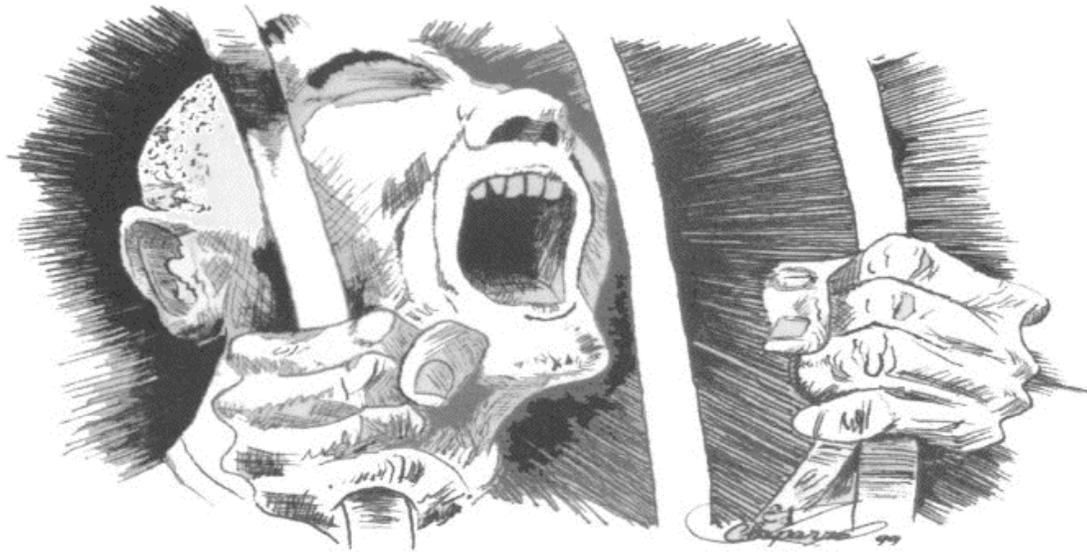


The Struggle for Equality:

The History of the Anarchist Red Cross

By Boris Yelensky

Edited with Introduction by Matthew Hart



Produced with additional information provided by Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross

New Introduction
From Matthew Hart
Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross

The name Boris Yelensky may be unfamiliar to many, but for the first half of the twentieth century this name was synonymous with the Anarchist Red Cross (ARC). Yelensky was born in 1889 in Krasnodar, Russia, and at the age of 16, he joined a small Socialist Revolutionist-Maximalist group and fought in the 1905 Revolution in Russia. Fleeing from the repressive measures by the government that followed the uprising, he immigrated to the United States in 1907. Two years later, he became an Anarchist and joined the Radical Library, a branch of the Workmen's Circle in Philadelphia. While in Philadelphia he helped establish a branch of the Anarchist Red Cross, an Anarchist organization designed to support Anarchists imprisoned in Russia. He later moved to Chicago and assisted in the creation of the Chicago branch of the ARC.

He continued to work with these organizations until the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia, where he then traveled back to Russia to assist the revolution. Once there, he returned to Nororossijsk, a town where he had helped establish a soviet council in the 1905 Revolution. There he assisted the establishment of worker-controlled factories and worked as a courier for the government publishing agency. In 1922, five years after the Bolshevik gained control of the government he fled from Russia for fear he would be imprisoned for his Anarchist ideas. He went back to Chicago where he helped to create the Free Society Group, a group that lasted until 1957. Shortly after his return, he also organized the Committee to Aid Political Prisoners, also known as the Chicago Aid Fund. This group later changed its name to the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund in memory of Berkman who took his own life in 1936.

The Chicago Aid Fund worked and functioned as an Anarchist Red Cross. Most of those involved in the organization had worked in the ARC prior to the revolution in Russia. After witnessing the persecution of Anarchists by the Bolshevik government, they reorganized and continued their aid work under the Chicago Aid Fund assisting Anarchist prisoners in Russia.

What is important to note about the post-Russian Revolution period is that most of the Anarchist Red Cross work was not done under that title. During this period, the organization worked under the Society to Aid Anarchist Prisoners in Russia, the Joint Committee for the Defense of Revolutionists Imprisoned in Russia, the Berkman Aid Fund, and, of course, the Anarchist Black Cross. These organizations should not be excluded from the history of the ARC. Many of the early members of the Anarchist Red Cross organization considered these groups as extensions of the ARC and were organized by the same people.

Although many have marked the late 1930's as the period in which the Anarchist Red Cross ended its activities, (only to reemerge again in 1967-68), the organization, under the name of the Berkman Aid Fund, lasted until 1958. Yelensky was a key figure in this organization until its very end. One could say, more than any other individual in the history of this organization, Yelensky was the Anarchist Red Cross.

One of the last activities of the organization was Yelensky's book, *The Struggle for Equality*. Yelensky's hope was not only to write about the organization's history, but

also about its message. During the half century of his work in prisoner aid organizations, one thing became abundantly clear to Yelensky: The main obstacle in the assistance and support of political prisoners was not the authoritarian institutions that held them, but rather the sectarian squabbles between political factions and organizations. The creation of the Anarchist Red Cross itself was in response to the sectarian support within the Political Red Cross at the hands of the Social Democrats. The Anarchist Red Cross, at the very beginning, decided not only to support Anarchist political prisoners, but also Socialist Revolutionaries, since neither parties were getting support from the Political Red Cross.

Today, not only has the sectarian divide expanded but feuds between Anarchist Black Cross organizations has caused the fabric of political prisoner aid work in the Anarchist community to weaken. Rather than put aside differences of approach, organizations have used these differences to split and disrupt the solidarity aid community all together. Support for political prisoners has been placed on the back burner as the battle of egos prevails.

The Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross, a Branch Group of the Anarchist Black Cross Federation, has produced this pamphlet in hopes of ending this feud. We hope this pamphlet will not only remind everyone what the purpose of this organization is, but also what happens when feuds interrupt the work. We recognize that the denial of aid to Anarchist prisoners is what caused the birth of this organization, and we refuse to take part in such sectarian behavior by refusing support to other political factions. Our vision is consistent with Yelensky's when he wrote, "Perhaps this is a promise of the day when solidarity among radicals will be revived, and it will no longer be necessary to have their own relief program; it is evident to us that this day has not yet arrived." And since this day has yet to come even with our generation, we will continue to do our work in the manner in which our comrades before us have, consistent with their vision and spirit.

The Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross wishes to support all organizations that continue in the mission of political prisoner aid work. We hope the feuds that continue today will desist tomorrow, so that we will be able to continue to focus our energy on the freedom and liberation of all political prisoners.

In his foreword, Yelensky informs our generation of its mission and responsibilities. In it he writes, "Now that our generation is passing away, and the struggle for Freedom, Humanism, and Justice still lies ahead, I hope that those who take over the work will continue the fine traditions of impartiality and of justice to all those who need help." This message has become the motto for the Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross and we hope that others follow this lead. Only with the solidarity between those active in political prisoner aid work can this mission be fulfilled.

The Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross has, for several years, searched for the history and tradition of this organization in hopes that it will cease to be foreign to us. This is just one of the pamphlets being produced that relate specifically to the organization's history. Footnotes provided are additional information that was not mentioned in Yelensky's book and we hope that others will find this information as exciting and informative as we, in the Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross, have found it.

In addition, other information has been added, such as an essay written by a member of the LA-ABC regarding the Lettish Anarchist Red Cross and an article found in Freedom written by the ARC in New York.

Lastly, in the original publication, Yelensky wrote the follow dedication:
To the fighters for Freedom, Humanism and Justice,
To those who endeavored to help these fighters by applying the principle of mutual aid,
To my comrade and wife, BESSIE, and my children LEON and RUTH, who often
suffered on account of my activities, but never complained, for their loyal devotion, their
untiring cooperation and sincere understanding.

We would like to dedicate this pamphlet to the past and present members of the Anarchist Black Cross and all Anarchist and Class War political prisoners found behind the prison walls. We have tried to continue the commitment that those who have walked before us have shown. We have tried to pass along the message of solidarity, commitment, and the hope for the Anarchist ideal. As Yelensky once said, "This work is not done for glory, but because we believe in Mutual Aid." We must continue with this tradition and hope that others will join us in support of all Anarchist political prisoners, for this is the truest act of mutual aid and one that we cannot fail to show full commitment towards. It is in the spirit and memory of our former comrades and those who are still found behind bars today that we continue struggling under the name the of Anarchist Black Cross.

Original Introduction

This book has been produced because the Publication Committee believes that the story of the Anarchist Red Cross, and of other rescue and aid organizations, should be told. The time will soon come when those who lived through these experiences will no longer be here to tell their story. Therefore writers, editors, and teachers have combined to help Boris Yelensky produce the book, and many others have given generously to care for the costs. It is hoped that the future generation may find this work interesting, and may profit from the experiences related here.

This little book gives a picture of life among the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who were arriving in America in the early years of this century in large numbers. To some extent they transplanted the culture they had known in Europe. But in this country the old pressures were off, and new pressures took their place, causing misunderstanding, and difficulties in adjustment.

Of the many interesting stories, which have been, and will be told of these people, one of the most valuable is this account of a sympathetic movement to aid the persecuted comrades "back home." How was this organized? How did the comrades respond? These immigrants came seeking liberty, as had the original Pilgrim Fathers; their problems were no less difficult, and their response was perhaps no less noble. We would like to know more about the life of the early Pilgrims; the time may come when there is great curiosity about the life of the largest numbers of liberty-seeking immigrants who came three centuries later.

These alert, fearless, working people in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, and other cities, responded to Yelensky's appeal. They had been the vehicle through which the apostles of revolution and social change carried their ideal into the trade union movement, into cooperatives, into the education of the young, and into plans for international federation and world association. Perhaps no society could live up to the Utopian visions they had conceived, but they were not ready to settle for anything

less than a world of liberty, of brotherhood, and of peace. Thus, even in America they continued to study and work for their ideal and to maintain a sense of ideological solidarity.

We are fortunate in having this story told by one of the most prominent actors in it, Boris Yelensky. He was born in the Caucasus of Jewish ancestry, amid the fires of Russian revolution. In consequence he was not taught Hebrew, and it was not until he came to America, as a young boy, and he learned Yiddish. In Philadelphia he became an active member of the Radical Library. This Library was more than a store of books; it was an association, one of the most important centers of the intellectual radical movement in the early years of this century. The leader of this library at the time was Joseph Cohen, writer, lecturer, editor, and organizer of cooperative communities. Yelensky received his social education from Cohen, and his practical experience in this Radical Library.

Boris Yelensky is approaching the age of seventy as this is written. For almost fifty years he devoted all his energies to the movement of rescue and aid for those who suffered at the hands of tyrants in many parts of the world. He worked prodigiously to raise money for thousands of packages to be sent to Europe. He wrote innumerable letters on behalf of the cause. He devoted a lifetime to help build a better world and to form and sustain an international chain of assistance for the oppressed.

In 1949 a booklet celebrating the sixtieth birthday of Yelensky was published, containing the tributes of many friends. Rudolph Rocker, the internationally famous anarchist, author of "Nationalism and Culture," says there: "Yelensky is ... a brave man who always had an aim in life and the strength to fight for it... he has never been idle and does his work with love and devotion."

The tribute of M. Beresin in that booklet is especially significant. He says: "When I arrived in the United States in 1911, a fugitive from hard-labor sentence in Siberia, my first thought was to devise some means of extending aid to our comrades who were languishing in Russian prisons. I promptly proceeded to have a notice inserted in the Russian language newspapers requesting any co-workers in our ideological movement who were located in Philadelphia... to come to a meeting. Among those who attended that gathering was Yelensky. Our first step was the ... organization of the "Anarchist Red Cross" ... Yelensky is one of the most ardent and dynamic workers in our Movement; he has not for a single moment deviated from his ideological course; He has not allowed himself to become assimilated... by the American Bourgeois spirit. This intransigence of his... was responsible for the fact that in time he became to be recognized as more than a person. He became a veritable 'institution'."

Beresin points out that Yelensky is a product of the Russian revolutionary movement and anarchist thought, and says, "the Russian Revolutionary Movement embraced representatives of all social classes, from the highest nobility down to the humblest proletarian and peasant. In the revolutionary ranks were found outstanding thinkers, scholars, writers, orators, and host of plain, common people. But all of them, regardless of their social or intellectual status, were permeated by the same spirit of revolutionary idealism and freedom, by the same impulse to risk and sacrifice, if need be, their lives for the cause they held dear. Boris Yelensky is one of the very few surviving 'pure specimens', of that heroic era."

Since America was not in a revolutionary period the Anarchist movement here appeared quixotic rather than heroic. Yet the Russian heroes were a very legend to the Anarchists who crowded halls to hear lectures on the writings of Kropotkin, Bakunin, Tolstoy, Proudhon, and Johann Most. In America generally these Anarchists were vigorously denounced for their beliefs and actions. The teaching of anarchy was considered a sin, and it became really dangerous to even peek into Anarchist literature. For most people “anarchy” was made synonym for “chaos.” It therefore becomes necessary to give some idea of what anarchy means.

Anarchists believe in such freedom of thought that they have never been willing to adopt a binding statement of beliefs. Nevertheless, Anarchists feel that their ideal of freedom has been an increasing influence upon the political thinking, the education, the social planning of all nations since the turn of the century. They feel that they have been persecuted because they were the gadflies of progress, rather than because they were wrong.

The Encyclopedia Britannica has a quite full and sympathetic account of anarchy. We would particularly call the reader’s attention to the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, which can be found in many libraries, and which has an excellent article on anarchy by Oscar Jaszi, a Hungarian scholar who was a teacher at Oberlin College. He gives a comprehensive survey of the history and literature of anarchy, and outlines some ideals which were the center of discussion at the Congress of American Anarchists held in Pittsburgh in 1883, as follows:

“(1) To establish justice, that is, equality and reciprocity, in all human relations by the complete elimination of the state, or by the greatest possible minimization of its activities, and its replacement by an entirely free and spontaneous cooperation between individuals, groups, regions and nations. (2) Our unbearable social and moral evils cannot be cured, or even alleviated by the state, which is necessarily an instrument of domination and exploitation. (3) All reforms from above are worthless and can only augment our present misfortune. Only the principle of federalism, beginning with the humblest of human relations and ascending to the highest international cooperation, can establish a new society. (4) This new society can only be the result of a revolutionary action in the soul, or on the sociopolitical life, which will destroy the state... and all coercive systems whatsoever.”

In the light of experience with the Bolshevik Revolution, the Anarchist today no longer plans political revolution, but emphasizes the “revolution of the soul” which treasures freedom, and personal responsibility for moral and political action. Such a revolution is needed today more than ever.

However, the groups of which Yelensky speaks, in the early years, were anticipating a world revolutionary social change. Wherever they could find a platform, or could make a demonstration they were eager and ready to present their ideas. Yet, outside of agitation, they lived rather ordinary lives and fulfilled all obligations as citizens. They believed in libertarian communism- several types of communism were expounded, but the kind that appealed most to this group was Peter Kropotkin’s. In Kropotkin’s view the state was to be eliminated and the village was to become a real commune, a brotherhood, a family society, the nucleus of a worldwide, humanity-wide organism.

The experience of the Russian Revolution proved to them who was right in the Marx-Bakunin dispute. As they encountered the oppression of Marxist communism in

Russia they came to repudiate violence, and turned increasingly toward a more “spiritual revolution.” The underground tactic, which had been necessary in Russia were gradually eliminated from their thinking. They became interested in the defense of civil liberties in America, in opposing the standardization of art and education through the controls of the ruling class group, and in supporting efforts for broader international unity.

In Russia they had been part of a revolutionary movement, and it was only gradually that they discovered that there was no revolutionary situation here in which they could participate. But wherever liberties were in jeopardy they continued to express their concern, and in particular they did what they could for those who were being persecuted for the cause of freedom in Europe. They attempted to form some communities for the exploration of anarchistic principles in practice, but these colonies were not very successful. They did, however, inculcate a love of freedom in their young, and in many people who were reached by their activities.

Yelensky’s story is colored by the fact that there has been division among the forces of freedom everywhere. The project for the relief of Anarchists arose because the Anarchists were discriminated against by the Socialists and Communists who had been their comrades in the fight against the Czar, and later against Franco. The Marxist had larger and stronger organizations, and therefore were able to control popular programs of relief. Under these circumstances the Anarchists were refused aid on the pretense that they were just “bandits.” This accusation is a manifestation of the fact that the followers of Marx treated the Anarchists in the same way that Marx himself treated Bakunin. Those who know the lives and teachings of the apostles of anarchy- Kropotkin, Bakunin, Malatesta, Tolstoy, Reclus, Michel, and others, know that they represent the most ideal humanism of mankind. Therefore it is obvious that the accusation of “banditry” is a gratuitous slander. These accusations, coming from their former comrades, were particularly resented.

The judgments, which Yelensky pronounces on various individuals and groups, may not always be accepted as accurate. The Publishing Committee feels, however, that Yelensky has earned the right to express his view in his own way. If he is wrong the field is open for others to reply and set the record straight. Right or wrong his feelings explain why he acted as he did in developing the relief organization to which he has devoted his life. The serious student must take these views into account even though this report might need to be balanced with a study of other writings.

Again today we hear thousands of young people in Hungary, in Poland, and in other parts of the world who want to die for ideas rather than for things. Even a generation brought up under Communist totalitarianism need not be molded forever. The work of the past was not in vain, and it may give inspiration for steadfastness to the principle of liberty in the future. The Anarchist Red Cross, and similar organizations, have made their mark in history, and have performed an undying service in the struggle for liberty and equality.

