The Way to Golgotha: How Anarchism Persisted and Developed in Reaction to World Events, 1918-1940

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April 2026

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Word Count: 14,172

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Acknowledgements

There are always more thank yous to be said than are possible in the space of a page. I would like to begin with a blanket thank you to everyone who has helped me in any way over the last four years, big or small–this thesis is the culmination of my college experience and all those moments of assistance I will forever be grateful for.

I first want to thank Professors Rhiannon Stephens and Thai Jones, whose guidance and support were invaluable during a year full of doubt. Professor Jones I also want to thank for introducing me to the archive, that place where history comes to life. With that, I also want to thank the people of the Tuesday afternoon thesis class. It was a privilege to be in a room every week with such curious and thoughtful people, and the feedback received from each of you was invaluable in making this thesis happen.

I want to thank all the community archivists who made a project like this possible. So much of the research done in this thesis was only possible due to organizations like the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive and the Anarchist Library, both of which have gone out of their way to archive the lives and texts of many of the anarchists.

Lastly, endless thanks to the people of Hogan 6A/6B (and Ruggles 608-612 before that, and Hartley 8B before that, and all those who are part of the family even when not living there). I am eternally grateful to have found a family here, and one that has pushed me intellectually and personally so far. So much of the research that I've done for this thesis centers bonds that people maintained across countries, languages, and cultures, even in the face of constant opposition. As we move toward graduation, I find inspiration in the belief that if even a small, persecuted ideology could persist for so long, then surely a friendship will be easy.

Introduction

In the late Fall of 1922, Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón sat in a cell in Leavenworth Prison in Kansas. He had been in the United States for nearly two decades, having fled arrest in Mexico in 1904. Magón had spent those decades spreading his anarchist slogan, "Tierra y Libertad," across the United States and Mexican borders. But now, having been captured by the U.S. government along with many other *magonistas*, he was nearly blind and sick with tuberculosis, two thousand miles from his home in Oaxaca. Still optimistic about his potential release, which was being negotiated between the Mexican and American governments, he wrote to a comrade in New York on November 12th, 1922:

> Yes, it is cold, and I dream of the South, and its sky, and its flowers. Before long, perhaps, I shall be blessed with its beauty…And when by my native cliffs I happen to discern the vague outline of the northern shores on which lay scattered the wreckage of so many hopes of mine, I shall say with a sigh: I meant well, my blonde brothers, I meant well, but you could not understand me…[1]

Magón would die just nine days later, still in captivity.

Though Magón saw his contribution to the spread of anarchism as a failure, he had become a part of a transnational, global anarchist movement. In Mexico, the anarchist Zapatista movement had taken up *Tierra y Libertad* as their rallying cry and had gotten many libertarian ideas written into the new Mexican Constitution of 1917.[2] In the United States, his newspaper *Regeneración* had a readership base stretching across languages and cultures from Los Angeles

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[1] Magón et al., *Correspondencia*, 457.

[2] Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*, 287.

to New York.[3] *Regeneración* and Magón himself were representative of an entire global ecosystem of anarchist thought that was influencing and creating the broader global movement. His death at the hands of the United States was an example of the traumas experienced by the anarchist movement in the wake of World War I, while his correspondence also signaled how the anarchist movement was moving away from the borderlands and toward New York.

In America, the anarchist movement included anarchists of Hispanic, Italian, Black, and Jewish descent, among others. Anarchism is defined here as a left-wing, bottom-up revolutionary movement where the workers' union operates as the primary driver of societal change, also characterized by a resistance to top-down authority.[4] It has also been called anarcho-syndicalism and, by many of its subscribers, libertarianism. This anarchism also existed in constant opposition to other left-wing groups that it saw as more authoritarian, especially the Bolshevism that became prominent in the Soviet Union, as well as Trotskyism, socialism, and other left-wing ideologies. In this paper, the term "anarchism" will be used for simplicity.

In his seminal work on the history of American anarchism, *Anarchist Voices*, Paul Avrich calls the period from the 1871 Paris Commune to the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 the "classical phase" of anarchism.[5] Following this classification, this paper seeks to intervene in the last stage of this classical phase, starting from 1918, as the First World War was ending, and ending in 1940, just after the end of the Spanish Civil War. It will argue that the interwar period of anarchism had a distinct character that was defined by reactions to the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Civil War Examining the context in which we find the anarchist movement in 1918, anarchism had a long history in America. Anarchism had existed in America in some form since

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[3] Magón et al., *Correspondencia* 457.

[4] Prichard, "The Globalization of Anarchism, 6.

[5] Avrich, *Anarchist Voices,* 3.

nearly the beginning of the country's history. Josiah Warren of Boston, born in 1798, is often called the "first American anarchist" for his commitment to a decentralized form of socialism in the 18th century.[6] The the writings of Henry David Thoreau in the first half of the 19th century were also influential on American anarchist thought, as were the utopian communities that existed in the 1840s and 1850s. The anarcho-syndicalism that this paper deals with really got its start in the 1870s, culminating with the 1886 Haymarket Affair, an 1886 bombing at a pro-labor rally in Chicago carried out by anarchists, which became the opening event of the anarchist era in the United States. This was the event that inspired Russian-Jewish immigrants Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, two of the key figures in American anarchism, to the ideology. Over the next three decades, anarchism continued to be a factor in the labor movement of the country, especially as one of the key ideologies of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). As the First World War progressed, along with the leftist revolutions in Mexico and Russia, the United States government began to crack down on leftist organizations, including raiding the New York headquarters of the IWW in 1919 as part of the First Red Scare.

For many who have studied this subject, including sociologist and historian of anarchism Ronald Creagh, anarchism in the United States began to fade after 1918. In Creagh's words: "[Anarchism] will fade after World War I due to a variety of causes: mass culture and repression progressively corrode working-class institutions, union leaders are integrated into the establishment, and the Russian Revolution and the New Deal promote participation in political parties as the sole avenue to social change."[7] This paper instead argues that the anarchist movement during this period continued to be present in grassroots movements and also began to

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[6] D'Amato, "Josiah Warren: The Most Practical Anarchist."

[7] Creagh, "Anarchism in the United States to 1945," 1.

turn inwards, defining itself in the words of its participants, creating the anarchist movement in its unique interwar form. It also took on a distinctly transnational character, which, while not new, made American anarchism a reflection of its immigrant population and the global anarchist movement. This was especially true in New York City due to its role as a commercial hub, allowing the transmission of publications and radical ideas, and its role as the locus of immigration to America. A thriving world of print, both in the form of anarchist histories and biographies, and hundreds of periodicals, each dedicated to anarchism in a different form or language, continued to keep the anarchist movement active until the 1930s and the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Civil War, specifically the period in 1936-1937 when Catalonia was under the control of the anarchist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo-Federación Anarquista Ibérica (CNT-FAI), became a generation-defining event for the anarchists who remained in America during the 1920s and 1930s. Far from fading, the CNT-FAI attracted many volunteers and donors from America, directly as a result of the transnational anarchist world that had continued to develop after the First Red Scare.

Anarchists did not have to eliminate their ethnic, national, or racial categorization to become followers. Avrich says that there were "French, Spanish, Russian and Polish, Japanese and Chinese anarchists, united by tradition in addition to their political beliefs…cherishing diversity against standardization and uniformity."[8] Adding to this, there were many Mexican, Black, and Jewish anarchists present in New York City. A facet of the anarchist movement that makes its transnationalism a useful item of focus is its maintenance of these ethnic differences even in the face of the Communist International's (Comintern) attempts to institutionalize American leftist thought through the Communist Party of the U.S.A. (CPUSA). Anarchism also

[8] Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 315.

tended to feature gender equality, and many of its most prominent members during this period were women, including Goldman, the Irishwoman Mother Jones, and Black activist Lucy Parsons. The failure of these communities to create any overarching leadership is often attributed to the weakness of anarchist movements, with one anarchist calling it "the biggest mistake we ever made," but it also led to the diversity of ideas and communities that identified with the movement.[9] This paper will seek to highlight how these differences in ethnicities played a role in the changing nature of anarchism during this period.

In the last decade, there has been much historical scholarship on the transnational nature of anarchism and its relationship with American communities. Much of this research, though, has focused on the American borderlands and the role of Hispanic anarchist ideas coming from both Mexico and Spain. Of particular importance is the collection edited by Christopher J. Castañeda and Montse Feu, "Writing Revolution: Hispanic Anarchism in the United States," which traces transnational anarchism in the Hispanic community specifically. Though their work does not deal with the other ethnic anarchists directly, it does point to some of the overlaps between these communities that this paper further investigates.

