I.O., Australia's internal secret service. As a result, successive Australian governments denied him a passport. This went on for decades, leaving him stateless. In 1970 he was finally issued a special permit for six months, thanks to the involvement of Yugoslav diplomats, and returned to Europe with the intention of visiting his mother in Bulgaria, but the regime prevented him from entering. He never saw his parents again.

After this, his trips, at least to Europe, were rare until the end of the twentieth century, when he was finally granted Australian citizenship and a passport. In these early years he worked in various jobs, including as a bus conductor. His political activism led him to create a wide network of contacts throughout eastern states of Australia, from Queensland to New South Wales and Victoria, and saw him involved with several libertarian groups. This included several years with the Jura Books Collective in Sydney, which he joined soon after the bookshop was founded in 1977.

There were many dimensions to Jack's anarchist activism. Soon after landing in Australia, he could be seen giving speeches at the open-air speakers corner on the Domain in Sydney. He was an ecologist from childhood, a supporter of the feminist movement, a significant figure in the Sydney Push, and a champion of social issues for workers that characterized the second half of twentieth century Australia. He also kept busy as a largely self-educated intellectual. He founded the magazines Red and Black and Anarchist, and wrote countless pamphlets and articles about the thoughts and writings of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Stirner, Gorelik, Avrich, Bookchin and many other libertarian thinkers.

With an indomitable spirit, independent and autonomous, in spite of advanced age, he continued to live in his home in Quaama after his partner Nan died, with many friends in the district and in the countryside. Throughout his time in his beloved countryside, and until the end, he maintained tight relations, particularly with people and groups in Sydney and Melbourne who shared his passion for life and the struggle for freedom. About 30 people attended an enthusiastic commemoration of Jack's life near his home after his funeral, and another 50 at an animated celebration of his friendship and anarchist life at Jura Books in July.

Readers may like to find out more about his life here: <http://slackbastard.anarchobase.com/?p=39907>

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