Author’s Preface

When the Russian Revolution released political prisoners from Tsarist confinement, in 1917, it was supposed that there would be no more persecuted comrades needing relief. The Anarchist Red Cross was dissolved and many of the active

participants returned to Russia, taking important documents with them. Of the material that remained, much was confiscated by government agents during the notorious Palmer Raids in 1919, or destroyed by people who wanted to avoid trouble with the authorities. Since then many have died, and details have been forgotten. Thus it had been difficult to gather material for earlier parts of our story.

In the desperate struggle of radical groups for survival each party has tended to look after the interest of its own people, and has been indifferent, if not hostile to the welfare of others. We have not intended our report to be an expose of factionalism; but we have to record the facts in order to provide a foundation for realistic plans and programs of the future.

Our story is primarily a report of what so-called "subversive radicals" have contributed to social development in the United States. Scholars are already doing research in this field, and I hope that what I record may help towards the full acknowledgment of the debt which social progress in America owes to this misunderstood group of immigrants.

I had hoped to include a list of all those who took part in Anarchist relief work, but this has proved impossible. These people have the undying gratitude of the many whose lives were saved. The work was not done for the glory, but because we believed in Mutual Aid.

It has been a pleasure to recall the years when we had such great hopes that in our own lifetime we would see a world in which political persecution would belong to past history. Our dreams are still far from realization, and it seem, alas, that the noble work of providing mutual aid for our comrades all over the world will continue to be necessary for many years to come.

It has also been pleasant to recollect the enthusiastic activity that existed in so many cities during the old days of the Anarchist Red Cross. There was so much willingness during that period to sacrifice a part of one's life in order to help those comrades who needed assistance in prisons and places of exile. If one compares those visionary years of our youth to the "practical" epoch in which we are now living, one realizes that those young dreamers of the past accomplished much more than the "practical" men of the present. Now that our generation is passing away, and the struggle for Freedom, Humanism, and Justice still lies ahead, I hope that those who take over the work will continue the fine traditions of impartiality and of justice to all those who need help.

I wish to extend my most cordial thanks to all my friends, comrades and groups, and especially to the Philadelphia comrades for their large contributions, which enabled me to complete my book.

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Martin Gudell, who suggested that I take up this work; to George Woodcock for his editorial work on the first draft of the manuscript; to my old friend and comrade Beresin for his interest and advice; to Dr. B. for his interest and final editorial work; to Olga Maximoff and Irving S. Abrams for their constructive advice and to Richard Ellington for proof-reading the work.

I. The Nineteenth Century

The serious consideration of any aspect of Russian revolutionary history must begin in 1825, the year of the first organized insurrectionary movement, the Decembrist conspiracy against the autocratic rule of Nicholas I. It is true that before the movement arose Russia has already seen many popular uprisings, such as that led by Stenka Rasin on the Volga, and that led by Pugachev, about whom the Russian people still sing their folks songs. But these were spontaneous protests rather than movements based on carefully thought-out social philosophies.

Most of the Decembrist conspirators were officers of the Tsarist army, and some of them were intellectuals influenced by social theories from Western Europe which aroused in them the idea that it was time for the Tsarist government to give some measure of freedom to its subject. The Decembrists were in fact men who enjoyed considerable social privileges and a great measure of economic security, but they were not satisfied with these advantages when the vast majority of their fellow countrymen live in serfdom and oppression, impelled by their ideals, they decided to sacrifice their personal happiness- and even in some cases their lives- in the hope of helping the Russian people.

Their uprising, which took place on the 14th of December 1825, is relevant to our subject because it resulted in the first great exodus of political prisoners to Siberia. Tsar Nicholas I took part personally in the trials of the conspirators, and behaved with great cruelty towards these idealists. But his ruthlessness could not destroy the new thoughts of liberty, which the Decembrists injected into Russian intellectual life, and when the impetus of revolt reasserted itself some decades later the new generation of revolutionary intellectuals took up where the Decembrist had left off.

In the 1860's there emerged the Narodniki, a group consisting of students and intellectual who sacrificed their privileged positions and went among the Russian people to spread to gospel of freedom and to make them understand the true nature of the Tsarist regime. If the Decembrists had shown rather remotely the influence of the Western European ideas, the Narodniki were in full and close contact with the world outside Russia's borders partly through political emigres, like Herzen, Ogarev, and Bakunin, who, from Western European exiles, established and maintained contact with the movement in their homeland.

Faced with the Narodniki movement, which assumed considerable magnitude, the Tsarist government adopted repressive measures of barbaric thoroughness, and from this period dates the practice of the mass imprisonment of radicals in Russia.

In the seventies the pioneer Narodniki were followed by a new movement, known as the Narodnaya Volya, which concerned itself not only with revolutionary propaganda, as the Narodniki had done, but also with the use of terroristic acts as a means of taking revenge on the Tsars and their officials for the suffering of the Russian people. In turn, it was from the Narodnaya Volya that there emerged the Social-Revolutionary Party, which carried on, with modifications, the traditions of its predecessors. At the same time, there were other movement, such as the Earth-and-Freedom group, which was strongly influenced by the libertarian teachings of Michael Bakunin. Marxism appeared relatively late, in the 1880's, when G. Plekhanov left the Earth-and Freedom group and abandoned

Bakunin's teachings to become eventually one of the founders of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, which finally split into rival groups of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

Anarchism as an organized movement appeared in Russia at the end of the 1880's, but the ideas it embodied had already been influential in the revolutionary tradition through the work of those two great libertarians, M. Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin.

Many other revolutionary groups and parties, too numerous for us to mention in detail, arose in Russia during the years before the Revolution of 1917, and all of them contributed their representatives to the political prisoners and places of exile. In 1885 the American traveler, George Kennan, visited Russia and was allowed to travel to Siberia. In his return he wrote a moving book, which aroused world-wide protest. Had he visited Siberia thirty years later, in the years immediately preceding the downfall of the Tsarist rule. He would find the population of the places of exile many times greater.

II. THE 1905 REVOLUTION

Science suggests that children inherit some of the characteristics of their parents, and if we look at the history of socialism during the past century we can see that this seems to apply to political parties as well. In the First International Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin clashed over the principles and tactics of the labor movements. In order to defeat Bakunin and his associates within the First International who later became known as the Anarchist movement, Marx and his followers used methods of calumny and vilification, particularly against Bakunin himself, who bore the brunt of the attack against the authoritarian conception of socialism. Down to the present day the followers of Karl Marx, no matter to which faction they may have belonged, have continued to use slander as a method of arousing enmity towards their opponents.

It is true that there have been times when the Social Democrats, or certain groups of them (such as the Mensheviks during the period when they were involved in the bitter strife with the Bolsheviks) have sought to make common cause with the Anarchists. Even in the prisons and places in exile of the Tsarist Russia, the Socialists maintained their resentment towards the Anarchists who were their fellow-fighters in the struggle to free Russia from Tsarist reaction. This resentment went so far that in those prisons where the Social Democrats were in the majority the Anarchists were refused any of the aid that was sent by sympathizers.

The situation in the Russian prisons became particularly acute in the early years of the twentieth century. Immediately before the Russian Revolution of 1905 the activities of the opponents of Tsarism were greatly intensified and the Tsarist government was naturally not idle in retaliation. Every section of the revolutionary movement had many of its members in prisons and exile, and the need for aid grew enormously in comparison with the early years of resistance to Tsarism. Moreover, while formerly the prisoners had been mostly upper-class people, whose families were in a position to help them materially, by the beginning of the twentieth century the change in character of the revolutionary movements led to the appearance of a mass of prisoners drawn from poorer classes, with no resources of their own.

The question of helping the prisoners in fact became a national problem; not only did every section of the socialist movement, both authoritarian and libertarian, raise funds

in Russia and abroad, but also the Russian liberal-progressives, and even rich men and aristocrats unattached to any party, felt the obligation to aid political prisoners and exiles. After the 1905 Revolution a non-partisan Red Cross was organized for this purpose, under the leadership of Maxim Gorki's ex-wife, Madam Pieshkova.¹ At the same time, in the frequent political trials in Tsarist courts, which drew the attention of the whole world, the most famous Russian lawyers would offer their services to the defense without payment.

In the pre-revolutionary times, up to 1917, it often seemed as though the radical, liberal, and progressive groups in Russia had great unity of feeling; they saw in the liberation of Russia from the corrupt Tsarist government a common aim, and consequently they thought that all political prisoners should be helped. The only exception to this unity of feeling was the Social Democrats with their sectarian policy.

After the failure of the 1905 Revolution the government started the prosecution of all those suspected of taking part in the insurrectionary activities, and the jails and places of exile filled rapidly. Yet despite the strength of the Tsarist government, the political prisoners managed by a bitter struggle in the prisons to establish their rights. I believe it was only in Russia that the political prisoners were at this time acknowledge as a special group, separated from the criminal elements and not compelled to wear prison clothing. Only political prisoners condemned to serve time in Katorga (hard-labor) prisons wore prison clothes and chains; elsewhere the politicals had many privileges. They were allowed to make communal living arrangements, to elect representative and from among their representative to choose a Starosta (headman) whose duty it was to convey grievances to the prison administration and to receive outside help that was sent to the prisoners. But this custom was often abused where the Starosta was a Social Democrat for he channeled the aid received to members of his own group.

The need to help our comrades in Russian prisons who had been denied aid from the common funds led the Anarchists of Europe and America to organize the Anarchist Red Cross. This organization originated in Europe, which is understandable since people their had more direct contact with whatever was going on in Russia. I have been unable to find the exact date when it began to function there, but the following the extract from a letter written by Rudolph Rocker, for many years the treasurer of this organization in London, sets the founding of this organization in the early years of the century:

“The Anarchist Red Cross was found in the hectic period between 1900 and 1905. All revolutionary parties in Russia organized committees abroad for the assistance of the political prisoners in Russia and Siberia, and those committees took money from everybody, **but our own comrades there received almost nothing.**

That was the reason why the A.R.C. was founded. Only when Vera Figner came to London (she was the treasure for the political prisoners of the Party of the Socialist Revolutionaries) we had a conference in London with a representative of the S.R.'s and agreed that in all prisons and in Siberia, wherever the Anarchists were in the majority,

¹ The Political Red Cross is known to have existed as early as 1872. The organization consisted of mostly women from the Tchaikovsky group of which Peter Kropotkin was apart. It not only raised funds for those in prison and in exile but was also known to organized escape attempts for those it supported. The organization also helped young women escape from parental restraints sometimes even by organizing fictitious marriages for them.

our fund should send money to all Anarchists and Socialist Revolutionaries, and vice versa.”²

Rudolph Rocker
June 2nd, 1956

The First Anarchist Red Cross in the United States was organized in New York in 1907 under the following circumstances. As a result of the reaction, which followed the Revolution of 1905 those who had not yet been arrested began to look for a means of escape from persecution, and a great migration started, to England and especially the United States, where the young people from Russia hoped to find political asylum and liberty. Between 1905 and 1910 tens of thousands of these refugees came to North America, and, since economic conditions were hard and they found themselves among people whose language they could learn only with difficulty, it was natural that their thoughts should linger with their own country and their comrades in prison, and also that, instead of being readily assimilated into their new homes, they should come together in all kinds of Russian and Jewish clubs and societies where the concern for their mother country was maintained at a high level of intensity.

Many of those who reached the United States had participated in the Anarchist movement in Russia, and some had escaped from prisons or places of exile. They brought with them the sad news of the situation of Anarchists in these prisons, where they received little help owing to the Social Democrats being in the majority. This helped create a sympathetic atmosphere for the formation of an A.R.C. in New York; in this the actual pioneers were H. Weinstein and J. Katzenelenbogen, who themselves had been in Russian Prisons. The following letter written by H. Weinstein gives many details of how and why they set about this work:

“You want me to write something about the Anarchist Red Cross. A resume of this subject by Weitzman was published in the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* in the issue of February 10. What I shall add consists of precise details which friend Weitzman was either unaware of or else had forgotten.

In July or August of 1906 I was placed under arrest in the city of Bialostock. When I arrived at the prison in that city. I met there Jacob Krepleich and a friend of his, a Russian teacher; they likewise informed me that the organization which then existed in Russia, set up by the Social-Democrats to extend aid to all revolutionary captives regardless of political affiliation, was refusing to help the Anarchists; and during the brief period that I remained in the Bialostock prison we received letters from the Grodno jail which gave confirmation of the truth of these statements.

² Vera Figner, who was released from Strelnikov Prison in late 1904, traveled to London to attend a Social-Democratic Convention in the summer of 1907. This is when the meeting Rocker speaks of might have taken place. By this time the ARC was already active in Russia. In 1906-1907, five members of the Anarchist Red Cross were on trial with 162 other Anarchists. Anarchist Red Cross chapters were known to exist in Odessa, Kiev, Bialystok, and other cities. As mentions in this book, Harry Weinstein had already been released from prison and was living in New York by May of 1907. With the information available to us, we can hypothesize that ARC in Russian began during the period of July 1906 to May 1907. Internationally, it began during the summer of 1907.

About the time I was released from the prison, Kadel's group of five or six members were sentenced to exile in Siberia. Also at that time Iza Wishniak was sentenced to Siberian exile.³ It was urgent to provide them all with clothing and with boots. Naturally money was needed for that purpose, and I knew only too well that the organization existing for that purpose would not contribute to help our comrades. Hence B. Yelin and I, with the cooperation of our co-workers who still remained in Bialostock, undertook to prepare the deportees for their journey, and this task we accomplished efficiently, furnishing them with new boots, linen, and suits of clothing. Often, when we were in the U.S.A., Iza Wishniak would often recall what a good job we did equipping our comrades.

In May 1907, I came to the United States. Here I became acquainted with Jacob Katzenelenbogen, whom I had not known in Bialostock. The fact is that for a time he was the only comrade whom I met frequently here in New York, and we had lengthy discussions about the dire situation of our arrested comrades in Russia; for we knew that over there they were receiving no aid from the existing relief organization, nor for our own groups- because very few of our comrades had remained there.

We decided to arrange a concert in the hope of raising some funds for the victim; but how could a mere two men execute such an undertaking? It would be necessary to sell tickets and appeal to organizations for support. I knew very few of our comrades then. But an idea occurred to me- I doubt if I could have carried it out two years later, but at the time it appeared to be the only way to procure help from several persons who had no ideological kinship with us whatsoever.

I don't know whether you are aware that I come from a small town called Orle? I am certain that you have no idea where it is located, but that is of no consequence. However, at that particular time it was extremely important for me to obtain assistance from two persons who had emigrated from my town. Inasmuch as in Kadel's group, which we fitted out for their deportation, one member came from Orle, I contacted two men from Orle who were living in New York City and appealed to what you might think call their 'civic pride'. One of our fellow-townsmen, we told them, was in Siberia and must have help. They were acquainted with him, and so my plea was not in vain- they pledge their assistance.

After several conferences and consultations they agreed to our project for a concert to be held in the month of January or else in February 1908- we staged our first concert in the hall on Grand Street. Katzenelenbogen and I went around selling tickets to various organizations; of course, we had to offer some explanations as to why we were seeking aid precisely for Anarchist prisoners. All kinds of questions along this line were put to us and we had to give convincing answers. Fortunately, the two fellow townsmen kept their promise gave us their unstinted assistance, and the concert proved to be a great success. The hall was packed to overflowing, and the concert was attended by a number of friends who subsequently participated in the official launching of the Anarchist Red Cross."

I myself first became involved in the Anarchist Red Cross in Philadelphia in 1911. At the time it seemed to me very strange that we should have to found a separate organization.

³ Iza Wishniak, along with his wife Fanny Wishniak, were active members of the New York Anarchist Red Cross.

In my hometown in Russia, I remembered we used to collect food and money to help the political prisoners who passed through on their way to Siberia, and we never even thought of asking about their party affiliations. I brought this matter up with several of my comrades, and particularly with one of them named Pade, whose arguments finally convinced me I was wrong.

On this subject I inquired of M. Berezin, who himself escaped from a Katorga prison and later wrote a book in Yiddish, "From Chains to Freedom," (published 1916 by A.R.C., NY) in which he described the life of political prisoners in Russia. This is what he said in his reply:

"In some prisons there was little distinction made between anarchists, and other political prisoners, **but in others the anarchists were refused any help.** That is the reason why I organized the Anarchist Red Cross when I came (to Philadelphia)."

As a final document bearing on the reason for the foundation of the Anarchist Red Cross organizations in the United States, I include a quotation from the already-mentioned historical article on the New York A.R.C., which M. Weitzman wrote published in the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* on the 10th of February 1956.

"The most depressing aspect of reports coming was the incredible fact that only Social-Democrats seemed to benefit from the aid which was coming from America. Our comrades had raised the funds, and gave generously of their own resources to alleviate the desperate plight of all fighters for freedom in Russia.

We began to seek ways and means to arouse public opinion in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles to a realization of the privations, tortures and unspeakable tragedies that had befallen our comrades in Russian prisons and labor camps. To further our aim, we obtained in number of personal letters smuggled out from our deported and captive brethren, and submitted them to the editors of a number of local and Yiddish and English-speaking newspapers and magazines. However, as soon as the editorial offices learned that Anarchists were involved in the campaign, they began to resort to all kinds of idle pretexts to defer the publication of the stories, and in the end these reports never saw the light of day.

In order to breach this thick partisan wall of silence and sabotage that had been erected to shut out the story of the ordeal of our tormented comrades in Russia, the local Anarchist Red Cross launched the publication of a monthly periodical under the title of *Die Stimme (The Voice)*, which addressed itself to the general public here and urged aid for the imprisoned Anarchists in Russia.⁴ This journal appeared half in Yiddish and half in Russian; in its pages we also published a selection of the letters written by our captive and deported comrades. The editor of that publication in its early days was our now deceased comrade, Alexander Zager.