This work complicates the idea that anarchism faded during this period in American history and instead argues that anarchist ideas continued to be read and practiced, especially inspired by the events in Russia. New York City, though not the sole focus of the investigation, acts as the lens for this argument. The primary research questions are: How did transnational anarchist movements develop or change in America between 1918 and 1940, both intellectually and in practice? How did their understanding of the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and their place in the broader left-wing movement change with these developments? Secondary

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[9] Ibid.

questions will focus on the dimensions of ethnicity and gender, the internal understanding of the movement in the face of Comintern pressure to join the Soviet sphere, and how the Russian and Spanish Revolutions were tied to the American movement. The primary methodological approach of the paper is intellectual. The first chapter focuses on how anarchist intellectuals, such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were beginning to categorize themselves and their movement in the interwar period, writing their own historiographies of anarchism. The second turns to the print world of anarchism in New York, specifically that of the Vanguard Group, a rare English-language anarchist newspaper. The third chapter turns to the pivotal event of this period, the Spanish Civil War (referred to interchangeably as the Spanish Revolution by anarchists), and how the United Libertarian Organizations in New York, along with American volunteers in the war, understood the place of anarchists.

A fundamental part of anarchism during this period and beyond is the large number of histories and biographies written by self-proclaimed members of the movement. These self-written histories and biographies serve as the basis for the first chapter of this thesis, based largely on the biographies of famous anarchist figures such as Goldman and Parsons. This chapter focuses on the 1920s and how the anarchists reacted to the new state of the world following World War I and the First Red Scare. It builds on the work of historian of anarchism Lucien van der Walt to that end. New York City served as a location they frequented, and many of their ideas were centered on the New York anarchist community. Another major figure in this anarchist self-formulation was Max Nettlau, a German anarchist who, despite never travelling to America, became one of the major figures of American anarchist thought. As described by Jorell A. Meléndez-Badillo, Nettlau was “a nexus in the global cartography of radical ideas…connecting radicals across continents through correspondence and exchanges in print

media."[10] Nettlau, through his correspondence with anarchists of every creed, acted as a compiler for anarchist ideas, taking in all that he could find and turning them into coherently combined histories and ideological positions. He also served as a major proponent of anarchist synthesis, an idea that sought unity within the diversity of anarchism. This makes his writings, both his books, such as *A Short History of Anarchism,* and his correspondence with his American interlocutors, important objects of study to understand the transnational nature of anarchism in America and abroad. The historiography on Nettlau has thus far focused on his importance to Latin American anarchism, but I will show that he also served as a nexus for Pan-American anarchism, especially as he himself understood the United States as a part of the same world as the hispano-centric anarchism he wrote about.[11] Another object of study for how anarchists understood themselves is Berkman and his *ABC of Communist Anarchism*, a 1929 book that attempted to define the movement as the 1930s started. In its introduction, Berkman wrote, "There is considerable literature on anarchism, but most of its larger works were written before the World War. The experience of the recent past has been vital and made certain revisions necessary in the anarchist attitude and argumentation."[12] Along with this the work of Frank Tannenbaum and Lucy Parsons is studied to get a full view of how anarchists were understanding themselves during the 1920s. This thesis interrogates how these major anarchist figures understood the movement in response to the world's events to understand how the movement had grown and changed over the period. It is also important to understand the audience that they wrote for and what the anarchist population looked like at the time of writing.

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[10] Meléndez-Badillo, "The Anarchist Imaginary," 178

[11] Ibid.

[12] Berkman, *Now and after: The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, 18.

The second chapter examines the development of the anarchist movement through the periodicals of the time. Nearly every sub-group of anarchists had its own periodical during this period. Avrich lists more than 100 anarchist periodicals in *Anarchist Voices*, of which over 20 were published primarily in New York during the period 1918-1940. The large number of periodicals reflects the democratic and diverse nature of anarchist ideas; there was no central, authoritative source. Most of the historiography, including Javier Navarro Navarro in *Writing Revolution*, has focused on the Hispanic world as the center of these periodicals, yet they were a cross-cultural phenomenon.[13] The Yiddish *Fraye Arbiter Shtime* was prominent, and many anarchists of many ethnicities would submit op-eds or have their writings translated or republished in other magazines, such as the Hispanic periodicals *Regeneración*, *La Cultura Obrera*, and *La Cultura Proletaria*. This chapter will focus, however, on the Vanguard Group, a publication that was created in 1932 as a youth reaction to the old guard of intellectuals who had been defining anarchism the 1920s. Their position as the only major English-language anarchist publication when the Spanish Revolution broke out would lead them to becoming a major factor in the creation of the United Libertarian Organizations (ULO), the propaganda arm of the CNT-FAI in America.

The ULO is the major focus of the third chapter. The final chapter turns away from domestic events and toward the capstone event for anarchism in this period, the Spanish Revolution. Though anarchist rule in Spain was short-lived, there was demand from anarchists in America to participate in the "good fight," which was normally thought to be limited to the International Brigades organized by the Comintern during this period. Kenyon Zimmer focuses on these anarchist volunteers in his work on the war, *The Other Volunteers*: *American Anarchists*

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[13] Navarro Navarro, "Transnational Anarchist Culture in the Interwar Period," 210.

and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. Though his research into the 100 volunteers is well done, he acknowledges that "Historians of the Spanish Civil War are only just beginning…to uncover the bottom-up transnational networks also at work in the conflict."[14] This paper further uncovers the bottom-up transnational networks that were attracting volunteers to fight in Spain on behalf of anarchism, and how they were raising funds and support in the United States. It also builds on the work of Morris Brodie, who has extensively researched the role of anarchist volunteers in the war. This paper intervenes more intellectually, focusing on how the ULO's press arm was conceiving of the revolution and supporting it intellectually. It also uncovers more information about how the anarchist volunteers on the ground felt about the war and anarchism in general, through the lens of Bill Ryan, an American volunteer who had a series of correspondence with Emma Goldman after returning. This correspondence, housed in the Tamiment Labor Archive at New York University, uncovers a more personal angle of how anarchism was affecting the lives of its adherents during this time.

[14] Zimmer, "The Other Volunteers," 40.

Chapter 1 – Whoever You Be: Anarchist Synthesis and the Global Labor Movement

"Whoever you be - man or woman, rich or poor, aristocrat or tramp, white, yellow, red or black, of whatever land, nationality, or religion - we are all alike in feeling cold and hunger, love and hate; we all fear disaster and disease, and try to keep away from harm and death."[15]

As the world of print anarchism began reacting to the events happening in Spain, it built upon the intellectual labor of members of the movement who developed anarchism in the wake of the major world events of the 1910s. As previously mentioned, the prominent historiographical approach to anarchism sees it as in decline after the First World War and the First Red Scare in America.[16] Although the works of members of the anarchist movement during this period refer to a decline in the mass popularity of the movement, a flaw in the historiography is that it separates the ideas of "syndicalism" and "anarchism," although anarchists themselves made little distinction between the two. Historian of anarchism, Lucien van der Walt, points this out in his book, *Black Flame*: *the revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*: "Many writers have drawn a supposed distinction between 'anarchist communism ... perhaps the most influential anarchist doctrine' and 'another doctrine of comparable significance, anarcho-syndicalism." We reject this approach as a misleading analysis of the broad anarchist tradition."[17] In other words, the anarchist tradition was one that made little distinction, at least during the 1920s and 1930s, between these two types of anarchism. Van der Walt goes on to attribute this

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[15] Berkman, *Now and after: The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, 1929, 5.

[16] cf. Creagh, "Anarchism in the United States to 1945," and van der Walt, *Black Flame*.

[17] van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 19.

separation in the scholarship to the rise of Marxism, social democracy, and nationalism as more prominent areas of study in the history of labor, "freezing" the research on anarchism.[18] Despite this freeze, many of the anarchists during these two decades wrote extensively on the history and health of anarchism during their time. Following this, this chapter shows how many of the most prominent global anarchists of the day saw the anarchist movement as being both alive and unified, especially in its role in opposition to the Soviet Union in the wake of the Russian Revolution, while also establishing key figures in the print anarchist world discussed in Chapter 2.

The most prominent novel idea added to the anarchist movement's canon during the 1920s is anarchist synthesis, popularized by Max Nettlau, a German historian who served as the nexus of the global anarchist movement during the 1920s. Defined by Nettlau, anarchist synthesis was the product of "all the anarchists … becom[ing] a united force, which, while preserving the autonomy of each of its members."[19] Anarchist synthesis calls for unity in the diversity of anarchism, allowing for the continued maintenance of ethnic and nationalist identities referenced previously. Van der Welt defines it further, saying that "while a specific anarchist political organisation was necessary, it should be structured loosely, seeking to unite all anarchists and syndicalists as far as possible. Thus, the specifically anarchist organisation should be open to all anarchists and syndicalists, and could and should not aspire to a close agreement on questions of analysis, strategy, and tactics."[20] The goal of the anarchists then was to

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[18] van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 26.

[19] Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*. 294-295.