The Anarchist Red Cross made a valuable contribution towards helping a certain number of the imprisoned anarchists to flee from Siberia and subsequently to find asylum abroad. To this very day there are to be found in a number of free countries comrades whom we literally snatched from the jaws of death in Siberia.

⁴ Die Stimme (the correct title was Di Shtime fun di Rusishe Gefangene) was a monthly publication from 1913-1916. It was edited by Alexander Zager.

It is only lack of space that prevents me from quoting many other sources which would help to show how the foundation of a separate anarchist relief organization was rendered necessary primarily by the inhumanly sectarian attitude of those Social Democrats who at the same time claimed to have the intention of bringing to an end the unjust society in which we were then living and in which, unfortunately, we still live.

III. Relief in U.S.A., 1908-1917

When the first nucleus of the Anarchist Red Cross started in Europe around about the beginning of the present century, its activities were largely concentrated in London, where a committee headed by Kropotkin, Cherkessoff, Rocker, and others set about organizing material help for the imprisoned Anarchists in Russia, mostly through collection and donations sent in from all over Europe and the United States.⁵ London was well fitted for this function, since it was the center through which the closest connections were maintained with the Anarchists in Russia, and through which news of the situation of our comrades in prison and exile reached the world.

Consequently, when Weinstein and Katzenelobogen organized their first concert in New York in 1908, they had no idea that from the tiny committee they formed for that purpose there would grow up an enormous organization in the United States which would not only collect large sums of money but would also maintain contact with Anarchist prisoners and exiles in Russia and organize the systematic distribution of material help and the manifestation of moral support. In 1909 Chicago followed the example of New York by organizing its own Anarchist Red Cross, and Philadelphia followed suit in 1911; there was also a small committee in Detroit and Baltimore.

New York was the center that absorbed the greater number of immigrants who arrived from Eastern Europe; many of them were enthusiasts who dreamed of a Russia liberated from the corrupt government of the Tsars, and it was therefore natural that the Anarchist Red Cross should be successful in that city. Very soon after the first concert in 1908, the two pioneer organizers found that they did not have to worry about seeking help. Almost immediately a permanent organization was formed, and up to the time of its liquidation after the Russian Revolution of 1917, the A.R.C. continued to have hundreds of active members in New York.

Its activities rapidly widened, and they centered around an annual gathering known as the Arestantin Ball (Prisoners' Ball), which became so popular an event in immigrant circles that every year a larger hall had to be found to accommodate the people who wished to attend, and even then hundreds were often turned away because there was no room for them. The mention of the Arestantin Ball arouses vivid recollections of those early days of the A.R.C. Thousands of gay people, full of vigor and hope, danced all kinds of Russian dances; the hall itself was decorated in the spirit of the event, and, in order to remind the dancers that in faraway Russia and Siberia people were suffering for a cause we all believed in, there would be tableaux in which young men and women would appear dressed in Russian prisoners' garb, with their hands and feet chained and

⁵ The London Anarchist Red Cross started in 1907 under the direction of Peter Kropotkin, Rudolph Rocker, Alexander Shapiro and Cherkessov. The group in London also produced a journal known as the *Hilf-Ruf* (*The Call to Aid*)- *Organ of the Anarchist Red Cross*, 1911-1912. It was written in half Yiddish and half Russian.

with soldiers and policemen in Russian uniform guarding them. As well as the Arestantin Ball, a summer excursion was organized every year on the Hudson River. These two annual events brought in a considerable sum of money, to which were added the receipts of subscription lists circulated in their spare time by the hard-working young members of the organization, who kept constantly in their minds the thought of their comrades suffering in Russia.

But raising funds was the only part of the A.R.C.'s work- and the least complicated part at that. There was a special committee, working in secret, whose duty it was to carry on correspondence with prisoners and exiles in Russia. This had to be done discreetly, for the Tsarist government kept a sharp eye on its victims; in order not to arouse undue suspicion, each member of the committee had a number of prisoners on his correspondence list to whom he would write as if he were a relative; in any other way the letters would not reach their addresses and the prisoners might also have trouble with the authorities. Because of this need for discretion, most of the correspondence committee were men and women who had experience of underground revolutionary work in Russia and who were therefore adept at getting letters to their destinations under the noses of the Russian authorities.

In the article, which we have already quoted M. Weitzman reports that, in order to give comrades in prison news about our movement, the committee adopted the device of inserting letters into the bindings of books sent to prisoners. For a time this expedient worked, until one day a book aroused suspicion of the authorities in Irkutsk, who took it apart and found the letter enclosed in it. Since it was regarded as a grave offense both to receive clandestine letters and to have connections with the Anarchist Red Cross, the Tsarist authorities set on foot the trial of the prisoners involved, and it looked as though, instead of helping them, their friends in New York had in fact got them in trouble. Through its connections in Russia, the A.R.C. engaged one of the best lawyers in the country to defend the prisoners involved, but before the trial could reach the courts the 1917 Revolution had taken place and all the political prisoners were set free.

The Philadelphia Anarchist Red Cross was organized by a group of young people who were members of the famous Radical Library. One of them, who I have already mentioned, was M. Berezin, who had only recently come to the United States as a political refugee. Berezin had been fortunate enough to escape from the Artvisky Prison, one of the worst hard labor jails in Siberia, where he had shared a cell with the famous Egor Sazonoff, who in July 1904 assassinated the minister Von Plehve for his brutal treatment of the Russian people. A few years later Sazonoff committed suicides as a protest against the inhuman conditions endured by political prisoners in the hard-labor prisons, and his act made a very deep impression both in Russia and abroad.

In the early winter of 1912 the first Arestantin Ball was held in Philadelphia. As an advertisement members of the A.R.C. committee attended dances of friendly organizations in the guise of prisoners. When the *Jewish Daily Forward* held its annual masked ball, Berezin suggested that we should create living pictures illustrating the life of the political prisoners undergoing hard labor. His suggestion was accepted, and at the ball we erected a tent with three compartments; in the first was shown the march of political prisoners through the cold Siberian winter towards their place of confinement; in the second was shown the kind of life which each man lived in his cell; in the third was represented the suicide of Egor Sazonoff. When the Ball was in full swing we showed our

tableaux, and they made a deep impression on the thousands of dancers who crowded round to watch. Later, when we passed in the Grand March before the judges who were appraising the various fancy dresses, we were accorded the loudest popular applause. However, the judging went in accordance with the saying, "Where there is politics you will not find justice"; it was a Socialist ball, and therefore Anarchists could not get the first prize even if they deserved it; we had to be content with the second prize of \$25.

Our own ball, the first Arestantin Ball, was a great moral and financial success, and this was the case during all the ensuing years, so that we were able to collect considerable sums of money to send to the organization in New York.

The Chicago Anarchist Red Cross, organized in 1909, grew rapidly into a large and energetic organization; at the time of its liquidation in 1917 it had 300 members, most of them young people. It became so popular in immigrant circles that every affair organized by it was highly successful, while much money was collected from various Jewish Russian societies, including not only progressive groups, but even religious organizations, which, as soon as they heard that their donations would go to political prisoners in Russia, would often give freely.

The two large annual events organized by the A.R.C. in Chicago were the Bouren Ball (Peasant Ball)⁶ on Thanksgiving Day, and the Arestantin Ball in March, both of which were so popular that the older comrades still talk about them with nostalgia.

The Bouren Ball centered around an elaborate caricature of the institution of marriage. Long wires were strung across the hall, from which were suspended various fruits which represented the "forbidden fruit" of the Garden of Eden. Around the hall were booths in which stood members of the organizing committee, dressed as priests of the various religious denominations, as well as girls in peasants dresses and young men in the uniforms of policemen and soldiers. The girls would propose marriage to the men with whom they danced, and when the men refused them the girls would call upon the policemen or soldiers for help; the men would be arrested and taken before one of the priests, who would perform a ceremony of marriage, give the girl a ring and collect a fee from the man. Afterwards the girl would demand a divorce, and the man would be brought before the judge, who would ask for a second fee for dissolving the marriage. In addition, any man who wished to twist one of the forbidden fruits from its wire would be arrested and fined. These fees and fines brought in most of the proceeds of this event.

Usually the Bouren Ball would begin at two or three in the afternoon, but it would rarely end before midnight, when the Grand March would begin, led by a giant rooster, followed by the "representatives of the State and of Religion," and then by the girls and boys in peasant costume and the general public, most of them in various kinds of fancy dress. At the end prizes would be given for the most attractive costumes, and also to the girls who had been married and divorced most often during the Ball. After the A.R.C. came to an end in 1917, the Bouren Ball was taken over by the Chicago Workers' Institute and later by the Workmen's Circle, but it never regained the gaiety and meaning it had held for all of us in the early days.

In Chicago, as in New York and Philadelphia, the Arestantin Ball was always a great success. Until 1913 it was only a dance, at which a few members of the committee

⁶ New York has its own annual Peasant Ball. These events were held at the Harlem River Casino at 2d Avenue and 127 Street. It was here that they had the last prisoners' ball prior to the Russian Revolution in 1917. It was a great success with all Jewish and Russian writers and intelligentsia attending.

would dress up as prisons, but in that year a few members of the Philadelphia group arrived in Chicago, bringing with them the idea of living pictures of prison life in Russia. At that same time there was a dramatic group among the Russian radicals in Chicago; we invited them to help us, selected a group of actors from our large membership, and, under the direction of Pakotiloff, worked hard at creating our living pictures. In March 1914, we produced them for the first time at the Arestantin Ball, to the astonishment of the guest, many of whom saw- reacted in the ballroom- kind of scenes in which they had taken part before leaving Russia. There were representation of street demonstration, fights at the barricades, arrests, political prisoners on the march to Siberia, life in prison, and, at the end, a grand tableau of Hope. This was in the form of a pyramid; at the bottom lay the defeated Tsar, with his brutal police and army officers and priests, on the pyramid itself stood peasants, workers, intellectual and students, representing the people of Russia with their longing for freedom, and on top was the statue of liberty with a torch in her hand- played by a school girl named Emma Avedon whose long Blonde hair, spreading over her shoulders, made her portrayal extremely effective. This final tableau made a deep impression; one could see on the faces of those who watched how deeply they were moved by the memory of what they had lived through and by their hopes for a better future in their homeland.

Since it has a similar experience with the local Jewish press as its fellow committee in New York, gaining no publicity for its big annual events in such quarters, the Chicago Anarchist Red Cross decided to publish yearly a humorous bulletin called The Bouren Ball, which was distributed throughout the Jewish colony in Chicago. We also advertised our events by means of a painter named Goroditsky, who carried his tools about in a horse-wagon; we would make two large signs which covered the wagon, and in this way our dances were publicized all over Chicago for months before they actually took place.

In 1915 or 1916 a committee of the Chicago A.R.C. went to Milwaukee and addressed a group of sympathizers there in the hope of setting up a branch in that city. After some discussion it was decided that the Chicago organization would help to organize a Bouren Ball in Milwaukee. However, the interest was not lasting enough for us to be able to create a permanent organization there.

Up to 1913 the money, which was collected in Chicago, was sent to Peter Kropotkin in England, but in that year the distribution of funds was reorganized. The Chicago Anarchist Red Cross came to an understanding with the New York organization, by which the latter sent us a portion of the names of imprisoned Russian Anarchist who were on their lists, and we undertook to help them. After we received the names, a correspondence committee was elected to send material help directly to Russia, and this closer contact with the Russian prisoners made our work much more interesting. At the same time we had such a large income that we were still able to send money to New York and London, even after fulfilling the responsibilities we had accepted.

At the beginning of this century Detroit did not have a large Russian or Jewish colony, but when the Ford Company announced that they would pay \$5.00 a day the immigrants began to move there, and among them was organized the Relief Society for Russian Political Prisoners, to which all the Russian political groupings belonged. The money, which this society collected, was sent to the Russian Political Red Cross, on the

assumption that political prisoners of all shades of opinion would receive help from the collective funds.

However, in 1912 and 1913 rumors began to reach Detroit- and they were later confirmed by letters which some Anarchists received from friends in Russian jails- that Anarchist prisoners were receiving no help from the collective fund in the United States, owing to that fact that the Social-Democrats had control of it. This news was taken up at the meeting of the Relief Society in Detroit, and for months a bitter fight went on there, until the Anarchists realized that no result favorable to them would come from the dispute. Accordingly, in 1914, they set up a local A.R.C., which received a good response and was able to send funds both direct to Russian and also to the Committee in New York.⁷

IV. The Kerensky Period, 1917

It is impossible to forget the winter night in March, 1917, when we came out of the Chicago Opera House and heard the newsboys shouting loudly in the lobby: "Revolution in Russia! Tsar Nicholas abdicates!" Each one of us bought a paper, and we rushed into a restaurant where we read every word twice over, and then looked for the news between the lines. We saw that the Romanoff dynasty had come to an end, yet our minds were still full of suspicion, and we could not get used to the idea that our long fight to liberate Russian from the Tsar and his corrupt government had at last been successful. We were skeptical, and the thought that it might be merely an attempt to depose the Tsar which would have no lasting effect. But the next day brought us more and fuller news, and our doubts vanished. The Russian colonies all over the United States began to celebrate and high-spirited mass meetings were held by every political group. In the joy of the moment, every radical seemed to feel it his duty to attend the functions of other parties and groups, and it was in every way a time of brotherly feeling.

Events in Russia moved very quickly, and soon we received the news that all political prisoners had been set free. In these circumstances the future of the Anarchist Red Cross naturally came up for discussion, and special meetings were held at which the unanimous conclusion was reached that our mission had come to an end and that we should liquidate our organization.

Meanwhile, as soon as the first news of the Russian Revolution reached them, the vast majority of the political refugees then living in the United States thought immediately of returning to help build a new society and to help defined the new freedoms which had been won with so much suffering, but at first these desires seemed far from fulfillment, partly because the great majority had no financial means and partly because of the disruption of transport by the First World War. However, the dream of return came true when Kerensky came into power and the Provisional Government decided that it would pay all the expenses of political refugees and their families returning to Russia.

⁷ Other ARC's not mentioned in this book are St. Louis, Baltimore, Rochester, Brownsville (Brooklyn), and the Lettish Anarchist Red Cross in New York (founded in 1913)

The First small group, which included L. Trotsky, left very soon; it was detained for a while in Halifax, Canada, but was set free and allowed to go on to Russia as a result of the representation by the Kerensky government.

Soon afterwards a special committee of representatives of all Russian political groupings was formed in New York, and this committee, working in co-operation with the Russian consul, became the clearinghouse for those who were entitled to a free passage home. A similar committee was later formed in Chicago to represent the political refugees in the mid-Western states; in a few weeks it approved several hundred applications, and soon the first group was ready to leave Chicago, accompanied by a contingent from Detroit.

Since the Atlantic was at this time a dangerous ocean to cross, it was decided that all the political refugees would leave from the Pacific coast, and go through Siberia to whatever point in Russia they wished to reach.

The departure of the first group from Chicago was a sight never to be forgotten. It seemed as though the whole radical Russian and Jewish colony had come to the station to see their friends go home. Later, during April, May and June 1917, contingents from the Eastern States were constantly passing through Chicago and each arrival became the excuse for a celebration.

The first months of the Russian Revolution brought a feeling of brotherhood between the various political groups, but this spirit did not last long. The well-known Bolshevik, Bukharin, came to Chicago to give a few lectures on the Revolution, predicting that a "proletarian" revolution would soon take place in Russia. After his lectures the small Bolshevik group in Chicago began to act as if they would soon take over affairs, and their representatives on the Political Refugee Committee began to claim that they were the only real representatives of the Russian people and that for this reason they alone had the right to decide who could go back to Russia.

Their declaration resulted in a bitter fight, which lasted through one meeting of the Committee until past midnight. When the rest of the members saw that it was impossible to reach an understanding with the Marxists they decided to go to another hall to terminate the business on the agenda. Accordingly, at 3 a.m., all the members of the Committee except the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks went to the Russian I.W.W. hall on Roosevelt Road. The first question discussed there was the election of a special committee, which would go next day to the Russian consul and explain to him what had happened. About 5 a.m. a certain Mr. Berg, later to become famous under the name of Borodin, came to us and proposed that we should not be hasty and should find a way to work with the Bolsheviks. His proposal was not accepted, and we told him to let the Russian Consul decide the matter.

Later in the morning, when our committee arrived at the Consul's office, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were already there. Our Chairman and Secretary explained what had happened the previous night. The Consul was shrewd enough to understand what the Bolsheviks were driving at, and he said that he would acknowledge no new committee and would deal only with our present Chairman and Secretary, giving passports and money solely on their recommendation. So, in the end, the Bolsheviks had to come to our Committee and to accept the common decisions.

When the last group of returning refugees left Chicago in June 1917, the activities of the Anarchist Red Cross seemed to have reached an end; neither those who left for

Russia nor those who remained in the United States dreamed that in a few years they would have to organize another Anarchist Red Cross to help the new political prisoners in Russia. We could not foresee that the brutalities of the Tsar's government would seem like child's play in comparison with those, which the new despots of Russia would initiate. The whole thinking world imagined that Russia was on the way to becoming one of the most democratic countries in the world.

However, before we come to the new tragedy of Russia it is appropriate to trace the adventures of those who returned in that year of 1917. More than ninety percent of those who went back were later to die in the Bolshevik terror. From some of those who escaped, we have collected information as to their journey back to Russia.

Generally speaking, the travel of the political refugees had been admirably arranged; there were Pullman cars on the trains, second-class accommodation on the boats, and hospitality in the cities. However, when the last group left, the special train was, either through intent or error, formed of old and shabby cars. The refugees refused to board it, but when the railway agent arrived he claimed that he had no other cars in Chicago and promised that when the train reached St. Paul the next morning the refugees could go to the yards and pick out any cars they might want. This assurance was accepted, and the annoyance was forgotten in the excitement of farewells, for the station was packed with the friends and families of the departing men and women. As the train moved out, the refugees began to sing revolutionary songs, and the people on the platform wept and waved as the wheels of the train seemed to pick up the rhythm of the singing.

Next morning in St. Paul a train of new cars was indeed waiting, and then, as the train began its long journey over the western Canadian prairies, the refugees settled down to consider the realities of their situation, of their return to their country- a country, which for the first time in centuries, was free. At first small groups began to discuss what they could expect to find in this new free Russia, and these private conversation soon developed into mass discussions in which whole cars would take part, and then individuals would wander to other cars where the members of other political groupings were talking, and so, in all this speculation, the journey to Vancouver was hardly noticed.

In Vancouver the Russian Consul was waiting for the train. He had made arrangements for hotel accommodations. A large group of other refugees was already there, and two days later the whole contingent crossed to Victoria, on Vancouver Island, and there boarded the liner *Empress of Asia*.

The ten days' voyage across the Pacific was an experience in itself. The whole second-class portion of the ship was occupied by the political refugees so that it looked like a small and very happy Russian community. Among them were many outstanding personalities, including the anarchist writer Volin⁸, whose important book, *The Unknown Revolution*, was published a few years ago, the American writer and artist John Reed, author of *Ten Days That Shook the World*, who was then a follower of Emma Goldman but later became a Bolshevik, William Shatov⁹ and many other writers and speakers. As

⁸ One of the final tasks of the ARC was organizing and assisting Anarchists voyages back home. Volin has been mentioned in many texts as one of those assisted by the ARC on his trip back to Russia.

⁹ William Shatov was a member of the New York Anarchist Red Cross and also worked on *Golos Truda*. He has escaped from Tsarist prisons after the revolution and came to America. Although he claims to have been a political prisoner while in the Tsarist prisons, members of the New York ARC were critical of these

soon as they settled down on the ship an educational committee was elected and, since a mimeograph machine was available, a daily paper was published under the titled of *The Float*, which commented on life in the ship's community and contained articles on the Russian Revolution, satirical writing and many cartoons by John Reed. Volin gave a series of lectures on the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, others spoke on different subjects, and there were musicals and other entertainment, so that the passengers were constantly busy in one way or another and the voyage passed like a dream.

In Yokohama there were already so many returning Russians that the passengers of the *Empress of Asia* had to stay in native Japanese hotels. The reason for this congestion was the relative backwardness of Japanese transportation facilities at this time. There were two ways of getting from Japan to Russia; one was by a short sea trip to Korea, and then by train through Korea and Manchuria, and the other was by small boat to Vladivostock, which involved a longer and usually rough and unpleasant sea voyage. Except for one very small group, everyone decided to go by train, and a party was sent off each day according to the number of tickets that could be obtain from the railroad.

Shortly after the arrival of the party we are following, some unpleasant rumors began to spread in Yokohama about a clash between returning refugees and the Russian authorities in Harbin. What had actually happened nobody knew, but the tale scared a few families who decided to remain for the time being in Japan, and this was the first crack in the holiday spirit with which the party had set out, for now everybody began to think of what they might expect when they reached the Russian border.

The Chicago party crossed the border at a small station where they had to change on to a Russian train. Not far from the station the Russian border guards were walking up and down, and some of the returning refugees started a conversation with them. They found out that all the poor soldiers actually knew was that there was no longer a Tsar in Russia; this news they were very happy to impart.

As they approached Harbin, where their train would connect with the main Vladivostock-Moscow line, the refugees began to feel some uncertainty, in view of the rumors they had heard in Japan. They could see the blaze of lights in the station, and then, as the train slowed down, a military band struck up the Marseillaise, and a crowd of people ran towards the carriages. The refugees could not understand what was happening, or for whom the music was playing, but very soon men and women began to crowd into their cars and to embrace them. These first-comers introduced themselves as members of the Reception Committee for Political Refugees; afterwards, as they got down from the train, the newcomers were greeted enthusiastically by all the people who had gather in the station. They were astonished and moved by this reception, which seemed to them manifestation of the warmth of the Russian people, and of the effects of the great changes that had taken place in their homeland.

Nevertheless they were still puzzled by the rumors that had circulated in Japan, and on the second day they mentioned these to the Harbin Reception Committee, who gave the following account of the actual incident. A group of refugees from Pittsburgh, including some rather violent individuals, arrived in the city and demanded that they should be sent immediately to Central Russia. The Reception Committee explained that

claims. According to the wife of an ARC member who had come from the same town that Shatov had come from, he was nothing more than an "ordinary criminal" and "not an anarchist expropriator." Avrich, P. *Anarchist Voices*. p. 374

before this could happen each of them would have to be checked by a special committee to establish the authenticity of his revolutionary activities in Russia; the main object of this investigation was to detect any former spies or provocateurs from the old Tsarist police who might be trying to return to Russia. The Pittsburgh group refused to agree to this, and went to see the manager of the railroad, who happened to be a former Tsarist General. He refused to give them traveling facilities, but, being an old reactionary, he saw an opportunity to stir up the feelings of those who were still against the revolution, and one evening a group of these people went to the carriage where the Pittsburgh group was living and tried to burn it. The incident could have ended tragically, but fortunately at that moment a train full of sailors from Vladivostok happened to arrive, and they interfered in the matter. After this experience, the Pittsburgh group realized the need for vigilance, submitted to the committee's investigation, and in a few days left Harbin.

While the group which we were following stayed in Harbin they felt already the spirit of renewal that was in the Russian air at the time, and this feeling continued as they traveled on through Siberia towards their various destinations. Everywhere the words Political Prisoners or Refugees acted like magic, and at every large station committees of young men and women met the trains and provided food and any other help which the travelers might need. Constantly, in this atmosphere of brotherly love, one felt gratitude, which the people showed towards those who had sacrificed their years and their freedom to help the liberation of Russia. In these idyllic early months of the Revolution there appeared among the Russian people that intensity of human feeling towards each other, which occurs rarely- perhaps not more than once in a century- in the history of any people.¹⁰

In Siberia, where the majority of political prisoners and exiles were concentrated, the news of the revolution had been received with profound emotion. In the city of Krasnoyarsk, a center from which the Tsarist government used to send exiles to the remote corners of the Siberian wilderness, the Governor received the telegram from the Provisional Government in Petrograd, informing him of the change of the regime. He was in no hurry to tell the people of the liberation, but the telegraphist who had received the message passed the news to a few of his friends, and it spread quickly among the resident exiles. Excitement ran high, and in the evening a large deputation went to the city hall to see the mayor and ask him to call on the Governor in Order to find out the text of the telegram. The people who had gathered outside the city hall were so excited that the Mayor decided to take out a copy of the telegram, which had been passed to him, and read it to them. At first the news was so surprising that nobody knew whether to believe it, but after that their joy was unbounded, and all night long the celebrations went on in the streets of the city. A few days later the exiles began to arrive from the remote places to which they had been banished; they walked as free men in the streets, but there was

¹⁰ When the members of the Anarchist Red Cross returned to Russia, they met up with many of the prisoners that they had supported. One such member of the organization, Morris Greenshner traveled to Odessa after he arrived to Russia where he met up with Issak Golovin, a person he had helped through his work in the ARC. Golovin embraced Greenshner informing him that it was his letters that had kept him going through the years. He assisted Greenshner in getting a job at the factory where he was working. Another prisoner, Iosif Savitsky, heard that several members of the Anarchist Red Cross were in Odessa and traveled there in search of Greenshner in hopes of thanking him for what he had done for the one-time prisoner.

still fear in their faces, the fear of the dark past from which they emerges. Their clothing was ragged, their shoes were worn-out, and most of them were half-starved, so a committee was organized to take care of them. It had no funds, but here also the new spirit of free Russia was made manifest, for the merchants of the city offered to provide without payment whatever might be needed for the exiles, and even the noblewomen of Krasnoyarsk came to the Committee and offered their help.

Yes, a social revolution can produce miracles of brotherhood, and if the political parties which were busily fighting for power had turned their attentions to keeping up these miracles, Russia and the whole world might now be far advanced on the road towards real freedom. Instead, however, we must now consider the bitter reality of what the politics of power actually brought about in Russia.

V. BOLSHEVIK TRIUMPH

The early “honeymoon” months of the Russian Revolution went by happily but all too quickly, as the Russian people, and particularly the Russian peasants, waited for the miracle which they hoped would change completely the life they had endured for more than three centuries under the domination of the Russian Tsars and their feudal governments.

What the Russian people in general expected from the Revolution was the end of hunger and of the bloodshed of the First World War. In addition, the peasants wanted satisfaction of their centuries old dream of possessing the land they worked, while the workers desired the control of industry. The Provisional Government, on the other hand, contained many people who were opposed to any kind of radical change, and in consequence its activities reached a stalemate. Instead of even beginning to solve the burning social questions with which it was faced, it decided to embark on an offensive against the German armies, and the land question was left for the attention of the Constituent Assembly, which was to meet in a year or so.

The tense situation that resulted brought about the first clashes between the revolutionaries and the Provisional Government; as a result there were political prisoners once again in the new Russia. However, the Provisional Government contained a large proportion of members who were themselves revolutionaries and knew what imprisonment meant, so that there was not yet the cruelty, which characterized the Bolsheviks in later years. Those arrested were usually released quickly, and it still seemed as though the spirit of the revolution were fully alive.

But events moved very quickly during that summer of 1917. The peasants, workers and soldiers were becoming more and more disappointed with the situation, and the left-wing elements felt that the revolution was in danger of being brought to a halt. The Bolsheviks, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Anarchists all continued to agitate for a broadening of the revolution’s scope, and by the early autumn it was evident that new developments were on the way. In October, 1917, what everybody had expected took place, the Provisional Government of Kerensky was overthrown and Russia started on a new social road, a road no country in the world had traveled before, towards a communized system of soviets in which the will of the people would govern from below, instead of the will of the Government ruling from above. “All Power to the Soviets,” “Workers’ Control of Industry,” “The Land to the Peasants”- under these magnificent

slogans, a new social order seemed to be born in Russia, and it looked as though a real social revolution were taking place. The peasants did not wait for any laws to authorize them to divide the land, and the workers quickly organized Shop and Factory Committees and Industrial Soviets for the control of places of work. The Coalition Government of Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries had to acknowledge these developments by issuing decrees authorizing the taking over of the land and factories, and the construction of the new way of life seemed to be beginning.

Yet the happiness engendered by these events was already tinged with violence and it soon became evident that the civil war was impending. The Civil War actually started in January 1918; it began with the expedition of the Tsarist General Kornilov in the Kuban region of Southern Russian, and it soon spread of other areas. Many of the active revolutionary elements were drawn to the military fronts so as to fight against the counter-revolutionary armies; the Bolsheviks took advantage of this situation to organize their power in Moscow and to start negotiations with the Germans for a separate peace. This move, on their part, led to the withdrawal of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries took matters into their own hands in an attempt to disrupt the peace negotiations, and members of the party shot and killed the German Ambassador Mirbach.

The Bolsheviks were looking for an excuse to loosen their Cheka (secret police) against groups who opposed them, and this assassination gave it to them. All over Russia members of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party were arrested, and this resulted in the attempt on Lenin's life by the Socialist-Revolutionary Dora Kaplan.¹¹ This in turn brought about a wave of cruel reprisals on the part of the Bolsheviks, who this time were not content to attack the Socialist Revolutionaries, for in, for in April, 1918, they staged an armed raid on the Anarchist paper *Anarchy* in Moscow and on the club connected with it. Later, in Leningrad and in the provinces, many Anarchists were arrested and the Russian prisons started once more to fill with political prisoners.¹²

Actually, from the October Revolution of 1917 to the middle of 1919 most of those arrested were released quickly. The Bolsheviks still seemed to have some kind of

¹¹ The attempted assassination of Lenin actually happened in August of 1918, four months after the raids against the Anarchists. This event is a common excuse used today for the repression brought on against the Anarchists by Lenin. This could hardly be an excuse for events that happened much earlier than the attempted assassination.

¹² On the night of 12th of April 1918, the Cheka raided 26 anarchist centers in Moscow. Most of the Anarchists surrendered without a fight, but many offered fierce resistance. By the end of the night, forty Anarchists died with over Five hundred injured. Most Anarchist publications were suspended and nearly all the leaders of the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups were arrested, including many former ARC members. Two days after the raids in Moscow, similar raids took place in Petrograd. Much like the previous raids, machine-guns and cannons were trained upon the Anarchists clubs as arrests took place. By April 20, most of the Anarchists arrested during the raids had been released, but the government still detained close to fifty Anarchists. According to the Bolsheviks, these raids were done in the name of weeding out the criminal elements that hide within the Anarchist movement. This excuse ignored the fact that the main targets of these raids were well known Anarchists.

On May 11th, the government sent out a telegram calling for disarming of all Anarchist organizations. As in the past, the excuse of criminal elements within the Anarchist movement was used as an excuse for this action. According to the telegram, "under the protective flag of Anarchist organizations operate thugs, thieves, gangsters, hold-up men and counter-revolutionists who are actively preparing to subvert the Soviet government." It seemed as though the Bolsheviks confused political opposition of the state with criminal behavior.

moral feeling and many of them did not relish seeing their comrades-in-arms of the October Revolution in prison. They had not yet become accustomed to the cruel terror, which G.P. Maximoff described so vividly in his book, *The Guillotine at Work*.

In September 1919, however, a member of an underground group threw a bomb into a meeting of the Moscow Committee of the Bolsheviks Party, and this resulted in mass arrests of anarchists all over Russia.¹³ In the meantime the widespread Confederation of Anarchist Organizations in the Ukraine, which went by the name of *Nabat*¹⁴, also began to feel the effects of the growing reaction in Moscow. Here and there, even at this distance from the capital, Anarchist militants were arrested, and even the Revolutionary Army lead by the Anarchist Nestor Makhno began to suffer from the pressure exerted by L. Trotsky, who was anxious to destroy this non-Bolshevik force.

In these circumstances it soon became clear that some kind of organization would have to be created once again to help Anarchists in Russian prisons, and in Moscow, Kharkov, Odessa and many smaller cities there sprang up organizations, which soon became known as the Black Cross.¹⁵ In the Ukraine and in other parts of Russia where food was easy to obtain it was not hard to help the prisoners, but in Moscow, where food was scarce, the work of these newly formed relief organizations was difficult, although they were helped by Anarchists who came from the Ukraine and always tried to bring food with them;¹⁶ very often however, even this would be confiscated by Bolshevik guards encountered on the way.¹⁷

Taganka Prison, in Moscow, was the scene of much misery and hardship during those bleak days of Civil War. The imprisoned Anarchists, nearly all down with scurvy

¹³ This attack was done in response to oppression that took place after the attempted assassination of Lenin. The attempt against him gave him the excuse needed to deal with opposition groups within socialist circles and hundreds of Anarchists and Socialist-Revolutionaries were arrested after the attempt.

¹⁴ [Yelensky footnote] *Nabat* means the alarm bell or tocsin, which was rung in the Ukrainian villages to call urgent meetings of the community.

¹⁵ The Anarchist Black Cross was organized by a man named Apollon Karelin. Karelin was born in 1863 in St. Petersburg where he lived until 1881 when Tsar Alexander II was assassinated. He was arrested for his involvement in the radical student movement and was sent to Peter-Paul fortress in Petersburg. After his release from prison he joined the Populist circles, which caused him to continuously be thrown in jail. After the 1905 revolution he fled to Paris where he started the Brotherhood of Free Communists. As with many revolutionaries in 1917 he went back to Russia to assist the revolution. In 1918, he became a Soviet-Anarchist and started an Anarchist organization to persuade anti-Bolshiviki anarchist to aid and help the communist government. In 1926, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage, but not before losing faith in the government, which arrested and banished most of his comrades into prisons.

¹⁶ The manner in which the Black Cross had manifested itself in the Ukraine was unique to the region. These Black Cross units were organized by Makhnovists, as both workers self-defense units as well as medical units. The constant onslaughts by the pogromists, White Guard, and Red Army forced the city-dwellers to protect themselves from harm. It was the duty of the Black Cross to organize resistance against any actions brought on by their enemies. Although there was no specific uniform, during times of violence in the streets, a Black Cross member could be recognized by denim overalls and an arm band. The organization had become the first urban army in the Ukraine area. As the White Guard began to be a difficult opposing force, the Black Cross was the only force in the town able to organize an immediate self-defense unit. Although they were able to properly defend their cities, they never became a mobile force like Makhno's Insurgency Army.

¹⁷ In one situation, during the arrest of the Secretariat of the Anarchist groups of Ekaterinoslav, the Cheka confiscated over forty thousand rubles and clothes belonging to the Black Cross. The money seized by the Cheka was turned over to the State Bank and the clothes were never returned.

and many developing pneumatory and heart defects from the unhealthy conditions of their incarceration, addressed a collective appeal on June 3, 1921, to their comrades on the outside. "Without exaggeration," they wrote, "we may say that the imprisonment becomes a slow form of death by starvation." More than just a syllabus of a miserable prison life, the letter from Taganka Prison was, in the words of the prisoners themselves, a plea to their comrades... to redouble your energy, to strain your efforts to the utmost, to coordinate as much as you can the work of the various organizations of the "Black Cross," and to inform all those about our starvation who may be in a position to extend effective aid to the "Black Cross" and the imprisoned comrades."

But it was after the Civil War finally came to an end that the Bolsheviks openly showed their intentions towards any kind of opposition to their dictatorship that might rise up among the Russian people, and the following account of their dealings with the Anarchists at this time is a sufficient illustration of the bad faith with which they behaved.