[20] van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 244.

synthesize as many global movements as possible, without having them be subservient to an overarching doctrine. Anarchist synthesis is demonstrated by anarchists Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Frank Tannenbaum, and Lucy Parsons in their works and speeches, even if the idea is never mentioned by name. To show this idea and how it related to the self-perception of the movement during this period, examinations will be made of Tannenbaum's academic work *The Labor Movement: Its Conservative Functions and Social Consequences*, Goldman's biography *My Life*, and memoir of her time as an anarchist visiting Russia following the Revolution, *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Parsons' works during the 1920s, and finally, Berkman's *The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, specifically his anarchist historiography of the Russian Revolution. Each of these activists saw a need to write their own history in the wake of increasing pressure on left-wing movements to assimilate with the positions of the Soviet Union. Rather than seeing left-wing revolution as something political that needed to be united and organized, the anarchists saw it as coming entirely from below, a product only of workers making a conscious choice to organize themselves with their counterparts. This follows and builds on the argument made by van der Walt that "'Class struggle' anarchism, sometimes called revolutionary or communist anarchism, is not a type of anarchism … it is the only anarchism."[21] Specifically, the rise of anarchist synthesis served as a response to the perceived evil of the Soviet Union, as it worked increasingly hard to homogenize left-wing movements under its umbrella.

Beginning with *The Labor Movement*, Frank Tannenbaum was an Austrian immigrant raised in New York City during the early decades of the 1900s. In his teenage years, he was an

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[21] van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 26

active anarchist and member of the IWW and frequently protested, being arrested multiple times between 1913 and 1915. He would then attend Columbia University and later become a professor there, specializing in Mexican history. He maintained close ties with Mexican revolutionaries during his life, but the traditional historiography on his life maintains that he moved away from anarchism as he moved into the world of academics in the late 1920s.[22] *The Labor Movement*, first published in 1921, stands between his time as an active revolutionary and as a professor of history. It describes the function of the "labor movement," distinguished by Tannenbaum from both "socialism," represented in America by the Socialist Party, and from the "Bolshevistic" ideas of the Soviet Union[23]. This labor movement is synthetic and global in nature, defined by Tannenbaum as being composed of all workers throughout the entire world, locked in a permanent struggle with capital owners for control over their labor. Matching Van der Walt's thesis, he does not differentiate between "anarchist communism" and "anarcho-syndicalism," instead seeing them as the same, opposed to the more top-down movements. He distinguishes this from socialism and Bolshevism in that it is apolitical, global, and inevitable. He describes the state of this movement himself, saying:

> Present-day society the world over is obviously bound up in this great and intense process of reorganization–from Russia to Japan and from Argentine to Alaska. There is not a place upon the globe where men meet to work in factory and mine that this growth of labor organizations, this struggle for power, for control, for self-determination by the workers, is not manifested. This is no 'problem.' It is a social metamorphosis of universal extent.[24]

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[22] Whitfield, "Out of Anarchism and Into the Academy," 93-123.

[23] Tannenbaum. *The Labor Movement*, 39, 65.

[24] Ibid, 115.

This optimism in a global growth of the labor movement is not only a refutation of the idea that anarchists saw their movement as weakening in the early 1920s, but also a comment on its transnational nature. Discussing anarchist synthesis practically, he points to examples of international worker solidarity, saying, “When American longshoremen refuse to load ships with ammunition because they believe that they will be used to fight Russian workers … when Scandinavian workers refuse to handle ammunition for Russia for the same reason, it seems evident that international capitalism is tending to be met on an international scale by an internationally conscious labor movement. Tannenbaum’s labor movement, as will be seen in the works of Goldman, Parsons, and Berkman, is how anarchists understood class struggle during this period–rather than being an ideology that needed to be sponsored by a state, it was instead a natural consequence of the workers’ struggle that was happening across the world at that time.

Using the language of the labor movement, it is possible to examine how Goldman reacted to her time spent in the Soviet Union and her appraisal of the anarchist movement in her autobiography. Emma Goldman, born in Lithuania and immigrating to Chicago in 1885, was one of the most prominent anarchists in the entire Western world during her lifetime. From her start in the Haymarket Affair in 1886, a massive anarchist protest in Chicago, up to the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, Goldman was one of the most famous political activists of her time, working at points in the United States, Canada, England, France, and Russia. Her publication, *Mother Earth*, based in New York and discussed in detail in the next chapter, was a cornerstone of anarchist activism in the 1910s. Following her exile from the United States in 1918, she was invited by the Soviet Union to work in the newly-formed government. Quickly disillusioned by the Soviet repression of free speech, dictatorial government, and treatment of anarchists, she left after only three years and wrote *My Disillusionment in Russia* in 1923. Having worked in the IWW with

Tannenbaum during the 1910s, Goldman shared the same ideas about anarchist synthesis and the labor movement, and examining *My Disillusionment in Russia* shows how anarchists began to split from the Soviet Union, even if initially excited by the prospect of the Russian Revolution.

Goldman begins by discussing why she felt the need to write the account of her time in Russia, saying that "real history is not a compilation of mere data. It is valueless without the human element which the historian necessarily gets from the writings of the contemporaries of the events in question. It is the personal reactions of the participants and observers which lend vitality to all history and make it vivid and alive."[25] This is emblematic of the approach taken by anarchists in general during this period, seeing it as part of the education necessary to further promote worker solidarity and to ensure that their stories were not co-opted by other factions, such as the Bolsheviks in Russia. She also offers her personal definition of the anarchist movement, aligning with Tannenbaum and Nettlau in defining it as a constructive state of the world created by revolution and without overarching government. Through this she crafts a vision of labor that does not have to exist in a Bolshevik context.

Of the moments in *Disillusionment* that best illustrate how the split began to widen between the global anarchist movement and the International left-wing movement of the Soviet Union, the most critical is Goldman's meeting with Vladimir Lenin. Invited to meet with him soon after she arrived in Moscow, Goldman planned to voice her concerns about the treatment of anarchists in the country and to work on a plan for strengthening the unions in Russia. She instead found Lenin to be concerned only with the possibility of creating a revolution in America through the IWW, and unconcerned with putting into place any of the syndicalist policies that had been partially responsible for bringing the Bolsheviks to power during the Russian Civil

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[25] Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia*, 4.

War.[26] This meeting, along with her experiences under the "dictatorship of the proletariat," was what inspired her to leave Russia. Rather than finding a society of unions working toward the constructive goal that she had anticipated, she instead found that the unions were "lackeys to the government," where the workers "had no say in them."[27] This can be seen as the start of the split between Russia, which had once been the biggest source of optimism for the anarchists when the Revolution first broke out in 1918, and the global anarchist movement. It can also be seen as a reason why the labor movement idea, as understood by Tannenbaum, became popular during this period, as the perceived failure of the Soviet Union caused a general disillusionment with the idea that a workers' movement could be initiated by a government, and instead, there was a move toward a bottom-up, union-driven movement.

It would be incorrect to paint a picture of prominent anarchists only being optimistic during the 1920s and early 1930s. Goldman herself, in her autobiography *Living My Life*, published in the early 1930s, was more pessimistic about the chances of success of the movement than she was even after leaving Russia. The case of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian anarchists put on trial and executed in Massachusetts in 1927, potentially due to bias against immigrants and anarchists, and despite broad pushes to have their case re-tried or to have them pardoned, was a major moment of pessimism for anarchists and the broader left-wing movement in America. Goldman comments on this in *Living My Life*, saying that "Surely some progress had been made in America in the past quarter of a century, some change in the minds and hearts of the masses to prevent the new human sacrifice … How could I have believed that Sacco and Vanzetti, however innocent, would escape American 'justice'?[28] It was not only the perceived

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[26] Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia,* 21.

[27] Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia,* 40.

[28] Goldman, *Living My Life*, 263.

miscarriage of justice that caused pessimism for the anarchists, but also, according to Goldman, "Lack of cohesion in our ranks, badly organized meetings, and Communist obstruction at every gathering made."[29]

The idea that the lack of central organization was not a universal positive of anarchism is also brought up by Lucy Parsons. Parsons, whose background is not certain in the historical record, but who is believed to have been a former slave of Black and Mexican descent, represented the diversity of the anarchist movement. Originally from Texas, before moving to Chicago and later being active in New York, her husband was one of the men executed following the Haymarket Affair of 1886.[30] She would spend the rest of her life writing about and fighting for anarchist ideas in America, including during the Sacco-Vanzetti case. By the 1930s, she shared a similar disillusionment with the potential for success of the anarchist movement, writing that "Anarchism has not produced any organized ability in the present generation, only a few little loose, struggling groups, scattered over this vast country, that come together in 'conferences' occasionally, talk to each other, then go home."[31] This perception that, compared to the growing strength of the Communist Party, the anarchist movement was losing ground is a common thread in the later writings of both Parsons and Goldman, indicating that there was some amount of pessimism present before the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

It was in response to the growing pessimism of the anarchist movement that Alexander Berkman wrote his work, *The ABC of Communist Anarchism*. Berkman, also a Lithuanian immigrant who came to the United States in the 1880s, was a romantic partner and frequent collaborator with Emma Goldman. He attempted to assassinate businessman Henry Clay Frick in

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[29] Goldman, *Living My Life,* 262.

[30] Ahrens, Dunbar-Ortiz, *Lucy Parsons*, 9.

[31] Ibid, 96.

1892, but failed and was imprisoned for over a decade. After his release, he remained in America working on anarchist publications before being exiled along with Goldman due to their protests against the First World War. He also went to Russia and became disillusioned, choosing to write a work that truly established what he believed to be the core anarchist principles after leaving. *The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, published in 1931, combines the ideas discussed in Tannenbaum and Goldman, along with an anarchist historiography of the Russian Revolution. The goal of Berkman's work was to make anarchist ideas accessible to large numbers of people by explaining the core tenets beginning from basic principles. In this way, it is the ultimate synthesis of where anarchist intellectuals stood on the cusp of the Spanish Civil War.

Like Tannenbaum, Berkman's work aligns with Van der Walt's view that mass anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism were understood to be the same during this period. Berkman states that "Indeed, there never was a truer word spoken: in union there is strength. It has taken labor a long time to realize this, and even to-day many proletarians don't understand it thoroughly," and that "The union is just you and the other fellow and more of them - the membership and the officials. You realize now that the officials, the labor leaders, are not interested in changing things. Then it is up to the membership to do it, isn't it?"[32] This reflects both the sentiment that anarchism needed to be a mass movement, not relying on leaders, and the sentiment that the union was the core of the anarchist movement. He also offers an optimistic view of the Russian Revolution's consequences, even despite his disillusionment, stating that "The Russian Revolution has broadcast ideas and feelings that are undermining capitalist society, particularly its economic bases and the sanctity of private ownership of the means of social existence. For not only in

[32] Berkman, *The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, 87.

Russia did the October change take place: it has influenced the masses throughout the world."[33] This once again emphasizes the transnational aspects of anarchism, viewing the success of the movement in terms of how widespread the ideas of labor activism were becoming across the world.

Berkman's historiography of Russia is also of particular interest when examining the ideas of the global labor movement. He begins by stating that the Revolution was an unequivocally good thing, as it gave the Russian people the right to self-determination for the first time against those who held the capital in their country. However, like Goldman and Tannenbaum, he sees the problem with Russia as a result of the dictatorial control held by the Bolsheviks, who believed that state centralization was needed to create a communist society. He also accuses the Bolsheviks of using anarchist ideas to amass power, and then immediately abandoning them once they achieved that goal, similar to how Goldman talks about Lenin. He states this, saying, "The Bolsheviki advocated and partly carried out Anarchist ideas, but the Bolsheviki were not Anarchists and they did not at heart believe in those ideas. They used them for their own purposes–purposes that were not Anarchistic, that were really anti- Anarchistic, against the Anarchist idea."[34] These purposes were anti-anarchistic in that they would remove power from the labor movement, centralizing the power in the hands of the state rather than continuing with the anarchist synthesis idea of maintaining individual differences in the movement. Berkman also discusses what Revolution means in the context of anarchism, stating that it was actually the collectivization of the country that occurred in each factory and farm during the months between the Tsar's fall and the Bolsheviks taking power in 1918. He states,

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[33] Berkman, *The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, xv.

[34] Berkman,*The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, 131.

"These collective activities constituted the Revolution. They were the Revolution. For 'revolution' is not some vague thing without definite meaning and purpose; nor does it signify political scene shifting or new legislation."[35] This matches the ideas of Goldman and Tannenbaum that anarchism is a continuous process of metamorphosis, rather than a changing of the political guard.

With this understanding of how the anarchist intellectual ideas about the state of global leftism developed in the 1920s, it is possible to examine the active publication scene that was occurring in many cities across the globe, as the next major anarchist touchpoint event was beginning to form in Spain. In 1934, Parsons wrote that "The radical imprint, they all leave something behind, and the next great movement like this one that comes, simply steps into the footsteps of those who have gone, and carry it further until the emancipation comes."[36] With a full understanding of both the popular and intellectual arms of the movement, it will then be possible to examine how the next generation of anarchists stepped into those footsteps.

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[35] Berkman, *The ABC of Communist Anarchism*, 140-141.

[36] Ahrens, Dunbar-Ortiz, *Lucy Parsons*, 93.

Chapter 2 – The Great Anarchist Idea: The Vanguard Group and Print Anarchism

"The realization that revolutionary anarchism must be maintained, developed further and made popular among the masses of this country, has brought together a group of young students and workers to carry on this work, who will concentrate upon the neglected rising generation…If you haven't as yet gotten in touch with us do so as soon as possible. Let's have some real cooperation."[1]

It was in the world of publications that anarchism, both in the United States and globally, found its strongest footing in the 1930s. These publications were the books of Berkman, Goldman, and Nettlau discussed in the previous chapter factored into the anarchist understanding, but it was the writings that anarchists submitted to their publications of choice that showed both the depth and widespread nature of the movement. No publication showed this more than the Vanguard Group, an organization founded in New York City in 1932 to synthesize anarchist ideas to create an American youth movement founded on the principles established in the previous chapter. The Vanguard Group has remained relatively unstudied compared to its contemporary non-English publications, but it illustrates the transnationalism of anarchism and shows how the Spanish Civil War galvanized anarchists of the generation that came of age in the 1930s. This chapter begins with the context of the publication scene in New York and a discussion of the most prominent ethnic anarchist publications in the city at the beginning of the 1930s, before moving into a specific examination of the history and writings of the Vanguard

[1] Vanguard Group, *Vanguard: A Libertarian Communist Journal*, "EDITORIAL NOTES," July, 1932.

Group, a New York City-based, English-language anarchist publication that would become one of the most prominent voices in synthesizing anarchist ideas in English and organizing the American anarchist reaction to the Spanish Civil War culminating in the founding of *Spanish Revolution* in 1936.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the most prominent understanding of anarchism among its members was one of synthesis, where the movement would be comprised of many different groups aligned in different ways, occupation and ethnicity being the two most common, that would work together toward a common goal while maintaining their individuality. Each of these groups generally expressed their views and maintained their base through their own publication of newspapers and magazines. As America and the rest of the world grappled with the rapidly changing events of the 1930s, from the early stages of the Spanish Civil War, the Great Depression, and the ramp-up of world tension that would lead to war breaking out in Asia in 1936 and Europe in 1939, these groups were the driving force of grassroots anarchist organization and reaction to the state of the world during this period. With little wealthy donor support, they were almost always funded by the communities that they served, which left them vulnerable to economic shifts, but also allowed them greater freedom in the topics that they addressed. According to Avrich, these publication groups concerned themselves with "the whole range of issues that confronted the world during the twenties and thirties: the growth of the Bolshevik dictatorship, the rise of Mussolini and Hitler, the martyrdom of Sacco and Vanzetti, the impact of the great Depression, and the overriding questions of violence, revolution, and war."[2] The reaction and disillusionment that anarchists felt in response to the increasingly strong

[2] Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 415.

grip of the Soviet Union on left-wing politics has already been addressed, but it was in the magazines that the day-to-day impact of economic uncertainty and a world on the precipice of change was shown.

The 1920s, though a busy period for the reformulation of the anarchist movement, were also associated with a lack of grassroots publication in America.[3] New York City had become the heart of the American anarchist movement as it shifted away from Chicago in the early 1900s, and therefore illustrates the broad decline of the publications in this decade. The largest English language publication by circulation in America before 1920, Goldman's *Mother Earth*, was shuttered following her arrest and deportation in 1918, and only the most major foreign language publications survived the First Red Scare during that same period. In America, the largest anarchist communities were the Yiddish speakers, the Spanish speakers, and the Italian speakers. There was the long-running *Fraye Arbiter Shtime*[4], a Yiddish anarchist publication that had been printing in New York City since 1877 and would last until 1977. *Fraye Arbiter Shtime* had a circulation larger than any other anarchist publication in the country at 30,000 copies a month, and was the organ of the very prominent Yiddish anarchist community. In the Spanish language community, there was *Cultura Obrera*, which survived the Red Scare but would also shutter in 1927, to be replaced by the *Cultura Proletaria*. The Italian during this same time rallied around the magazine *Il Martello*. All three of these, according to research done by Kenyon Zimmer for the "Mapping American Social Movements Project," were larger and more prominent than any

[3] For more information on this reformulation, see Chapter 1's discussion of Berkman, Tannenbaum, and Goldman's books published in the 1920s.

[4] Also commonly spelled as freie arbiter shtime or fraye arbeter shtime.

English-language magazine during this time, as they avoided the worst of the censorship.[5] Even still, according to the editor of *Fraye Arbiter Shtime*, Joseph Jacob Cohen, only "a couple of foreign-language newspapers also maintained their existence with great hardship. No one even dared to speak about widespread, public activity in our circles."[6] It was difficult for even the largest of the anarchist groups to exist publicly in the wake of the Red Scare.

Smaller publications would be founded, but it took six years from the last issue of Mother Earth in August of 1917 for another English language publication to be published in New York City, the *Road to Freedom,* starting in 1924.[7] Though it had lower circulation numbers, it was important for bridging the gap between the previous generation of anarchists, that of Goldman and Berkman, and the young people disenfranchised in the 1920s. It was also the first attempt at re-creating the anarchist movement for all Americans, rather than just those in the ethnic enclave communities, and thus can be seen in the context of the growing push toward anarchist synthesis that Goldman and Berkman were attempting to create. Though *Road to Freedom* would disband in 1932, its example and some of its former members directly led to the creation of The Vanguard Group and are thus crucial to understanding how anarchism started to shift toward one all-encompassing movement.