In order to smash the White Armies of General Denikin and Admiral Wrangel the Bolshevik Government needed the co-operation of Makhno's Revolutionary Army, which at this time was operating in the rear of Denikin's forces. Accordingly, they sent a delegation to Makhno with the proposal that he should co-operate with the Red Army, and that in return for this the Bolsheviks would guarantee that, after the Whites had been defeated, the anarchist movement would be granted full right of existence in Russia. An agreement on this basis was signed, and one of its main points was that an all-Russian convention of the Anarchist movement should be called in Kharkov at the end of 1920.

Denikin's army was soon smashed by the combined attacks of Makhno's forces and Red Army; its survivors fled to the shores of the Black Sea and then to Turkey. Wrangel's army, which was entrenched on the Crimean Peninsula, created a much more difficult problem, since the narrow isthmus which connects the Crimea to the mainland was heavily fortified, and a frontal attack would have been suicidal. Makhno accordingly decided upon a risky maneuver; avoiding the isthmus itself, he sent his men across the tidal flats during the night and in the morning attacked from the rear.

It was the end of the Civil War, but it was also the end of the Bolsheviks' promises and of the agreement that had been signed with Makhno. Trotsky decided to liquidate Makhno's army, and did so eventually after many months of bitter fighting, while the Anarchist convention in Kharkov was turned into a trap and most of the delegates who arrived to take part in it were arrested.¹⁸

In February 1921, the situation was worsened as a result of the rebellion of the men of the Baltic Fleet at Kronstadt. This created panic among the Bolsheviks, and after the crushing of the uprising arrest went all over Russia, until the prisons were packed beyond their capacity and the Bolsheviks opened their first Arctic concentration camp in the old monastery on Solovetsky Island. The situation was so bad that the non-partisan Red Cross Society, headed Pieshkeva, and the Anarchist Black Cross had a hard job providing even minimum assistance for the inmates of the Moscow prisons, which were packed with members of every section of the Socialist movement in Russia.¹⁹

¹⁸ Along with the arrests of Makhno's army, members of the Nabat Federation were also arrested. Many of those were former members of the Anarchist Red Cross from the United States and would play decisive roles in the Taganka hunger strike.

¹⁹ As the battles in the Gulf of Finland waged on, Lenin seized the opportunity to rid himself of all opposition. He declared to the Tenth Party Congress, "The time has come, to put an end to opposition, to

At this time Russia was virtually isolated, and it was almost impossible to let the rest of the world know what was going on there. Furthermore, it seemed at least doubtful whether the free world would believe that political prisoners and exiles were once more a reality in Russia. However, a break in the situation came in 1921 when a group of Anarchists who were in the Taganka prison in Moscow decided to declare a hunger strike to the death in protest against the Bolshevik brutalities, and to reinforce a demand for the release of all the political prisoners.²⁰ At this time, in the hope of enlisting on their side labor organizations throughout the world, the Bolsheviks had organized an International Trade Union Congress in Moscow to which came many delegates from Anarcho-Syndicalists organizations. When the delegates arrived in Moscow the Anarchist Black Cross arranged a meeting with the Anarcho-Syndicalist representatives to inform them of the hunger strike prisoners. At this meeting men and women of international repute, such as Alexander Shapiro, Olga Frydlin, Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman gave the Anarcho-Syndicalists from abroad a full report what was going in Russia and on what the Bolsheviks were doing to all shades of Socialists opinion except their own.²¹

The foreign delegates decided to take up the matter on the floor of the congress, and the next day they did so. The Bolsheviks tried hard to prevent this move, for they were anxious to avoid the news spreading abroad that they had made political prisoners of the men and women who had fought beside them in the October revolution. Bukharin maintained in the Congress that it was untrue that Anarchists were incarcerated; those in prison were, he asserted, “bandits.” The fight continued for several days, and in the meantime the hunger strike went into its second week, until the strikers could not walk around their cells and some at least among them seemed very near death.

In these circumstances a committee was organized from among those attending the Congress for the purpose of making representations to Dzerzhinsky, who was then head of the Cheka, and to Lenin. With Dzerzhinsky the delegation has a bitter discussion, but they could get no satisfaction from him. Lenin first refused to see them, but they sent a message that they would stay at the gates of the Kremlin until they were admitted. Eventually, knowing that the men standing outside in that cold winter night included not only Anarcho-Syndicalists, but also independent labor leaders like Tom Mann from England, he changes his mind. However, when he did see the delegates he repeated Bukharin’s statement that the arrested Anarchists were dangerous bandits who could not

put a lid on it; we have had enough opposition.” Following this statement, the Bolsheviks went on rampage; the arrests and killing of opposition groups took place all over the country. There was not a single industrial center or large settlement that remained free from sweeping arrests of opposition groups to the Bolsheviks. Anarchists were rounded up in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, and Ekaterinoslav. Those who were arrested were either charge with “anti-Soviet propaganda”, for Menshevism, or for being a “counter-revolutionist.” The arrests files of socialists and Anarchist were emblazoned with the letter “C.R”, or simple “counter-revolutionist” written in the file report. Included in these arrests were present or former members of the Anarchist Black Cross, including Yarchuk from New York ARC and the infamous, Maximoff.

²⁰ Those involved in the Taganka hunger strike included members of the ABC/ARC, including Volin, Yarchuk, Mark Mratchny, and Maximoff.

²¹ Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman came to Russia after being deported from the United States during the height of the Red Scare. For some time, even when in Russia, both were rather apprehensive about the rumors regarding Anarchists being arrested by the Bolshevik government. It wasn’t until the Kronstadt uprising that both realized what was taking place. It was at this time that they began to do work with the ABC, which was known during this period as the Society to Aid Anarchists Imprisoned in Russia.

and should not be released. The delegation insisted on a more satisfactory answer, and Lenin promised that they would discuss the matter with Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev, and would send a definite answer the next day.

This answer came in the form of a letter from Trotsky, who wrote in the name of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. He claimed that the delegation had not been fully informed about the situation and repeated once again the story about the prisoners being bandits. However, in conclusion he stated that the Communist Central Committee had decided that, if the hunger strikers were willing, they should be deported from Russia. The Strikers accepted this condition, and soon afterwards they were released from prison; after many weeks of uncertainty they were deported and traveled with their wives, under extremely miserable conditions, to Berlin. Their departure gave at least a ray of hope that the rest of the world would at last get to know what was going on in Russia, and that somehow help might reach the Anarchists who still remained in prison and exile.

Within Russia itself the situation became steadily worse. The Bolsheviks had evidently decided to liquidate every kind of opposition to their ruthless dictatorship. Arrests continued in every part of Russia, until they took on the proportions of a mass hunt directed against all opposition sections of the Socialist movement. Those who for the first time being were fortunate enough to be left alone did their utmost to help those in need.

In particular, the All-Russian Black Cross sent out an appeal to all parts of the country for help. At this time the food situation in Russia was so bad that almost everybody was half-starving, but the comrades who were at large did everything they could to get supplies to those in prison. Even more difficult than collecting food was the task of getting it to those who needed it. In the cities, indeed, it could be taken to the prisoners as presents from their families, and this did not involve any great risk. But to reach those in concentration camps and particularly on Solovetsky Island raise much greater problems. Neither the post office nor the railways were functioning properly at this time, and the only moderately sure way of getting help to detainees in such places was for comrades to travel there. Apart from the hardship of the journey itself, this involved great risks to the messenger's own freedom. There were many occasions when Anarchists returning from trips to concentration camps were arrested. It was a desperate and dangerous time for all those who wished to help the new generation of political prisoners.

The end of 1921 brought at least some cause for hope. A Congress of the Anarcho-Syndicalist International was organized in Berlin. The German organizers knew already that Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Alexander Shapiro were anxious to leave Russia, so they wrote requesting their presence at the meetings of the Congress. The three of them applied for passports, and since at this time the Bolsheviks were anxious to gain the sympathy of European workers' organizations, their request was granted. Very soon they were out of the reach of the Communist dictatorship, and as soon as they reached Germany they issued an appeal to all freedom-loving people to help the political prisoners and exiles in Russia.

Appeal For Help

Having now left Russia, we realize that our first and most necessary statements should be made in behalf of the political prisoners of Russia. It is a sad and heartbreaking commentary upon the state of affairs in Russia if one has to speak about political prisoners in the country of Social Revolution. Unfortunately such is the actual state of things.

And by political prisoners we do not refer to the counter-revolutionists who are the prisoners of the Revolution. Unbelievable as it may seem, the prisons and jails of Soviet Russia are now crowded with the revolutionary elements of the country: men and women of the highest caliber, of the highest social ideals and aspirations. Throughout the vast expanses of the country, in Central Russia and in Siberia, in the prisons of the old and new regime, in the solitary cells of the Cheka, revolutionists of all parties and movements are now languishing: Left Social-Revolutionist, Maximalists, Communists from the workers opposition, Anarchists, Anarcho-Syndicalist, and Universalists-Partisans of various schools of social philosophy, but all true revolutionists and active participants of the November revolution of 1917. The situation of the political prisoners is highly deplorable. Apart from moral sufferings and torments, the purely physical side of their existence is extremely lamentable. Due to the general state of the country, the lack of building materials and skilled workers, alterations of prisons have become nearly nigh impossible. That is why the hygienic conditions in most of the prisons are now of the most primitive kind. But worse than all, is the food problem. At no time did the Bolshevik government supply its prisoners with sufficient food. The rations given to prisoners fell upon their friends, relatives, and comrades. But now the situation has taken a turn for the worse. Only 52 percent of the food tax collections have thus far been taken in. With famine conditions now existing in the Volga provinces, with the general breakdown of the economic apparatus of the government, the situation of the prison population has indeed become hopeless.

The needs of the political prisoners are satisfied, of course by the Political Red Cross, a faithful and active organization. One of the outstanding members of this organization is the eminent revolutionist, Vera Figner. This organization was very successful in its mission considering how difficult it is for anyone to save anything from ones meager ration. However, the Political Red Cross until now has been able to supply the most basic need of the political prisoners. Of all the prisoners with the exception of the Anarchists! Not because the Red Cross is discriminatory in its work. Just the opposite- the organization is non-partisan in its work, although strongly colored by the rightist convictions of the socialist elements. But, guided by political reasons, the Anarchists of Russia have always reverted to self-aid in the work of helping the imprisoned comrades, for the purpose of which an Anarchist Red Cross (now called the Black Cross) was set up with the aim of providing for the Anarchists in the Russian prisons. This has now become a Herculean task for the Anarchists who still happen to enjoy their freedom. Many of the most active comrades have given their life for the revolution, while others were executed or thrown into the Bolshevik prisons. Many of those who survived and are still at liberty are themselves on the very brink of starvation: the Black Cross has to make superhuman efforts to keep the political prisoners from starving to death. The work done by it is one of self-sacrifice and high nobility.

But its work was always hard and full of obstacles it has become immeasurably more difficult. The new policy of systematic persecutions of Anarchists by the Bolshevik government is the greatest obstacle in the work of the Black Cross. Since most of its members have been imprisoned by now, the organization was revamped and now it is known under the name of the Society to Aid the Anarchists in the Russian Prisons. It heroically continues the work of extending to the prisoners the small material aid, which it succeeds in collecting. Unfortunately, its possibilities to do so are very limited. The comrades who are at liberty deprive themselves from the basic necessities in order to send a few pounds of bread or potatoes to the prison. They are eager to share the last they have. But they themselves have so little, and the number of comrades in prison is so vast and their need so great! From the prisons of Moscow, Petrograd, Orel, and Vladimir, from the far-off Eastern provinces, from the comrades exiled to the frozen North, from everywhere comes that frightful news: the terrible whip of famine, the dreadful scurvy. Their hands and feet swell up, their gums weaken, their teeth are falling out. Their bodies are actually disintegrating.

Comrades who are at liberty, pay heed to this cry for help! The Anarchists in Russia cannot supply the barest need of the imprisoned comrades unless helped in this work by the comrades abroad. In the name of the Society to Aid Anarchists in Russian Prisons, in the Bolshevik prisons, who suffer now for their faithfulness to the highest ideals, in the name of all of them, we call upon you, comrades and friends, from everywhere. Only your voluntary and immediate aid will be able to save our imprisoned comrades of Russia from starving Death.

With comradely greetings,

Alexander Berkman
Delegate at large from the
Society to Aid Anarchist Prisoners in Russia²²

²² Members of *The Society to Aid Anarchist Prisoners in Russia* were soon arrested and many of them later killed. On July 9, 1923, forty-one anarchists were arrested in the city of Petrograd. The Cheka raided their apartments and placed them under arrest for propagating Anarchist ideas, under article 60-63 of the Soviet Criminal Code. Several of those arrested including Mollie Steimer, Senya Fleshin, and Maria Veger were members of the Society and were arrested for their connections to Goldman and Berkman in Berlin, as well as, their prisoner aid work. Due to additional protests by foreign Anarcho-Syndicalist delegates at the Profintern, Steimer and Fleshin were released and were informed of their impending deportation. On September 27, 1923, both Fleshin and Steimer were placed on a boat headed for Germany. Once in Berlin, the two met up with Berkman, Goldman, Shapiro, Volin, Mratchny, and others, where they continued to do work providing aid to political prisoners in Russia. Veger found herself being transferred from prison to prison before being placed in Archangel.

Tatayana Polosova was another member with the Society to Aid Imprisoned Anarchist, who was arrested. The Cheka arrested her while she was assisting a prisoners' child to Petrograd, placing both in the Archangel with any charges preferred against her. She was last known to have been transferred to Poltava, where she was found by the aid organization to be without basic needs and without work.

Lea Gutman and Helena Ganshina, also delegates for the aid organization were sent to travel the north and distribute food, clothing and other vital necessities among the politicals in the prisons and camps of the Archangel Province. During their trip to the north, the Anarchists in Pertominsky prison declared a hunger strike for better living conditions. Because Gutman, Ganshina, and another comrade informed the others in Petrograd and Moscow about the hunger strike, they were arrested and sent to a Moscow prison. Both Anarchists were sentenced to two years in Beresov in the Tobolsk Province. A seven-day hunger strike forced the authorities to change the place of exile. Gutman was transferred and remained in exile in

Emma Goldman and A. Shapiro

VI. THE PALMER RAIDS

Before I go on to tell what was done to help the new generation of political prisoners in Russia, I would like to remind my readers that Russia was not the only country with such prisoners.

Between 1918 and 1924 an organization known as the Political Prisoners' Defense Committee was active in the United States. The Political Prisoners whom it was called upon to assist were not the victims of either Tsarist or Bolshevik oppression, but the victims of mass hysteria engendered in the minds of the ruling class. The strong protests in the United States against conscription, the sympathy aroused among American workers and intellectuals for the Russian Revolution, the wide-spread labor disputes toward the end of the war, of which the famous General Strike in Seattle was the most dramatic example, caused great anxiety in Government circles in Washington and resulted in the infamous "Palmer Raids."

During the past year the press, radio and television in this country have been busy telling American people about the Russian atrocities in Hungary, and they were completely justified in their condemnation of the Communist action, but, lest we forget, let us remind the American people of the brutal mistreatment to a small minority of radical dissenters in the freedom-loving United States, of the ruthless police raids, imprisonment and deportation, during the reign of terror of Attorney General Palmer. Cruelty and oppression is to be condemned, no matter who inflicts it, and we cannot blind ourselves to our past. Those who experience the misery and anxiety of the Palmer raids certainly cannot forget them, and they will remain a stigma that is difficult to eradicate.

Hilda Kover, one of the active members of the Political Prisoners' Defense and Relief Committee has furnished me with a general statement of the work of the Committee. It should be emphasized that this organization was completely separate from the Anarchist Red Cross or any of the groups that succeeded it, since its work was to give relief to American rather than Russian prisoners.

I. Historical sketch of the Political Prisoners' Defense and Relief Committee.

The Political Prisoners' Defense and Relief Committee was organized in August, 1918, because there was no organization at the time to render aid to those who were being arrested for voicing their opinions on the conduct of war, on our relations with the then- revolutionary government of Russia or on other unpopular causes. During its existence it supplied many unknown rebels with funds, aided them with getting attorneys, and provided medical help, when necessary.

Among its activities was that of regularly sending packages, money and other necessities to the prisoners. The monthly expenses for relief were often as high as \$400, and at one time reached \$500.

The people who consisted this committee were working men and women. No salaries were paid to anyone, all work being done voluntarily after their days toil at their respective trades. The cases they handled were usually such as were neglected by other

the town of Zinovievsk; Ganshina was transferred from prison to prison and was last known to have been in Siberia.

existing organizations. They extended relief to all political prisoners who were in need of it, regardless of their political opinions. The Committee also engaged attorneys to take up individual cases with a view to release from prison, which was sometimes granted only on the condition of accepting deportation.

The funds for this work was raised by the Committee through personal appeals to various labor and fraternal organizations, by individual collections with subscription lists and by benefits performances. At one time a noted violinist gave a recital at one of New York's most famous concert halls, and this netted about \$1,500. The Committee also printed a journal containing letters from the political prisoners receiving its aid, and the sale of this publication was another way of raising funds. No effort, indeed, was too great for the members of the Committee to undertake in order to get the necessary funds with which to carry out their work.

In later years other organizations were formed to do the work "systematically." as they called it, with paid officers, office help, overhead expenses, etc. And though some of these organizations claimed to send help to all concerned without any discrimination, the evidence is not conclusive that any such organization at that time did the work in exactly the same manner as the Political Prisoners' Defense and Relief Committee. It was the belief of the members of that Committee that because the work was done on the basis of individual rather than organizational contact, the political prisoners who benefited through it had the feeling that a real friend was interested in them- in their little personal problems as well as in the larger one getting relief and ultimate release from prison.