Before the creation of the Vanguard Group, foreign language publications dominated the world of print anarchism at the start of the 1930s. Max Nettlau, mentioned as the global nexus of anarchism in the previous chapter, wrote extensively about these various movements in

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[5] "Anarchist Newspapers - Mapping American Social Movements Project," Kenyon Zimmer, https://depts.washington.edu/moves//anarchist_map-newspapers.shtml

[6] Cohen et al, *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in America,* 565.

[7] Avrich, Anarchist Voices, 414.

comparison with each other. These organizations would go on to partner with the Vanguard Group later in a transnational organization for the support of the revolution in Spain. For Spanish language publications, the phenomenon of anarchist publications in the United States had started with *Regeneracion* in the early 1900s, published in Los Angeles. Following Magon's imprisonment during the Red Scare, *Regeneracion* folded and was replaced by *Cultura Obrera*. The previously mentioned *Cultura Obrera* and *Cultura Proletaria* organizations were strongly connected to anarchist circles in Spain, specifically the Spanish Magazine *La Revista Blanca*. According to Michel Otayek, "La Revista Blanca's second period from 1923 to 1936 is of particular importance for understanding the later anarchist movements in the United States…*Cultura Proletaria* was then the most well-known Spanish-language anarchist newspaper printed in the United States."[8] The pages of La Revista Blanca show the connections between the sister magazines on both sides of the Atlantic and provide invaluable testimonies and references to the Spanish anarchist communities and groups living in the United States." This points to one of the advantages that the ethnic enclave organizations had compared to English-language publications, often drawing a reader base and support from other countries speaking the same language. The ties between Spanish-language publications across the globe were especially strong, as they had Max Nettlau as a connective figure, reading and writing in many Spanish-language publications in Spain, Latin America, and the United States.

The Yiddish community, which Nettlau called "the most intensive and widespread" of anarchist emigrants around the world, was organized around the work of *Fraye Arbiter Shtime*, published in New York City.[9] Many prominent American anarchists began their careers in this

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[8] Otayek, "Keepsakes of the Revolution," 194.

[9] Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism,* 155.

publication, specifically Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. They were also responsible for publishing many of the anarchist books during this period, as well, including fundraising for the publication of Berkman's *ABC* of Communist Anarchism.[10] Though they did not maintain ties with any specific country, they did maintain ties with Jewish diasporic communities around the world. Under Joseph Cohen in the 1920s, the magazine began to print an English-language version to increase the size of the community among the youth, but it was largely unsuccessful. The largest Italian publication, Il Martello, was also based in New York City. They also maintained ties with the home country, and as right-wing forces strengthened their hold on the country, their focus turned towards anti-fascism. They were also involved in the push against the Sacco-Vanzetti trial, as they saw it as an issue tied directly to Italian immigration. All these publications would later become tied with the Vanguard Group once the Spanish Civil War began, so they are crucial to understanding the broader movement of anarchism in the 1930s

Unlike its foreign-language contemporaries, the Vanguard Group did not have an established community of readers to pull from. Coming out of the small *Road to Freedom* publication started in 1924, it went through two editions before taking the name Vanguard Group. According to Avrich, "After two years the Rising Youth disbanded. It was followed, however, by the Friends of Freedom, a tiny circle in the Bronx. The Friends, in turn, evolved into the Vanguard Group, which, augmented by its teenage affiliate, the Rebel Youth, became the leading youth group of the thirties, surviving until the outbreak of the war."[11] It was founded as a direct response to what its editors interpreted as the failure of the anarchist movement to create a

[10] Cohen et al, *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in America*, 573.

[11] Avrich, Anarchist Voices, 415.

new generation of anarchists, because all of the major publications that survived into the 1920s were foreign-language and catered to an older audience.

Figure 1: the first office of the Vanguard Group at 45 W 17th St

The rise of the Vanguard Group and other anarchist publications can be attributed to the outbreak of revolution in Spain. Otayek states that "at what is often described as the twilight of the classical phase of the global anarchist movement, the turn of events in Spain led to a brief resurgence of grassroots activism within anarchist groups in the United States."[12] Though the traditional history of Spain during this period begins with the outbreak of civil war in 1936, the events that inspired the grassroots anarchism movement had already been set in motion as early as 1931. In that year, not only did the dictatorship of the country end with landslide victories by leftist parties in the election, but also a general strike held by the CNT, one of Spain's two anarchist parties, was crushed by the new government. This led to a renewed interest in global anarchism, as it was the first major movement of its kind since the Russian Revolution of 1918. Though the Group was not in permanent operation, having to shut down between 1933 and 1934 due to a funding shortage, it would grow to become the largest and most prominent English-language anarchist publication in America by 1936.

The stated goal of the Vanguard Group in their first issue was to "revive, in America, the great anarchist idea of a revolutionary Vanguard, the anarchist idea of the role and place of an

[12] Otayek, "Keepsakes of the Revolution," 6.

active revolutionary minority in the great mass struggles of today and the near future."[13] Having started only six months after the beginning of the "Spanish Revolution," as it was referred to by anarchists, the struggles being discussed can be understood to align with the goals of the anarchists in Spain. Here, then, from the very beginning of its life, the Vanguard Group looked to Spain as its model. This shows the transnational nature of anarchism but also demonstrates the high place Spain would go on to take in all anarchist publications during this period. At the same time, the anarchists became even further alienated from the rest of the left after the election of Roosevelt in 1932.

They also address the way that the anarchists of the past had ignored the youth contingent of America, stating, "We are of the opinion that the anarchist movement has woefully neglected the elementary task of building up a youth movement. Cooped up within the confines of little national colonies, broken up and fragmentized into water-tight compartments of national movements, it never rose to the realization of the urgency of the youth movement."[14] The synthetic nature of anarchism is seen here, as the goal of the Vanguard movement was to combine the ethnic movements in the next generation. This may seem to go against the idea of synthesis because it moves away from distinct groups, but the same article goes on to state that "groups" are the fundamental element of anarchist life.[15] These groups are divided on the same bases as in the previous generation: occupation and ethnicity. Since the Vanguard Group had to

[13] Vanguard Group, A DECLARATION OF POLICY, April 1932.

[14] Vanguard Group, A DECLARATION OF POLICY, April 1932.

[15] Vanguard Group, The Lesson of Chicago, November 1932

re-establish their positions as a new organization, they also state definitively that anarchism requires "equal rights for all without distinction of sex or race."[16]

The early days of the Vanguard Group also established a recurring core part of the publication–its international section. In every issue, the end of the paper was dedicated to discussing major anarchist events from around the world. Throughout its first two volumes, it discussed anarchist movements in Spain, France, Bulgaria, Peru, Mexico, Sweden, Russia, the Netherlands and Japan. It would often invite collaborators from these countries to write, such as Russian anarchist Volin and Dutch anarchist Cornelissen in the May 1935 issue.[17] They followed the events in Spain particularly closely as the country got closer to Civil War and the anarchist factions of the CNT and FAI became stronger, discussing them in nearly every issue.

Even with its mentions of other countries, it was always Spain that had pride of place in the Vanguard Group's writings. In its second ever issue, in July of 1932, the longest article is titled "Revolutionary Spain." Looking to Spain as a model for America, the article finishes, "Comerades, *we salute your good work* and pledge our militant support. We, in America, shall do everything possible to win sympathy and popularity to our movement in Spain. *We hail the Spanish Revolution and its coming victory.*"[18] A year later, they would write another article, stating that anarchists would play a major role in the upcoming civil war in Spain—Trotsky, a figure who anarchists saw at times as a reluctant ally and at others as another arm of the establishment left, had predicted that the suppression of unionism in Spain would lead to the

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Vanguard Group, The Lesson of Chicago, May-June 1935.

[18] Vanguard Group, Revolutionary Spain, July 1932."

demise of anarchism in the country altogether.[19] In that same year, a workers' strike in Asturas had been violently suppressed by the Spanish government, an event that served to galvanize anarchists across the world, including in the Vanguard Group. That suppression was the first volley in what was soon to be a massive upheaval of anarchists in Spain and across the world, and the Vanguard Group commented on it often. They saw these anarchists as the bulwark against both fascism and Bolshevism (which they often referred to just as communism). In their October-November issue of 1935, they wrote that the communists continued to vilify everyone and prevent any unity on the left, and that "it is hard to believe that fascism will have a lasting chance in Spain."[20] Not only did the Vanguard Group foreshadow the events in Spain, they also show how the anarchist movement began to recover from the trauma of the Russian Revolution and the Red Scare as they looked toward the coming events in Spain with optimism.

Despite maintaining the transnational character of most anarchist publications during this time, the Vanguard Group was distinct in its addressing of distinctly American problems. In two issues, the group addresses the "Negro Problem" of America from an American perspective, stating that "For too long now, the world in general and America in particular have looked upon the problem not only as being merely racial, but also as one from which the negro alone suffers and that he alone must solve."[21] It goes on to discuss the plight of black workers in the context of both their racialized group and their place in the hierarchy of workers.