By the end of 1924, after most of the political prisoners- victims of the war-hysteria of 1917-18- were released and even some of the labor prisoners who had been in jails since long before the war were at liberty, the Committee was dissolved, since its activities were no longer needed.

II. Statement of the Political Prisoners' Defense and Relief Committee, made in January, 1922, to explain the reason for its existence.

Some time after the Political Prisoners' Defense and Relief Committee came into existence, other organizations, larger in scope, carrying on the work on a national scale, had begun to function, in consequence of which the Committee found it necessary to issue the following statement:

"Time and again we are being confronted with the question, "Why so many organizations of the same kind?"

"It is our desire to answer as follows"

1. Our organization is not of "the same kind." The work we are doing is not conducted by any other organization, i.e., no other organization is carrying on regular systematic relief work on behalf of the political prisoners in need, without any discrimination as to what party they may or may not belong to. What we do is: send every month a stated sum to each prisoner on our list, also packages of food and other necessities to those who are inmates of prisons where such are allowed. It is our belief that they need this the year round, and not at Christmas time only. While it is true that our organizations are sending occasional relief to some political prisoners, we must repeat that ours is a regular systematic relief. As to our defense work- the cases we take up are

such as have been forgotten and neglected, or such as no other organization cared to conduct.

2. It is the opinion of every member of the Committee that work of this nature must be conducted on a voluntary basis- everyone giving his time to it outside of his daily work.- and that every penny collected on behalf of the political prisoners must be used for them, eliminating overhead expenses of salaries, rents and so on. And it is because of this that our activities mean so much to the prisoners; we establish a personal relation with each one of our correspondents, and the money we send comes as from friend to friend, and not as from a secretary of an organization, whose duty it is to write to the prisoners. The prisoner feels that the one who writes to him is interested in his health, his well-being, his troubles, and therefore our letters bring cheer and joy to him.”

Those documents are self-explanatory, but it will have become evident in reading them that the Political Prisoners’ Defense and Relief Committee, like other organizations about which I write in this booklet, was fighting against the tendency which has been evident in the Left for the past half-century for relief organizations, particularly those dominated by Social-Democrats, to become partisan and to give very little help to the individual sufferer who falls outside their particular circle of opinion.

During the period of the Palmer Raids some other and smaller groups attempted to provide non-partisan assistance to those who suffered from political persecution. One of these appeared as a consequence of the arrival of political prisoners at Leavenworth Federal Prison, beginning in 1918. Owing to the initiative of Bessie Zeglin, a group of women in Kansas City, Missouri, organized a fund for their assistance. Since few of the women belonged to any political movement, and since they did not wish to draw undue attention from the authorities, they called themselves *The Women's' Tea Club*. While there remained any political prisoners in Leavenworth they continued to be active in providing food, clothing, money, etc., and they gave this help without ever asking to what political group any particular prisoner might happen to belong to.

VII. REVIVAL OF RELIEF IN THE U.S.A., 1921-1939

To return to the political prisoners in Russia. After the arrival of the deported Russian Anarchists in Berlin at the end of 1921 and the launching of an appeal there by Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Shapiro, the activity of collecting relief funds for political prisoners in Russia began all over again in Western Europe and the United States.

The first step was the organization, by Left Socialists-Revolutionaries and Anarchists, of the Joint Committee for the Defense of Revolutionists Imprisoned in Russia. Apart from its work of collecting funds for those in prison, this committee published a regular bulletin, which gave full information on conditions in Russian prisons and places of exile, documented in many cases by letter received from prisoners.

In 1926 this Joint Committee was dissolved, and the relief work was taken over by the International Working Men’s Association (the Anarcho-Syndicalist International), which set up in Berlin a Relief Fund of the I.W.M.A. for Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists Imprisoned or Exiled in Russia. Rudolf Rocker, as secretary of the fund, published a regular bulletin giving all the news that was available on the political

prisoners and their life in Russia. The fund was supported partly by contribution from the Relief Committees in various parts of Europe and the United States, and partly from voluntary levies among the members of Syndicalist organizations.

At this time the Bolshevik government did not make very great difficulties about prisoners receiving mail, money, or packages from abroad, and the committee of the Relief Fund organized a regular correspondence with arrested Anarchists in Russia, and supplied them with cash, food, and clothing, as well as books of various kinds, particularly dictionaries, since many of them had taken up the study of languages in order to pass their time. Every day the work of the relief became heavier, since the Bolsheviks arrested every oppositionist on whom they could lay their hands, and even went so far as to imprison people who had been inactive for years in the Anarchist movement, merely because of their activities in the past.

One of the factors that hampered the work for relief committees in Europe was the economic aftermath of the First World War; inflations, followed by depression, made it difficult to collect adequate funds in European countries to help the prisoners in Russia, and once again, as before the war, the United States became the principal source of material assistance. After receiving an appeal for help from Berkman, Emma Goldman and Shapiro in 1922, the Anarchists in the United States organized the Anarchist Red Cross Society, which explained its reasons for reappearance in the following statement.²³

“The Anarchist Red Cross, which liquidated its organization in 1917, is being reorganized because of the following circumstances: It is true that the Revolution of 1917 freed the imprisoned and exiled Russian anarchists and as a result we suspended the activities of the Red Cross. But conditions in Russia have changed for the worse. Men and women are again arrested and exiled, not only anarchists and Right Socialist but moderate liberals are also being persecuted... And not only in Russia alone does this situation exist. In France, Italy, Spain, etc., our comrades are languishing behind iron bars. Our aim is to help them all as much as possible.”

At first it was feasible to form an Anarchist Red Cross only in New York²⁴, and there are several reasons for the failure of similar groups to spring up immediately in other American cities. First, the patriotic hysteria of the war years and the reactionary sentiment of the period of the Palmer raids had left a deep impression on those who had suffered discrimination to believe that their dream of a free Russia had been destroyed; many of them were misled by the Bolshevik propaganda and left the movement, while others eventually became so disillusioned that they ceased to be active. The facts

²³ It was actually the Political Prisoners' Defense and Relief Committee in New York that after hearing the call put out by Berkman, Goldman, and Shapiro, reorganized itself as the Anarchist Red Cross. The organization changed its focus from just prisoners in the United States to a much broader scope of prisoners on an international level.

²⁴ As before the group began to organize benefit shows to raise money. On November 12th 1924, the Anarchist Red Cross held a benefit show at the Jewish Art Theater at 27th St. and Fourth Avenue in New York. Outings and dinners were also organized for the benefit of the political prisoners in Russia. The group in New York, along with the Joint Committee in Berlin, began to make joint pleas in Anarchist and other radical publications for assistance to aid all revolutionaries imprisoned in Russian jails.

hampered greatly the organization of relief work and made it difficult to organize the Anarchist Red Cross on the same scale as before the Russian Revolution of 1917.

At the end of 1923, when a few comrades returned to Chicago from a visit to Russia and brought with them the news of what they had seen there and especially of the conditions under which the political prisoners and exiles were living, these negative factors were so strong that it took very great efforts to collect even a small number of people to form the Free Society group in that city, dedicated to exposing the development of state capitalism in Russia and to raising funds for helping the political prisoners there. With such a small membership it was impossible to organize events like the great balls of prewar years, and at first we had to concentrate on collecting money by means of small gathering and through subscription lists and individual donations towards the relief fund.

At this time, however, there were a few Russian Social Democrats in Chicago who also were trying very hard to raise money for their political prisoners in Russia. They were on terms of personal friendship with some members of the Free Society group and used to attend our gatherings. In 1924 one of them suggested that, since both our groups were small and since we both represent movements persecuted by the Bolsheviks, we should combine in the work of raising funds. It seemed a logical proposal, particularly at a time when the Bolsheviks and their fellow travelers were so hostile to anyone who tried to tell the truth about what was happening in Russia. On the other hand, we were reminded of the experiences of Anarchists in Russian prisons where the Social Democrats had refused to give them any help. However, our personal friendship for the individuals who approached us, and a feeling that what had taken place in Russia might have changed their attitude towards the Anarchists, made us agree to their proposal of cooperation, and together we organized a Russian Political Relief Committee,

In the winter of 1924 this committee organized its first large ball in the Workmen's Circle Labor Lyceum. We were all pessimistic, since this was the first considerable gathering among Chicago radicals openly opposed to the dictatorship in Russia; many of us feared that the Bolsheviks would cause trouble, as at this period they did at almost every lecture or meeting in the United States that was critical of the regime in Russia. We need not have been apprehensive; more than a thousand people attended, and their attitude made it, not merely a Ball, but also the first mass demonstration so far as Chicago was concerned since the Revolution of 1917, reflecting a mounting feeling of solidarity with those who were once again suffering in the prisons and places of exile. The profits of the Ball were equally divided, and the Anarchist and Social Democratic groups each sent its share to the political prisoners in which it was interested. In 1925 we held a second and equally successful Ball, but shortly afterwards the more active of our Social Democratic associates left for Los Angeles and those who remained broke off connection with us, so that once again we started work independently as the Chicago Aid Fund.

As this time, since we had collected a considerable sum of money through our balls and other activities, we came to a understanding with the Committee in Berlin by which we in Chicago would take over a list of prisoners in Russia and send help directly to them. We organized this assistance as we had done in the days of the original prewar Anarchist Relief Committee, and the direct contact, which we established with prisoners in Russia, aroused a steadily increasing interest in our work.

About 1926 the Anarchist Red Cross in New York liquidated its activities, and we in Chicago remained the only group working regularly at the collection of funds for political prisoners. It is true that the Jewish Federation in New York and some of its individual groups occasionally collected money for the relief fund in Berlin, but it had no constructive and systematic everyday policy on this question; at the same time it performed a useful function, since it provided a means of establishing contact with non-anarchist Jewish groups, such as the Workmen's Circle Branches and some trade unions groups.

Apart from raising funds, it seemed to us even more important that we should carry on propaganda, which would bring to people the real news of the treatment of political prisoners in Russia. In 1925, thanks largely to the initiative of Alexander Berkman, a book entitled *Letters from Russian Prisoners* was published in New York by Albert & Charles Boni, and had some influence on public opinion. A year later the Chicago Aid Fund decided to expand its work for the relief of prisoners in Russia from a local to a national scale, and, after compiling a considerable mailing lists, we began to send our yearly appeals and also bulletins containing news and letters from Russia political detainees. This work brought good results, since it reached out to many town in the United States where people were still ignorant if what was really going on in Russia.

At the same time, our expansion into national activity aroused a certain amount of antagonism. Some of the groups belonging to the Jewish Federation believed we were trespassing on an area where we had no right to be, and they suggested that all work on a national scale should be done under the direction of the Federation. Joseph Cohen in his book, *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in the United States*, which was published in 1945 by the Radical library in Philadelphia, has this to say about the Chicago Aid Fund and the jurisdictional fight that occurred in connection with it:

“In Chicago, B. Yelensky organized a separate activity. Yelensky, with the help of Comrade Maximoff and other Russians, succeeded in establishing direct contact with the imprisoned comrades in Russia, and in developing in the United States a wide and systematic activity, which brought good results. But the jurisdictional fight in connection with it was not at all pleasant, and this question was for long a subject of discussion in the Jewish groups and in the pages of the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*. In 1927 the Detroit group brought in a recommendation that every large affair or other activity should be organized through the Federation. This recommendation, made without due consideration was thought b the majority of the Jewish comrades to be practical, but it did not bring any practical results.”

The results why we in Chicago opposed the recommendation that the Federation should have jurisdiction over the Aid Fund were two fold. First, the Federation and its affiliated groups had shown very little interest in the organization of a relief fund on a national scale. Secondly, we considered that from a practical point of view the work of any Red Cross organization must be independent of any propagandists group or Federation. For this reason, in the years before the 1917 Revolution in Russia, the Anarchist Red Cross had been a separate organization, with no leaning towards and particular grouping in the Anarchist movement. The main object of such relief organizations should be to help any Anarchist in prison or in exile, and for this reason we

could not accept a recommendation that would place our work under the direction of the Jewish Federation.

Instead of becoming too much involved in this squabble over jurisdiction, the Chicago Aid Fund devoted itself to increasing the scope of its work. The news we received from Russia showed that the situation there, far from improving, was growing steadily worse; very few anarchists were out of confinement, and concentration camps were being established in Siberia once again, so that it became increasingly difficult to keep in touch with our comrades. Moreover, the Bolsheviks authorities were harder to fool with underground schemes than their Tsarist predecessors had been, because they themselves had experienced underground work and they knew virtually every trick that could be tried. Nevertheless, we did our best, not only to send material help to the prisoners, but also, occasionally, to smuggle to them some news of the free world.

Fortunately, as the need for relief increased, so did the response to our appeals, and among the organizations, which helped us were the following:

Russian Groups in New York, Los Angeles, Akron, Youngstown, Gary, East Akron, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Boston, Baltimore, New Haven, San Francisco, Bethlehem, Waterbury, and Dobbs Ferry;

Jewish Groups in Los Angeles, Detroit and St. Louis, as well as the Radical Library of Philadelphia and the Free Society Group in Toronto, Canada.

English-speaking groups as follows: Freedom Group of New York, Mohegan Colony Group, Stelton Group, Libertarian Group of Los Angeles²⁵, Sunrise Colony Group in Michigan, International Group to Help Political Prisoners in Cleveland, Ohio, the Proletarian Group in New York. Also Spanish and Italian Groups, and the Italian language newspaper *L'Adunata*.

Apart from the anarchist movement itself, many branches of the Workmen's Circle responded consistently to our appeals, and at the convocations of this organization our work was endorsed and recommendations were made that donations should be granted. We were also supported by many locals of the I.L.G.W.U., and in our later years this Union also supported us at its annual convention.²⁶ The response of individuals was warm and good and though, as a minority movement, we never collected sensational sums of money, we were satisfied with the results we attained and with the fact that we were able, not only to help the prisoners, but also to keep in the minds of many people, the conditions under which political prisoners were living in Russia.

In this latter connection I come now to one of the principal achievements of the Chicago Aid Fund, the publication of the volume entitled, *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty Years of Terror in Russia*, a contribution to the truth about the Bolshevik Terror which historians of the future will doubtless recognize as one of the strongest indictments published in our age of the barbarism committed by the Communists in Russia.

The idea of this book originated in 1935, when Alexander Berkman wrote to Chicago suggesting that, since 1936 would be the fifteenth anniversary of the

²⁵ Like in so many other cities, the Libertarian Group in Los Angeles, organized Arestantin Balls to raise funds for political prisoners in Russia. Some of these benefits took place at the Folks House at 420 North Soto Street in Los Angeles.

²⁶ One of those active in the New York Anarchist Red Cross was the infamous labor leader Rose Pesotta. During the 1922 and 1924 ILGWU conventions, Rose demanded for a resolution by the union for the liberation of all political prisoners in Russia to crowd that was not entirely happy about this demand.

reestablishment of aid funds for political prisoners in Russia, we might publish a booklet acquainting the American public with the plight of the Russian political prisoners. This suggestion was accepted, as well as another suggestion by Berkman that a committee of three should be selected to carry out the work. G.P. Maximoff²⁷, Mark and the present writer were nominated, and we all agreed to undertake the work. We began by considering what material we should select, since it seemed to us that as things stood we should not be able to collect enough money to publish anything more than a fairly large pamphlet.

Mark soon left the committee, and Maximoff and I left to own. We decided to divide the work according to function, I would be responsible for collecting publication funds and Maximoff would compile and edit the material which was to go into the booklet. The very abundance of his archives on Russia made the task of selection difficult, but soon he had assembled enough material for a work of about 150 pages. However, when we read it over we realized that this was not really sufficient to give a full picture of what was going on in Russia, so, as our appeal had already brought in a few hundred dollars, we decided to take a risk and expand our pamphlet into a small book. With every few dollars that came in, our plans grew, until in the end we had produced a large volume of 624 pages. Then we had to face the problem of translation into English if the book were to reach a wide audience. Here however, we were fortunate in finding a friend in New York who became interested in our task, and, though we had to pay him a certain amount for his work, since he was penniless at the time, the English version was produced at relatively little expense.

We had planned to get the book ready for publication in 1937, but the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 slowed down our work, and it was only in 1940 that *The Guillotine at Work* eventually came off the press. There were many times when I doubted whether we should ever see it complete, and when it did appear the atmosphere was not exactly propitious, since by this time Russia was already at war with Germany and people who only yesterday had been extremely bitter against the Bolsheviks were now inclined to forget the realities of life in Russia. Even some of our own people felt that this was not the right time for the book to be published, but we did not pay any attention to their arguments.

When *The Guillotine at Work* did eventually appear we gained, in compensation for our hard work, the satisfaction of seeing its importance acknowledged by the radical and liberal press. Perhaps because it spoke of the suffering of Anarchists, it did not receive much publicity from the mass newspapers, but even without this it made its way to become one of the important source books on contemporary Russia. Many writers, both with and without acknowledgement, were later to use the information, which we first presented. Apart from reviews in periodicals, we received many letters of appreciation from people who were often unconnected with the anarchist movement. Among them was the English writer, Herbert Read, who remarked of *The Guillotine at Work* that "it is an overwhelming indictment of the Russian terror and a historical document of the greatest value." By now the book is available in University and city libraries throughout the world.

²⁷ Died March 16, 1950.

Meanwhile, in the beginning of 1935, we began to notice that the situation in Russia was taking a sharper turn for the worse than ever before. Registered letters, which we sent to political prisoners, began to come back, with the remark that the address “could not be located,” and money we sent would be returned by banks with the advice that they had been unable to deliver it. Furthermore, some of our correspondents began to tell us, in a code we had established with them, of prisoners who had vanished so completely that neither their friends nor their families had any trace of them. Reading between the lines of the letters that got through to us, we realized that the future for political prisoners in Russia was rapidly darkening.