It was this same year, 1936, that the Vanguard Group would move from being a fringe publication to being one of the major players in the New York City print anarchism world.

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[19] Vanguard Group, The Anarchists in Catalonia, May-June 1933.

[20] Vanguard Group, The Spanish Situation, October-November 1935

[21] Vanguard Group, Which Way for the Negro?, January 1936.

Otayek writes that, "Much of the renewed, collaborative activities of U.S. anarchists during the Spanish Civil War were centered in New York."[22] As it was one of the only English-language players in the New York City space, the Vanguard was in a prime position to become important as the conflict in Spain got more intense in 1936. They were also lent credibility by the interest of Emma Goldman, who wrote for them in their January issue, stating that "If only you can all hold out VANGUARD ought to grow into an important voice of our ideas."[23] Having someone with as much credibility as Goldman sign on to support the magazine led it to grow even further.

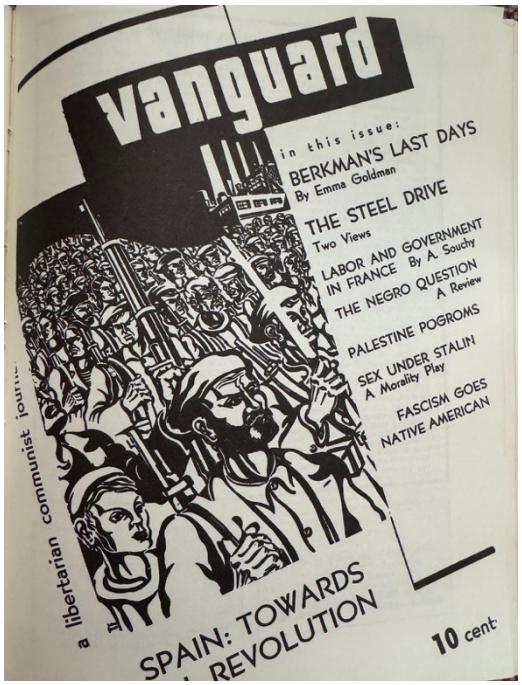

Figure 2: the May 1936 cover of Vanguard

This support for the Vanguard would come to a head when they were invited to join the United Libertarian Organizations that year, in 1936. The ULO, created by a Spanish immigrant working for the labor unions in Spain to create support for the cause as the Civil War ramped up, was a collection of all the major anarchist groups centered in New York City. According to Otayek, "Represented at the ULO were Jewish, Russian, and Italian immigrant anarchist groups such as the Jewish Anarchist Federation (publishers of Fraye Arbeiter Shtime), the Russian Federation, Carlo Tresca's Il Martello Group, and the Vanguard Group, as well as several branches of the Industrial Workers of the World union."[24] This collective body, which would begin to publish *Spanish*

[22] Otayek, "Keepsakes of the Revolution," 6.

[23] Vanguard Group, Sanctions and The Working Class, January 1936.

[24] Otayek, "Keepsakes of the Revolution," 6.

Revolution, a collective publication edited by all of the members that same year, was tasked with being the primary arm of the Spanish anarchist movement in America. Since the Spanish anarchist movement was at the time the center of the global anarchist movement, this meant that the Vanguard was now a major part of the largest transnational anarchist movement in the world. *Spanish Revolution*, discussed in more detail in the next chapter, would eventually have the largest circulation of any English anarchist publication during this entire period.

The ULO would become the major mouthpiece of the anarchist movement in America during the Spanish Civil War, and it is through them that the anarchist reaction to this new Revolution can be seen. The anarchists had spent the last twenty years waiting for an opportunity to rectify the mistakes that they saw in the Russian Revolution, and in 1936 they were on the brink of what they saw as the best chance to start the world revolution they had been looking for.

Chapter 3 – The Torches of Freedom: *Spanish Revolution* and the American Anarchist Reaction to Spain

“Fascism cannot quell the cry

Of worker shouting ‘Viva! C. N. T.-F. A. I.’

‘Avajo Capitilissimo.’ ‘Avajo Franco!’

Our victory must come. Wage slavery must go.

Viva Uno Gran Union De Los Trabajadores Industriales Del Mundo!”[1]

On July 20, 1937, at what was then the World Cinema on West 49th Street, New York City filmgoers were there to attend the premiere of a documentary titled “Fury Over Spain.” Its director, Louis Frank, had spent the last year in Catalonia, collecting footage for his documentary and working with the anarchist CNT-FAI that controlled northeastern Spain at the time. In one of its early scenes, it depicts a diverse crowd marching through the streets of Barcelona, flying the red and black flag of anarchism, full of what the film calls “revolutionary fire.”[2] The New York Times review of the film was mixed, stating that “There isn't a great deal to be said for or against [the movie], but it does mention that the movie was shown as part of a fundraising campaign to help American anarchists fund their comrades in Spain.[3]

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[1] “For His Masters’ Sake,” Sidney and Clara Solomon Papers.

[2] *Fury Over Spain*. 52:23.

[3] Nugent, ‘Fury Over Spain,’ at the World Cinema, Is Another Quasi-Documentary Film of the Civil War,” *The New York Times*.

The day before, a celebration had been held in Union Square commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Spanish Revolution.[4] Circulation of anarchist newspapers had never been higher, with *Fraye Arbiter Shtime* and the English language synthesis paper *Spanish Revolution* outdoing all previous English newspapers.[5] New York City held a strong anarchist energy for the first time since the Red Scare of 1919. *Spanish Revolution*, the newspaper created by the United Libertarian Organizations, including the Vanguard Group, was in high circulation. While it continued the anarchist synthesis tradition of reprinting translated works from other anarchist newspapers around the world, its most important job became translating news from the front in Catalonia and defending anarchism against Marxism. But even as it held that energy, the event that was inspiring it was taking a turn for the worse: by the summer of 1937, the anarchist uprising in Spain was losing steam and *Spanish Revolution* was already expressing concern. "THE SPANISH REVOLUTION HAS NOT BEEN CRUSHED BUT IT IS IN DANGER" reads an insert in the July issue of the paper.[6] The ULO, as part of the transnational propaganda arm of the Spanish anarchists, was responsible for continuing to drum up support in the United States, but as the war progressed, there was a considerable shift in the morale of the anarchists.

This chapter examines how the anarchist movement thought about and reacted to the events in Spain during the Spanish Revolution and is divided into three parts–the first covers transnational anarchism in America during the high watermark of the Spanish Revolution in 1936, the second covers reactions to anarchism as the promised revolution began to fizzle out,

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[4] This chapter uses the same term to mean two different things: The Spanish Revolution (unitalicized) refers to the event where unions seized power in Spain during 1936-1937. *Spanish Revolution* (italicized) refers to the American journal created by the ULO.

[5] Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution, 1936-1939*, 25.

[6] *Spanish Revolution,* July 2nd, 1937, 1.

and the final examines the reactions as the war drew to a close and it was clear that Spain would become completely controlled by a right-wing government. The ULO and the Vanguard Group remain the primary interlocutors for this, including unpublished archival documents and correspondence from two of its founders. Just like the cycle of hope and despair that had occurred in the anarchist communities during and after the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War again showed both the persistence of the anarchists and their belief that their continued lack of success was dooming to the global left-wing movement.

This chapter builds on the work of Kenyon Zimmer, specifically *The Other Volunteers: American Anarchists and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939,* and Morris Brodie's 2020 book, *Transatlantic anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution, 1936-1939*. For both, the Spanish Revolution was where "beleaguered anarchists in the United States found new hope."[7] Both make examinations into who the Americans fighting in the Spanish Revolution were, but neither spends as much time diving into what the transnational propaganda arms that were inspiring these volunteers looked like. Brodie's book does not focus on America specifically; rather collecting stories and draws conclusions from a transatlantic perspective that includes Ireland and the United Kingdom, but his work on collecting biographies of anarchist volunteers from both Europe and the United States serves as a testament to the existence of these volunteers. Brodie, using the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, managed to identify more than 60 American volunteers who were likely anarchists. This does not account for the full breadth of the anarchist volunteers, however, as anarchists tend only to appear in the historical record if they were killed in the war. Since anarchist identity was much more fluid than that of

[7] Zimmer, "The Other Volunteers," 20.

communists, who were often registered with the CPUSA or another organization, Brodie concludes that there were actually many more anarchist volunteers than are accounted for by the historical record.[8] Knowing that these anarchist volunteers existed also promotes the idea of the thriving, if small, transnational anarchist community discussed in the first two chapters. The work of left-wing journalists in Spain during this time has been critical to the understanding of the Spanish Civil War as a watershed moment for leftism, most notably the works of Ernest Hemingway who was aligned with the republicans, and George Orwell who fought alongside the anarchist-aligned POUM in Catalonia and wrote his memoir *Homage to Catalonia* about the events. In America during the war, it was *Spanish Revolution*, the journal created by the ULO that was the primary vehicle for what anarchists thought. This chapter builds on Brodie's work by examining the written piece of the transnational anarchist movement during this period, rather than the actions of the volunteers in Spain themselves.

Understanding the feelings around Spain in America requires a brief understanding of the complicated and overlapping events in Spain from the beginning of the 1930s. In 1930, the Spanish monarchy ended with the abdication of King Alfonso and the resignation of the military dictator after seven years of dictatorship. The Second Spanish Republic was declared, but almost immediately, there were signs of instability. The first election put primarily republicans and socialists in power, but monarchists and the beginnings of a fascist party began to consolidate power in preparation for the next elections. The country became increasingly polarized politically over the first six years of the decade, with clashes in the street between left- and right-wing factions. It was the strengthening of these left-wing factions, including the anarchist CNT

[8] Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 33.

and FAI in Spain, that initially inspired the creation of the Vanguard Group and their looking toward Spain as an example. In the 1936 elections, held in February of that year, the left-wing coalition managed to hold on to power. The fascist forces, led by Francisco Franco and backed by Benito Mussolini in Italy, began to plan a coup of the government for that summer. The coup attempt was launched on July 17, 1936, throwing the country into a civil war.

This moment also marked the beginning of a watershed moment for worldwide anarchists during this period, and the subject of this chapter is the Spanish Revolution. In response to Franco's coup attempt, two of the biggest unions in the country, the CNT (affiliated with anarchism) and the UGT (affiliated with socialism) called for a general strike across the country to begin on the 19th. The strike was successful, and the more radical elements of the CNT took almost total control of Catalonia in northeastern Spain, including Barcelona and the areas around it. It was also at this time that the CNT merged with the more radical FAI, an explicitly anarchist group. The economy was organized into communes, and almost every industry in the regions controlled by the CNT-FAI was collectivized and put under the control of the workers. By the Fall, the anarchists began to cooperate somewhat loosely with the main Republican government operating out of Madrid, allied against the fascist offensive supported by Italy. Despite this cooperation, however, the CNT-FAI began to be undermined by the Soviet Union, which supported the Republican government and the Marxist factions within it, refusing to supply aid to the anarchists. This continued a global trend discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, with the Soviet Union attempting to align all left-wing factions under the USSR-led International. It was also in the Fall of 1936 that the first International Brigades of foreign soldiers arrived to support the left-wing factions. In the wake of the USSR and Stalin's influence, the anarchists began to lose their control, and by the winter of 1936-1937, the Republican government was attempting to

demilitarize the anarchist forces in Catalonia. The anarchists were split over whether to continue the revolution and try to collectivize the entire country, or to join with the republicans and work against their right-wing enemies. This culminated in the May Days of 1937, in which anti-Stalinist factions fought in the streets of Barcelona against the Soviet-backed Republicans. This represented the watershed moment of the transnational conflict that had been brewing between anarchists and communists since 1918. The anarchists were defeated, and the Republic regained control of Catalonia. Though anarchists would continue to fight until the fall of the Republican government in 1939, May 1937 marked the end of the Spanish Revolution.[9] Afterwards, many of the anarchist volunteers would continue to fight for the Trotsky-aligned POUM faction, seeing it as the closest option to anarchism due to its anti-Bolshevik stance.

Back in America, the first issue of *Spanish Revolution,* published during the 1936 "Summer of Anarchy" begins, "If there is any event that can bring about a rediscovery of inner strength on the part of organized labor and the libertarian elements of the world, it is the grand struggle against fascism now being waged in Spain. This struggle can be best supported by comrades living abroad by vigorously combatting the lies of the reactionary press and by keeping the world informed as to the true course of events in Spain." [10][11] Already, through the pages of the ULO, it is seen that one of the primary concerns of the CNT-FAI was using the transnational anarchist movement to try to win the hearts and minds of people to the cause of anarchism. As discussed previously, the USSR had been engaged in a battle of assimilation with other left-wing factions around the world, specifically the anarchists, attempting to reduce dissent. The most

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[9] For more detailed information, consult Payne, *The Spanish Civil War*.

[10] "Summer of Anarchy" was a term used by the anarchists to refer to the Summer of 1936 when Catalonia was almost completely controlled by the unions

[11] *Spanish Revolution*, August 19th, 1936, 1.

important part of the Spanish Revolution was, thus, attempting to claw back the press damage done by the USSR. This is further pushed later in the issue, where the CNT-FAI writes directly: "The Defense Committee of the CNT and FAI appeals to all workers and anti-fascists. Especially do they appeal to all conscientious writers and reporters."[12] These conscientious writers and reporters are those who do not represent the USSR and instead are writing pieces that highlight the benefits of anarchy. Emma Goldman still served as the most famous of these journalists, creating anarchist material in Spain, and her alignment with *Spanish Revolution* points to their purpose as a newspaper.

The early issues of *Spanish Revolution*, during the height of power of the Spanish unions, illustrate the same anarchist synthesis ideas discussed in earlier chapters, a strong optimism, and an opposition to Marxism. For the global anarchists, the uprising of the unions was not simply another armed rebellion, but instead the beginning stages of a worldwide social revolution.[13] It was supposed to be the culmination of everything that the anarchists had spent the last century working towards around the world. In the fourth issue, released in October of 1936, there is an article titled: "Revolution by Example, Not by Decree." It begins by stating, "One of the most remarkable features of the Spanish revolution is the high moral tone, the great moral fervor shown by the great mass of workers and peasants," and goes on to say that "The transition to a new and higher system is not accompanied by a process of social decay as was the case in Russia in 1917."[14] Already, the comparison to the Russian Revolution, the last great event in anarchist history, was drawn, and already the disillusionment with Russia that had been put into words by

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[12] Ibid. 4.

[13] "To the Workers and Peasants of Spain!" *Spanish Revolution*, August 19th, 1936.

[14] "Revolution by Example, Not Decree," *Spanish Revolution*, October 19th, 1936.

Goldman was being seen again. For the global transnational anarchist movement, the Spanish Revolution offered them a new chance at the global social revolution that the Russian Revolution had betrayed two decades earlier. The galvanization of anarchists toward this idea can be seen in the amount of money that Spanish Revolution had managed to raise for the CNT-FAI cause in only their first three months of publication–according to the chart in the October edition, they had raised over $4,150, equivalent to almost $100,000 in contemporary money. ULO also hosted weekly meetings in Irving Plaza to drum up support for the Spanish cause. This enthusiasm and anti-Russia sentiment continued to grow during this early period, and it was also during this time that the first volunteers began to go to Spain as part of the International Brigades. It was only after the May Days of 1937 that the enthusiasm began to die down.

The May Days saw the Republicans take back direct control of Barcelona and Catalonia from the CNT-FAI. In the immediate aftermath, which saw the end of the Spanish Revolution as a historical event, the ULO track was one of denial. In the May 1937 issue, one of the top headlines reads, "Anarchists in Barcelona Still Hold Positions Intact–Stories of Defeat Not Borne Out by Scanty Reports."[15] The article goes on to mention that it's not possible to say how catastrophic a defeat the anarchists had been handed until the complete results of the negotiation were available and tries to twist parts of the defeat as victories. As a propaganda arm of the CNT-FAI, the ULO had to report the news in as optimistic a way as possible, but the reality of the situation made it difficult to craft any story that did not paint the revolution as being toward its end. By September, even *Spanish Revolution* had acknowledged the truth on the ground that the revolution needed saving. An article in that issue titled "Solidarity of Working Class Can Save

[15] "Anarchists in Barcelona Still Hold Positions Intact" *Spanish Revolution*, May 21st, 1937.

Spanish Revolution," states that "The Russian-controlled Negrin government has no mind to put an end to their tyranny in Spain any more than the C.P. is ready to give over its power to the working class in Russia."[16] Again, the anti-Soviet sentiment is seen here, and it goes on to connect Russia with "imperialist treachery." It also makes a call for a continued uprising by the workers of every country to attempt to save the Spanish Revolution. In this way, by September of 1937, the anarchist press had already returned to the state that it was in before the Spanish Civil War started, hoping to provoke a world revolution through newspapers and magazines. Decreasing enthusiasm can also be seen in the slowdown of funds donated–nearly $1000 less than the previous average was collected in May, and beginning in the June 1937 issue, the newspaper stopped publishing its donation numbers. Despite this waning enthusiasm, however, it was during this period that most of the volunteers mentioned in Brodie's biographies left to fight in Spain. This could be explained by the increasingly dire circumstances of the anarchist movement provoking more citizens to direct action, especially as it became clearer that the right-wing faction was winning the war and that there would be no chance for a leftist Spain in any capacity without assistance.