Then came the infamous events of 1936; the Bolsheviks Old Guard was liquidated, and in the persecution that followed all the opposition elements that survived were subjected to the new terror. Finally, in 1939, every contact with our comrades in Russia was broken, and our work for the political prisoners in that country came to an end.²⁸ After the Second War we managed to establish contact with a comrade who had survived the purges, and also with the family of another comrade which had been brought to Germany by the Nazis; from then we heard that all the Anarchist political prisoners in Russia had disappeared, and that nobody knew when or where they had died at the hands of the brutal forces of State Socialism.

Already in 1936 our contacts with Russia were so sharply reduced that the members of the Chicago Aid Fund began to discuss what should happen to our activities. Some of us hoped that soon our contact with Russian political prisoners might be reestablished, and for this reason we decided to postpone liquidation. Then, in June 1936, we received the tragic news that, after a long illness, Alexander Berkman had taken his own life so that he should not become a burden on his friends. To commemorate his life and work, we decided to rename our organization the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund and to give it an international scope so that we could bring help to political prisoners, not only in Russia, but all over the world.²⁹

We did not have to wait long for an opportunity to start our activities on the new basis. In July 1936, the Civil War began in Spain, and the events of that time are well enough known for it to be unnecessary for me to enlarge on them except in so far as they affected the work of our fund.

²⁸ What is rather interesting was the manner in which Anarchists who converted to Bolshevism were treated despite their conversion. Two former Anarchist Red Cross members, after coming to Russia became Bolsheviks but this did not stop them from receiving the same end that others Anarchists had received. Bill Shatov, from the New York chapter prior to 1917, after becoming a Bolshevik was arrested during Stalin's reign and was sent to Siberia. It is believed he was killed while in exile. Another former New York ARC member Efim Yarchuk, who had left Russia in 1922, had a change of heart and appealed for permission to return to Russia. He was allowed to return in 1925 and joined the Communist Party. Sadly, Yarchuk disappeared during these purges as well.

²⁹ [Yelensky's note] Here it may be well remarked that a change in our status had already taken place in 1932, when, at a special meeting, the Secretariat of the International Working Men's Association Russian Aid Fund in Europe decided that since the Chicago Aid Fund was the most active group in the work of helping prisoners in Russia, the proposition should be made that we become the Chicago Aid Fund Section of the International Working Men's Association. We accepted the title and worked under it for several years.

One of the members of our Committee, Maximilian Olay³⁰, was well known among the Spanish Anarchists, not only in the United States, but also in Spain itself, and at the beginning of the Civil War he was asked by the C.N.T. and the F.A.I. to supervise their publicity work in North America. The Alexander Berkman Aid Fund decided to take part in this work of putting forward the true aims of the Spanish people and also to undertake the collection of funds to assist Spaniards who might be in need as a result of the Civil War.

By now our own mailing list was a large one, and we obtained many addresses from other groups and organizations, so that we were able to disseminate many thousands of leaflets and other literature, as well as organizing large public meetings, lectures and film shows to familiarize the public with the true situation in Spain. By these and other means we collected thousands of dollars, which we sent to the help of needy people in Spain.

When resistance to Franco came to an end in 1939 and the supporters of the Republic were evacuated to France and North Africa, we continued our work by collecting funds to help the Spanish refugees, and in this task we collaborated with the S.I.A. (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity), which was organized by the C.N.T. and the F.A.I. in every country where an Anarchist movement existed.³¹ The aims of the S.I.A. were similar to those of the Anarchist Red Cross, but it was involved mostly in helping the tens of thousands of refugees who had left Spain, often accompanied by their families. In every American city where there were Spanish radicals the S.A.I. went to work, and it became a very lively organization in which men, women, and children took an active part. But, though its gatherings were for a time very popular, even among people who were not themselves anarchists, it gradually declined as the years went on since Franco's triumph.

VIII. SECOND WORLD WAR

The scheming of American and European Capitalists, who encouraged the resurrection of the German junker class and the rise of Hitler as a counterpoise to the Bolsheviks, became like a monstrous boomerang when, in September, 1939, the sound of German guns attacking Poland initiated a new chapter in man's history, a chapter of cruelty and inhumanity practiced not merely by the German armies, but also by those self-styled humanitarians who were so extreme in the condemnation of the Germans. As soon as the war began we realized that we should have an enormous task on our hands, for now it would no longer be a question of helping Russians or Spaniards only, but assisting any victim we could reach.

At this period we found ourselves almost the only organization able to undertake activity on anything like a large scale. The S.A.I. had more than enough to do in connection with Spanish refugees, and though an International Aid Fund (Interaid) had been organized by the Jewish Federation in New York during 1925, this was intended to aid old people and its activities were therefore somewhat limited.

³⁰ Died April 1943

³¹ It must be noted that Emma Goldman, who also did work with the Black Cross, also assisted with the SIA. Information about that can be found in most books relating to her life.

The work of the Relief Fund, which up to that time has continued to be centered in Berlin, was disrupted by Hitler's rise to power in 1933; its activity was then transferred for a short time to Holland and later to Paris, where Alexander Berkman reorganized it as the International Working Men's Association Russia Aid Fund. In this form it continued its work and published its regular bulletin until the Nazis invaded France in 1940. Now the work, which it had carried on, fell on American shoulders.

The situation at this time was tense and difficult. The terrible events that were taking place, and particularly such happenings as the pact between Russia and Germany and the German atrocities against the Jewish people, made many of our comrades feel that the ground was melting away under their feet, but we of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund realized the magnitude of the task before us and the fact that it had to be done in a hurry. We had a few hundred dollars in our treasury, and with this we started to send out help wherever we could.

In the meantime, the first agonizing reports from our comrades in Europe began to reach us; the following letter, which is typical of many, came from Sam Frydman, who had been a political refugee in the United States during the First World War, had returned to Russia in 1917, and had escaped to Paris in 1923, disillusioned with what he saw the Bolsheviks doing to their opponents.

Paris, Sept. 21, 1939

Dear and beloved Boris and Bessie:

It is a long time since we have had employment. I shall probably have to leave in the near future. Dora and Michelle will remain without any means of subsistence, because their means of livelihood became exhausted some time ago.

Michelle is four years old, and very delicate; attached to her mother. Hence it is impossible at this time to place her anywhere else, so that Dora should be able to go to work; the child must stay with her. And it is not yet certain whether they will be allowed to remain in Paris. It is precisely on this account that I want to write to you and to make a request. I have never turned to the movement for any help for myself- for others, yes; and I realize fully your economic situation.

Nevertheless, I beg you, if you can do anything for the family, don't let Dora and the child become destitute. Do everything possible... to help Dora and the child in such an emergency. You surely understand that without me Dora is helpless; but let us hope that everything will turn out for the best in the end. If you are able to send anything, it is best to handle it through the bank or through the American Express, in Dora's name. On the papers her name appears not as Dora. but as Deborah. If she is not in Paris it will be forwarded to her. This letter is being written by me, not in the name of the movement, but in my own name. The other comrades will probably write their own account.

But you surely understand that it is most urgent to give help to a mother and her child. I hope you will comply with my request. Write, dear friends, all about yourselves and the relatives. Keep in good health, dear and beloved friends Boris and Bessie and the rest.

Sam Frydman

This letter was the last we received; Sam and Dora Frydman lost their lives as Jews somewhere in the German concentration camps, though their daughter was saved by French friends.

With the German occupation of a large part of France in 1940, and the establishment of the Vichy government in the remaining section of the country, the situation of radicals, and particularly of those who were Jewish, became daily more dangerous, and the radical movements in the United States began to seek means of rescuing their European comrades.

In November 1933, an organization called the Jewish Labor Committee was organized by well-known socialist, B. Vladek.³² Vladek was a great humanitarian, not narrow or sectarian. His aim in organizing the Jewish Labor Committee was to rescue and assist those had fled from Nazi terror, and I believe that if he had been alive at the time of the Nazi invasion of the rest of Europe, many of our comrades would not have perished at the hands of Hitler's executioners.

With the help of the A.F.L. and of some of the larger Unions the Jewish Labor Committee managed to obtain a considerable number of visas to allow entry into the United States for people in Europe whose lives were in danger. At that time the internationally known Anarchist, Alexander Shapiro, was in Marseilles, where he was in charge of rescue work for the Jewish Emigrant Society. In 1940 he sent a telegram to our comrades in New York, advising them to compile a list of our comrades in France and to present it to the Jewish Labor Committee with a request that the names should be included on their list so that the rescue of our comrades might be hastened.

A list was accordingly prepared in New York, sent to us in Chicago for the addition of any names we knew, and then presented by a local delegation to the Jewish Labor Committee, whose members gave an assurance that they would take care of the matter. A few weeks later our friends in New York asked the J.L.C. what was being done for our comrades in Europe, and they were told that our list had got lost somewhere in the office. A new list was presented, which the J.L.C. promised very solemnly to treat with great care, and once more we settled down to await the results.

Meanwhile the situation in Europe became worse every day, and our Jewish comrades in Paris were being forced to flee or to go into hiding so as not to be caught and sent away to German concentration camps. The following letter, from a friend who later escaped, gives a full picture of the kind of life which Jewish radicals in France were undergoing at the time:

October 7, 1940

My dear ones,

Your letters were most welcome. You advise us against going home. Well now, even if we would want to return, it's too late. "Foreigners, Jewish and colored people must not enter the occupied zone." This is the decision of our new master.

Our friends with whom we lived in the village had to give up their house and to go to the south of France. Hence we went down to Clermont- the town nearby. We had no idea that even in the same state the foreigner hasn't the right to move about. So we went down with the intention to find here some work. Imagine our state of mind when we were told we had no right to come here, no right to work, and that we must "stay where we were!" After 48 hours we were mighty glad to be registered- even if we had to promise that we wouldn't try to look for a job.

³² [Yelensky's note] He died on October 9, 1938.

Here we occupy a small room with friends of friends- good Catholics. Without any members of our family near us, and without work, our life is very dreary. The weather, too, is cold and nasty, and we have only a few summer things with us. Last week I wrote to my sisters and brothers and asked if they couldn't send us some of their worn clothes, which would keep us warm. But I have an idea that there is something wrong with my people. I didn't hear from them since the beginning of May! Enclosed herewith you will find their address. Would you kindly drop them a line and give them my new address. Maybe my letters didn't reach them and they keep on writing to Paris.

A few days ago we had a letter from Rose in which she tells us to get out as quickly as possible, never mind where. I suppose this is a decision, which you all took. But, my dearest ones, this is absolutely impossible. If we have no visas we cannot move. I asked Alexander, who is in the immigration office, to tell me what we could do in order to get out as quickly as possible, and he told us not to budge from here, but to cable to Rose that she should compel Dubinsky to put us on the political refugee list for visitor's visas. He, I mean Senya, is very much surprised that Dubinsky could not be induced to accept the list of names which Mratchny presented to him. He advises haste, because after the 31st of October the visitors' office will not be given any more. But a cable means 200 francs, so I decided to send two letters by airmail instead. For I know that you, my loved ones, are doing all in your power any way. Alexander is very nice and he wants to help is, but- as he says- without a visa he can do nothing.

Please write to us; we can get all the mail you send. It is the only bright spot now- a letter from a friend.

Mollie.³³

While letters like this came to us, one after another, we waited anxiously, hoping every day for news from the Jewish Labor Committee, but the weeks ran away without our hearing anything, until our patience was exhausted and a delegation again went to the Jewish Labor Committee to ask about the fate of our comrades abroad. We were astonished to be told that the list had again been "lost." After this it became clear to us that history was repeating itself; in the old Tsarist prisons the Social Democrats, in charge of funds from abroad collected for all political prisoners, had refused to help our comrades, and now, half a century later, their descendants were again showing their hatred of the libertarians.

In Russia before 1917 the actions of the Social Democrats had not resulted in loss of life, but now it was a different matter, and it is impossible to find any excuse for the inhuman attitude of the Socialists in this situation. The people of the Jewish Labor Committee made great capital of the six million Jews killed in Germany or by German armies, but when it was actually possible for them to save a small group of Jewish people, and a few others who were not Jewish, they left these people to the mercy of the Nazis, merely because of the difference in political faith. This attitude on the part of the Social-Democrats naturally evoked strong protest, and it was suggested that we should

³³ Mollie Steimer, and her partner Senya Fleshin, being Jewish Anarchists and now living in Paris soon found themselves facing the fear of arrests and death at the hands of Nazis. On May 18, 1940, Steimer was placed in a Nazi internment camp. Senya, aided by French comrades was able to escape from the Nazis to an unoccupied section on France. Miraculously, Mollie Steimer was later able to secure her release and was able met up with Volin and Fleshin in Marseilles in 1941.

expose the attitude of the J.L.C. in the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, but our Jewish comrades in New York opposed this because they still hoped that something might be done to save some of our people, but as far as the J.L.C. was concerned, their hopes were in vain.

But before I leave this question, I should like to say that if the Jewish Labor Committee had refused in the beginning to do anything to help us save a few of our comrades, nobody would have thought a great deal about it, since from past experience we knew their attitude towards our movement. What I condemn is that for political reasons they made a promise they had no intention of keeping. If only they had declared openly that they wished to help only Socialists, instead of pretending to be a non-partisan organization, we should never have gone to them in the first place.

Later on, in 1942, our people made another attempt through the Jewish Labor Committee to get some Mexican visas for comrades who wished to escape from Europe, and I wrote to ask Alexander Shapiro whether he thought anything would come of this. He replied:

“When the new list for Mexico was made up, the names of our people were last. Fanya (his wife) then went to the Committee (the J.L.C.) and, thanks to our connections, and especially because I was directing the emigration work in Paris, Marseilles and later, Lisbon, and was in this way connected with the J.L.C., our list of names will definitely be included in the new list.”

He spoke with undue optimism, as can be seen from this letter from two comrades who had the good luck to escape from Europe and who tell here the grim story of persecution in Europe and of indifference in the J.L.C.:

Mexico, Nov. 1st, 1942.

Dear Comrade Yelensky:

I have written you long ago, but never received an answer. However, I just found out that you have done what you could to be of help to our unfortunate family in France.

Enclosed herewith is a letter from Volin in which he acknowledges the receipt of 25 dollars, which came from Chicago. I understand that you sent the money. That is why I am sending this acknowledgment to you- in case no other has reached you now- this letter may be of use to you.

You will be glad to know that in May of this year we sent 40 dollars. In June, New York sent 100 dollars, and, now, as there came a desperate call for help saying that what was sent was not enough, we mailed 55 dollars from here to New York, and Alexander immediately added 95 and sent it off to Marseilles for distribution.

The last news we have from France is extremely sad. The persecution grows beyond all description or imagination! The Spaniards who recently came told us that the persecution of the Jewish people in France is something unbelievable! The only consoling thing is that there is at the same time a spirit of solidarity on the part of the French, which is making up a good deal for the cruelty, humiliation and savagery to which the Jewish people are subjected. We ourselves have proof of this.

When Eva S. (a very good friend) was arrested and sent to Gurs (Basses Pyrenees) Jeanne W., a French woman, who is only a friend of ours, went down to the camp, was there for two days, and tried every possible way to get her out, Alas, she did

not succeed, but the fact that she went down there is a big sacrifice- for she put her own liberty at danger.

We are trying hard to obtain visas (of which I have already spoken to you once) for Eva S., Jacques D., and Nicholas T. When Rose was here in April, I gave her the list which she gave to J. Patt when in N.Y. Imagine that when Alexander called J. Pratt and asked what about them, the reply was that those named do not exist on the list!!! In another words, they were just ignored! Now, A.S. was assured that they will be attended to. But I will not believe those people until we see results.

Do write us a few lines. I think that we can help our folks much more if we would be more united, keep in close touch with each other, and inform one another of our doings.

From S. and M.

To conclude this account of our efforts to get anarchist refugees out of Europe through the Jewish Labor Committee, as far as I know only two of our comrades were saved from the Germans in France through the actions of the J.L.C., and if they had not had many powerful friends in the International Garment Workers' Union they would have experienced the same fate as so many other libertarians in France.

IX. POST WAR ACTIVITIES, 1945

During and after the Second World War the Alexander Berkman Fund was not concerned only with the largely unsuccessful attempt to get Anarchists out of Europe. It was also concerned with the problem of providing help for those who remained and, after the war was over, for those had survived. The few hundred dollars, which was in treasury at the outbreak of the war, did not last long; indeed, it was a mere pittance in comparison with the amount that would have been needed to do anything effective. Moreover, our appeals brought in very little; this was due partly to the fact that many of our people were scared by the political situation produced by the war, but also to the great publicity which other organizations used to create the impression that they were looking after everybody who needed help. Here and there our friends collected a few dollars, but it was not done in a systematic way, and it did not go very far.

We soon realized that both lack of funds and the impossibility of reaching our comrades in the occupied countries made it difficult for us to do anything to help them during the actual war years. But we also knew that the slaughter in Europe would not last forever, and that those comrades who escaped with their lives would have to be helped as soon as the war reached its end. We were well aware that this great task could not be fulfilled by Chicago alone and having discussed the matter, we decided to send one of our members to the Eastern States in order to establish personal contact with groups and individuals.

I undertook to make this trip, and in three weeks I visited Washington, Philadelphia, New York, Stelton (New Jersey), Mohegan (New York), Cleveland and Detroit. Everywhere I held meetings in which I brought out the tragic facts about the failure to rescue our comrades from Europe, exposed the inadequacies of the Jewish Labor Committee, and appealed to my audiences to prepare for the work that would have to be started as soon as the war came to an end. These personal contacts brought good results

in the ensuing years, and as soon as the call for help came from Europe there were friends in many cities who became extremely active in helping our comrades in need.