After the Spanish Civil War ended officially in early April 1939, the anarchist movement that had just become revitalized quickly started to fall apart. Both *Spanish Revolution* and Vanguard published their final issues in April 1938, though Vanguard would continue to attempt to raise funds to make a return until finally officially folding in July of 1939. The world was on the precipice of major war, right-wing movements were securing power around the world, and it seemed that anarchism had finally lost whatever gains it had made in the early 1930s. Anarchists

[16] "Solidarity of Working Class Can Save Spanish Revolution," September 7th, 1937

were forced into a reckoning with the movement as a whole, and many asked themselves what had gone wrong with the Spanish Revolution. Emma Goldman remained active during this period, though she would pass away only a year later in 1940. Also active were Clara and Sidney Solomon, two New Yorkers who had founded the Vanguard Group and served as its secretary and one of its primary writers, respectively. Clara became a good friend of Goldman, and both remained active anarchists for the rest of their lives. The married couple, like Max Nettlau, became a target of the transnational anarchist movement during this time, and received much correspondence discussing what went wrong with the movement.

One piece of correspondence to the Solomons of particular interest is a series of letters exchanged between Goldman and Bill Ryan, a New Yorker who went to Spain to fight before returning and moving to Milwaukee. Goldman forwarded these letters to Solomon to publish in Vanguard, but by the time they were received, the magazine had already folded. Goldman and Ryan discuss why the movement failed and illustrate the headspace of those anarchists who were instrumental in the 1930s revival. Since the letters were forwarded for publication, even though they never were, they are a rare archival document that contains both Goldman and Ryan's letters to each other, rather than just one side of the correspondence.

Bill Ryan, according to the research of Brodie, left New York in May of 1937 to fight for the anarchists, just after the May Days. Despite being an anarchist, he was allowed in the International Brigades, which is illustrative of a broader trend of anarchists managing to get into the communist-dominated brigades.[17] Orwell discusses this in *Homage to Catalonia*, writing that he had to get a voucher from a communist friend to be allowed in due to his membership in the

[17] Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 214.

POUM.[18] Ryan escaped from Spain as Franco's government continued to expand in 1938 by sneaking onto an English ship after approximately a year of combat. He then began to write articles for local anarchist journals before reaching out to Emma Goldman with his thoughts on the Spanish Civil War in the late summer of 1939. He was inspired by *My Disillusionment in Russia*. Though it must be acknowledged that Ryan's account of the war is necessarily biased, it also presents a rare perspective: most American anarchists who fought in the war either died or faded into obscurity after leaving, meaning Ryan's testimony is a rare example of how those anarchist volunteers felt. Goldman acknowledges the uniqueness of his perspective in a response, "If I tell you that I have been waiting for twenty-seven years to find someone who will express the thought of the Communists contained in your letters you will probably think that I am exaggerating."[19] Examining his letters, therefore, gives a novel perspective into the immediate aftermath of the Spanish Civil War on anarchists.

Ryan's letters are illustrative of how the anarchist volunteers felt about Russia's influence in Spain and how they felt about the war itself. After discussing a friend of theirs who also served in Spain, Ryan begins his letter by stating, "I trust you will not consider it presumptuous if I take this opportunity to tell you a little of the conclusion that was reached during a long service in the Spanish trenches."[20] Unlike many of the journalists who wrote in *Spanish Revolution*, Ryan had fought in the war, much like Orwell. He discusses how the communist party had been able to control the narrative from the beginning of the war and how in combined units, the anarchists were always much more likely to die. He also comments that the

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[18] Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*.

[19] "Emma Goldman to Bill Ryan, August 20th, 1939," Sidney and Clara Solomon Papers.

[20] "Bill Ryan to Emma Goldman, August 2nd, 1939,", Sidney and Clara Solomon Papers.

International Brigades were much more anarchist than the traditional historiography has acknowledged, saying that: "the real anti-fascist fighters were kept at the front without leave until death put an end to their suffering, because they could not be trusted to return and adopt the Party line…if the dead of the International Brigades could rise and speak their voices would drown the Moscow-dictated speeches of the conscienceless scoundrels and Albacete generals who did so much to betray the Spanish people."[21] Ryan here connects the fact that the International Brigades are remembered as primarily communist with the fact that the anarchists in them were more likely to be put in compromising positions. He goes on to say in another letter that, beyond just being first to the front, many anarchists "were actually murdered by the Stalinists."[22] Both make the fight between the Russian-influenced communists and the anarchists out to be more than just a war in the press circuit, but also something that caused actual death, even as the two groups ostensibly fought against a common enemy in Spain.

Both Goldman and Ryan acknowledge that the real Spanish Revolution ended in 1937, even if the fight continued for another two years. Ryan writes that what had been most disillusioning for him in the wake of the war was the "glossing over of the fact that the Spanish people had been disarmed in May 1937–these are the things about which we should be more concerned than Franco's victory."[23] Goldman wrote in response that the anarchists, "Even after the events in May 1937 they still clung to the hope that fascism will be conquered first and then they will deal with the communists."[24] Both, with the hindsight of the war ending, realized that

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[21] Ibid.

[22] "Bill Ryan to Emma Goldman, August 8th, 1939," Sidney and Clara Solomon Papers.

[23] "Bill Ryan to Emma Goldman, August 8th, 1939," Sidney and Clara Solomon Papers.

[24] "Emma Goldman to Bill Ryan, August 20th, 1939." Sidney and Clara Solomon Papers

there was no point in trying to cooperate with the Republicans, instead it would have been better to continue trying to fight for the ideals of the initial social revolution that had begun in Catalonia. Goldman concludes by talking about the difficulty of talking about these ideas in the left-wing press, even for someone with as high a reputation as her, because no press was willing to go against the Soviet-line as World War II began.[25]

The Spanish Revolution was the moment that many anarchists, old and young, had spent the last two decades since the Russian Revolution biding their time for. All the redevelopment of anarchist ideas, the focus on synthesis and growth, had been to prepare for exactly this moment. However, almost as quickly as the hope was granted to the international community, it fizzled out. This does not erase the commitment made by the many volunteers, Ryan and others, and the worldwide anarchists who attempted to use the Spanish Revolution as the touchpoint for their global revolution. As seen in Ryan's correspondence, however, this moment was deeply traumatizing for the anarchist community at the time. It was the end of the Spanish Civil War that erased any of the momentum that had been gained by the anarchists over the previous two decades and forced them once again to start the movement over.

[25] Ibid.

Conclusion

"The great heroic figure of that long Golgotha has been Man. It has always been the individual, often alone and singly, at other times in unity and co-operation with others of his kind, who has fought and bled in the age-long battle against suppression and oppression, against the powers that enslave and degrade him…The State, every government whatever its form, character or color-be it absolute or constitutional, monarchy or republic, Fascist, Nazi or Bolshevik-is by its very nature conservative, static, intolerant of change and opposed to it."[1]

The May Days and the subsequent victory of Franco in the Spanish Civil War did not spell the end of anarchism in the world, any more than the First Red Scare or the failure of the Kronstadt Rebellion in Russia did. But it did end this era of anarchism, the one that had begun again in the ashes of the Russian anarchists and the death of Magón. Many of the anarchists who survived went back home to live quiet lives, some in New York, some in the rest of the United States, others abroad. Berkman had passed away the same year that the Spanish Revolution broke out, in 1936. Emma Goldman passed away soon after the Spanish Civil War ended, in May of 1940. Her passing symbolized the end of a seventy-year anarchist career that spanned all of Europe and North America. In one of her final written works, "Was My Life Worth Living?" she reflects, "I am certain that anarchism is too vital and too close to human nature to ever die…when the failures of modern dictatorship and the realization of failure more general, Anarchism will be vindicated."[2] The anarchists had endured dual traumas at the start and

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[1] Goldman, *The Individual, Society and the State*, 6.

[2] Goldman, *Was My Life Worth Living*?, 7.

beginning of this era, from Russia to Spain. The global revolution never came, and most on the left turned their focus to being anti-fascist rather than dealing with the infighting on the left.

The Cold War saw the dimensions of left and right in the world flatten even more, as the world became divided starkly between the authoritarian form of Bolshevik communism that was practiced in the Eastern Bloc and beyond. The anarchists fared little better in other communist countries like China and Vietnam that also underwent revolutions during this period, though the anarchists in those countries also represent an understudied piece of the historiography of leftism globally. Almost every major country saw some amount of anarchist activity during the interwar period, all of which are worth studying. But anarchism did not die even in the Cold War, instead just remaining dormant. It would again become relevant to the New Left and the student movements of the 1960s and the leftist ideas rapidly expanding in the 1970s. Both the CNT and FAI persist in Spain to this day.

Returning to the question that Goldman asks about her own life, and by extension the anarchist movement of her time, we can ask: was it worth it? In other words, what do we make of a movement that in objective terms failed? There will be no studies done on the great interwar anarchist revolution that changed the face of the Earth. They are often ignored in the history of leftism, resigned to a group of troublemakers, incapable of organization. But no historical group should be judged purely on whether the most ambitious of their goals were met. The anarchists were committed to their cause, they fought and bled for what they saw as the system of world organization that would lead to the most equitable, most comfortable, and most natural world. They had a deep sense of community that united them across languages and countries. The anarchists pursued the betterment of the world on their own terms and, for better or worse,

refused to negotiate. And so, in a world increasingly fraught, I think we can look to the example of the anarchists who maintained their resolve even in the face of trauma and never gave up the fight.

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