When Paris was liberated from the Germans, the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund immediately sent out letters to every address in that city which was on our files. As soon as the replies began to trickle in, we sent money, and slowly, in return, there came news regarding the fate of our friends. In February 1945, for instance, we received a note from Sam Frydman's brother, who was in the American army. He wrote:

“Yesterday I saw Michelle (Sam Frydman's daughter). She is skinny and sickly-looking. The \$25, which you sent, she received. We hope that Sam and Dora will return alive from the German concentration camps.”

Alas, as I have already said, Sam and Dora were among those we did not return.

A month later, in March 1945, Alexander Shapiro wrote to us from New York:

“I have just had a letter from Paris, from Kantorovich. He tells me that the following were deported (presumably to Germany): David Poliakoff, Michel Finkelstein, Morris Schantz (his wife Fania remained in Paris), Fruchtman and his wife, Buzi Frishberg, Sarah Elstein and her daughter, Isreal Beck, Schmulek Matsidlover, Victor Bruth, Goldberg, and many others whose names he will give us in a future letter. Among those who have been saved we have, in Paris, Teitelbaum and Anna Schwartzbard, besides Yania and Eva Schwartz in Lyons. Viola is in Marseille.”

Afterwards more and more tragic news came in from all over Europe of comrades who had been killed or had vanished without a clue to their fate.

To cope with the calls for help, the Alexander Berkman Fund sent out a countryside appeal for help, and this time over \$5,000 came in; this enabled us to broaden our activities and to send help to France, Italy, Germany, Austria, England, Poland and North Africa. In addition to our own activities, groups in many centers were participating in the urgent task of relief. The Jewish Federation in New York decided at its annual conference to reorganize its International Aid Fund into a Libertarian Refugee Fund, and its affiliated Los Angeles and Detroit groups organized similar funds. The Mohegan group set up a special relief committee. The English-speaking magazine *Why* in New York, and the Italian groups centered round *L'Adunata*, collected funds for refugees, the S.I.A. concentrated its help on the thousands of Spanish refugees in France and North Africa, a committee in Mexico City set to work collecting funds for Europe, and later on groups in London, England, become active in the relief work.

Yet, despite all this activity, it became clear to us, that we could not help in a completely satisfactory way all those who had suffered so much and were still suffering. All our relief and help organizations operated virtually without overhead expense, since all administrative work was done as a free contribution towards our cause, but now, with so many to help, we had to be more careful than ever in counting every penny we spent; every committee, in fact, worked splendidly at getting the most out of the funds at its command.

One problem that concerned us was that of making fair distribution of our funds at such a distance, and when Yania Doubinsky came to back to Paris from Lyons in 1945

the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund suggested to him that he should form a Paris section of the Fund, and set up a systematic distribution of the help we were sending to France, in such a way that the most needy comrades would always be helped first. We also suggested that this work "should be done in connection with the S.I.A. in Paris. Doubinsky accepted our suggestion and organized a committee, which worked under the title of the Paris Section of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund. In 1946, after this arrangement had been in operation for sometime, both the Paris Section and the S.I.A. in Paris sent reports for inclusion in a 24-page pamphlet³⁴ which we published to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Alexander Berkman Fund; I am now reprinting these reports for the insight they give into the actual work that was going on among needy European libertarians at this time:

1. Activity Report, Alexander Berkman Aid Fund, Paris Section.

Many packages of food and clothing have been shipped to France on the request of the Paris Section of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund. This help was sent by the A. Berkman Aid Fund (Chicago Section), and the Libertarian Refugee Fund which was organized by the Jewish Anarchist Federation of the United States and is composed of the New York, Los Angeles and Detroit groups, as well as Mexican and English comrades.

Most of the parcels were sent directly to the needy comrades of the Masseur camp, to comrades in sanitariums and hospitals, and to individual comrades in need. Besides these parcels, 231 packages were received directly by the Paris Section of the A. Berkman Aid Fund and they were distributed in conjunction with the Paris S.I.A. among the more needy of our comrades.

Our committee was organized through the initiative of the A. Berkman Aid Fund in Chicago, and it is made up of the most responsible comrades who were willing to do the work. Immediately they started the distribution of the aid that came from Chicago.

Soon thereafter lists of needy comrades were compiled and were forwarded to Chicago. These names were added to the lists, which the Chicago comrades already had. When other American comrades in New York, Detroit and especially Los Angeles came to our aid we were able to help many more needy comrades.

Jewish comrades who were able to escape and survive Hitler's inferno, Spanish and other comrades, who returned from concentration camps, hospitals, and sanitariums, were able to receive our help. Through the S.I.A. in Paris we obtained the address of many unfortunate comrades, many of them invalids as a result of their participation in the Spanish Revolution, and food and clothing were forthcoming as a result of our efforts.

Notwithstanding the continuous aid from our American comrades, aid is still greatly needed. Reaction still reigns in Spain and many of our comrades cross the border to France, paying no heed to the danger of crossing the border without proper identification. Almost daily young people, proud and courageous, come to France. They are penniless. They need food, shelter and clothing. We believe our efforts to help them must be continued.

2. Letters from the International Anti-Fascist Solidarity (S.I.A.), Paris, 11/13/1946.

³⁴ [Yelensky's note] As an appendix I am printing an article by B. Axler, secretary of the Jewish Anarchist Federation, dealing with the 25th Anniversary of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund.

We are sending you an itemized list, which describes the type of help you have been giving the Spanish refugees and which was distributed to them through the S.I.A. The S.I.A., as you well know, is made up of Anarchists and Spanish Libertarians exiled in France.

Fifty per cent of the Spanish refugees in France belong to the S.I.A. Notwithstanding the fact that the organization is responsible for the care of 70 percent of its members, the S.I.A. does not receive any government or semi-official aid. The reason for this lack of help is because the organization is the spiritual child of our beloved CNT-FAI and hence its orientation is anti-government.

The aid for the Spanish refugees, which comes from foreign countries, is distributed by the pseudo-Republican government and the distribution is made not according to need but rather in accordance with the political influence of the refugees. This explains why your help, though very valuable, is far from sufficient in answering the needs of our refugee comrades.

It must also be remembered that our comrades were compelled to move many times since the Spanish events, which has resulted in the loss of much of their personal belongings; that the majority of us have lived in exile for almost ten years and in comparison with other workers have been often forced to work under disadvantageous conditions; and also that we do not expect any government help whatsoever even in the most dire cases, such as for invalids, the wounded and old age.

Your brotherly hand has helped us materially, but more than materially it has aided us spiritually for it has displayed that international solidarity still lives.

In addition to our activities in France, we tried to organize a German section, but this proved impossible, largely owing to the divisions between the various military zones. We did however succeed in persuading comrades in the various large cities to form local committees, which distributed necessities and money according to need and reduced to a minimum the possibility of unfair distribution.

During the period immediately after the war, when help was most urgently needed in Europe, money alone was often of little use owing to the difficulty of buying food and clothing in the countries involved. In consequence of this situation, requests for direct gifts and clothing began to reach us, and we had to branch out in a new direction. Fortunately, C.A.R.E. began to function at this time, and the relief funds in both Chicago and New York sent thousands of packages through this organization, while thousands more were packed and sent off by the members of the various relief committees. Apart from food and clothing, we sent dress materials, thread, medicines- anything that might be needed to keep human existence going, and we dispatched such quantities of used clothing bedding that all our comrades in urgent need of such items were supplied. All the groups I have named earlier took part in this task of sending parcels directly to Europe, but many also contributed cash to the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund or the Libertarian Refugee Fund in New York. The Los Angeles Libertarian Relief Fund particularly distinguished itself by the large number of parcels, which it sent.

Before ending this description our activities during the years immediately after the war, I would like to reproduce a letter we received from the Spanish refugees in the camp at Maseube, France; it gives some idea of the kind of problems to which we were trying to find a solution.

Masseube, France, Nov. 12, 1946.

I received your letter written on October 28, 1946, in which you inform us that the Alexander Berkman Committee sent us four big C.A.R.E. packages. So far we have received none of them, but we have already written to the C.A.R.E. office in Paris, inquiring about them. We are very glad to hear from you that you ordered us ten more packages; as soon as we received them we will let you know.

About two months ago all the very sick comrades and the elderly ones who lived in this camp were taken to the hospitals and rest places of this province. There they are getting the necessary care, with the exception of food, which is lacking in France. At the same time I want to tell you that all these comrades, although they are in different hospitals, are receiving their share of whatever you send. We have a responsible committee that distributes everything equally.

As regards stockings, there are only three women who belong to our Local Federation. However, there are women, the wives and daughters of our comrades, who are not members of the organization, but who will help us fight for the cause, and the stocking will be well received by them. I also want to tell you that in the packages you sent us previously, there were women's clothes and stocking. We gave a small share to each wife and child of our comrades, and sent the rest to the Department Committee of the S.I.A. in Gers in order to distribute them among more needy. We did that only with women's and children's clothing, and not with men's wear, because we did not have enough of that for those who needed it. There are several comrades who do not have overcoats and shoes.

E. FERNANDOZ NEGRETE

Delegate of the Local Federation of
The Spanish Libertarian Movement

There is a story attached to the stocking mentioned in this letter. In Chicago we had a comrade named Joe Goldman. We were then searching for clothing or anything else of this kind that we could obtain, and as Joe has a sister-in-law who held a high position in a firm of sportswear manufacturers, I asked him if he thought he could get anything through her. He promised to try.

A week or two later Goldman rang me up and asked me to find a truck and take away from his workshop the goods his sister had sent him. I thought Goldman was joking, but when I came to him a few days later and he took me into his stockroom, I saw that it was no joke at all. There five very large packages, and when we opened them we found over a hundred dozen pairs of stocking, as well as many jumpers and other important things, such as woolen swimming suits from which we could made undershirts. Thus, though we could not supply our comrades with everything they needed, there were stockings enough for everybody.

As economic conditions improved in Europe, and our own income from funds grew smaller, a certain amount of reconstruction of our activities became necessary. Many of the smaller groups and committees, which had been active in sending relief to Europe immediately after the war, ceased their work, and after 1950 only the organizations in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles remained active. The last two decided to concentrate their activities on the work, which had in the past been done by

the International Aid Fund and to help old and sick comrades. The Alexander Berkman Aid Fund returned to the work of helping political prisoners and internees.

Its immediate concern became to help members of the Bulgarian movement, both those in Bulgaria itself and also those who had escaped from that country through Yugoslavia and Greece, most of whom were held in Greek concentration camps. During the past five years our work has been concentrated on the assistance of political prisoners in Italy, Bulgaria and, particularly, in Spain, where there are thousands of imprisoned anarchists whose families are in urgent need of help. In this connection the Spanish movement collects large sums of money, and what help we can give is only a drop in the ocean in comparison.

X. CONSERVATISM AND FACTIONALISM

The first post war years brought in considerable sums of money, particularly through the yearly appeals sent out by the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund and affiliated groups of the Jewish Federation. But by the third and fourth years after the end of hostilities we began to notice that the financial response to our appeals was becoming progressively smaller. It is true that in some directions our needs had decreased. The German comrades, for instance, found that they were becoming more secure materially and decided to accept no further help from us. Some of the Spaniards in the French camps were placed in public institutions, and they too declined any more assistance. But we still had on our hands a large number of people who needed help urgently, and for them, with our reduced income, we could not provide even the minimum amount we had sent before.

In this situation we were forced to think of means by which we could find additional funds, and at one of our meetings it was suggested that we should once again approach the Jewish Labor Committee in New York.³⁵ Because of our past experience, many of us were opposed to this, but the majority thought there was nothing to be lost by making another effort. I was delegated to go to New York, and in preparation for my trip, a committee of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund called upon the Chairman of the Chicago Jewish Labor Committee, J. Seigel. When we heard our case, Seigel agreed that I should go to New York, and he wrote a letter of recommendation to N. Chanin, the chairman of the J.L.C. Office Committee.

In February 1947, I arrived in New York and almost immediately went to see Chanin, presenting Siegel's letter of recommendation and stating our case. When I finished, Chanin replied: "I don't see any reason why your organization shouldn't receive

³⁵ [Yelensky's note] I knew when I started to prepare this book that many of our Jewish comrades who are still taking part, for one reason or another, in the work of the Jewish Labor Committee would not be pleased by my bringing up this question. Recently a few of them approach me about it, and one in particular came to me with the argument that the Jewish Labor Committee did in fact help our comrades. To this friend, I would say that I know about the "help" in question, and later on I will give the relevant figures. At present, however, I want to remark that what the J.L.C. gave was no more than a sop to allay the growing volume of protest at its partisanship. This view was held by others than me, and in support of it I quote a letter from Alexander Shapiro, written in reply to a request of mine that he should represent the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund in an attempt to get some help from the J.L.C. "No Matter who your representative may be," he said, "I can assure you that you will get from the Jewish Labor Committee something in the form of a bribe. I personally will not take part in this matter under any circumstances."

help from us.” He had added that the best thing would be for a delegation representing the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund to meet the Office Committee of the J.L.C. When I heard this, I thought a miracle had happened, but I was soon to find how wrong my impression was.

After seeing Chanin I went to a meeting of the Jewish Federation in New York, and told them what happened. They decided to send a delegation, as Chanin had suggested, but, since I could stay no longer in New York, I was unable to be a member of it. A few weeks later, however, news reached Chicago from the Jewish Federation that the delegation had presented our case to the Office Committee of the Jewish Labor Committee, which had granted a sum of \$2,500 for a group of our comrades in Poland to establish a printing shop. As regards the general question about funds for refugees, they promised to give early consideration to this matter.

We waited five months without receiving any news as to what the Jewish labor Committee had decided to do for our refugees, and in the end the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund asked its chairman, Irving S. Abrams, to write to the J.L.C. on the matter. He wrote to N. Chanin as follows on July 5th, 1947:

Dear Friend Chanin:

I am writing you at this time to bring to your attention a matter, which has been a source of irritation for some time and is making our situation very difficult.

Last February we delegated our Secretary, Comrade Boris Yelensky, to go to New York and solicit the Jewish Labor Committee to grant us assistance on behalf of our comrades in Europe, whose requests for assistance have been increasingly steadily.

Before Comrade Yelensky left for New York, we discussed the matter with Friend J. Siegel, and he advised us to take the matter up with you and gave Comrade Yelensky a letter of introduction to you. Comrade Yelensky reported to us that he discussed the matter with you and you suggested that a committee of our New York comrades appear before the Office Committee. We are referred the matter to the Jewish Anarchist Federation, and have been informed that a committee appeared before the Office Committee of the Jewish Labor Committee and requested assistance in our work in Poland and other European countries.

Á The Committee reports to us that the Office Committee advised them that the Jewish Labor Committee has made an allotment for Poland and would consider our request for other work. To date we have not received any word from the office of the Jewish labor Committee

A number of years ago we complained that our comrades were being slighted and engaged in considerable correspondence with New York. Nevertheless we have continued in our assistance and support of the Jewish Labor Committee.

We know that our comrades in Los Angeles, Detroit, New York and other cities have contributed liberally in work and money and the fact that I am chairman of the Workmen’s Circle Division this year indicates clearly our desire to cooperate and help in this work. However, if we did not assist in the work, our comrades in Europe would still be entitled to assistance, and I have been requested to write to you and ascertain if the Jewish Labor Committee intends to help us in our work. I am waiting your reply.

Fraternally your,

(signed) IRVING S ABRAMS

On July 14th, 1947, we received an answer from the Jewish Labor Committee. It did not come from Chanin himself, and, though we can only make conjectures about his reason for passing the task to someone else, it seems possible that he did not wish to offend Abrams, who had been very active in the work of the Jewish Labor Committee in Chicago, by a direct rebuff. The letter was actually signed by B. Tabachinsky, and I reproduce it below.

JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE

175 E. Broadway
New York, New York

July 13, 1947.

Friend Irving Abrams
Alexander Berkman Relief Fund
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Friend Abrams:

I write you a reply, in place of Chanin, concerning the matter about which inquire in your letter. I want to say in that connection that your people who informed you about the matter as to how we conduct our relief work for your friends in Europe, have truly not given the correct information.

Let us try to clarify the matter for you with the fact. The group of your people in France totals- according to my knowledge since I was there- at the maximum, 25-30 persons. In the course of the year we sent them in cash \$3,000.00, which we have done for no other group- not even a third of that. We provided the funds in this manners: For the Cooperative, \$2,000.00, and later an additional \$1,000, just as we had promised your friends in California.

We have also reached an understanding with the Manager of Local 117 to provide them with five sewing machines. The machines are already here. We need only the possibility of transporting them, and that is not within our power. It is a fact, however, that the machines are already at their disposal. If it were within our power to bring the same help to the other groups, we would be happy to do so. We provided the five machines for your friends because I have made such a promise. To be sure, I thought at that time that we would be able to gather a larger number of sewing machines, but we are keeping our promise.

With regards to packages and other forms of assistance, that is being taken care of in the same degree as to our other friends.

For the foregoing you will be able to see that the information, which you have received, is not correct. I am pleased that I can rectify the matter by presenting the facts.

with cordial regards
B. TABACHINSKY
Executive Secretary

The true facts are that I did not go to see Chanin in New York in order to talk to him about the cooperative workshop in Paris. What we asked, and what Tabachinsky

significantly ignores in his letter, was help for the thousands of hungry, ill-clothed and sick individuals who were on our lists of refugees.

Furthermore, the Alexander Berkman Committee had nothing to do with the cooperative. What I talked about to Chanin about, and what the New York Committee of the Jewish Federation asked for, was help for all our comrades in Europe.

The final point to be emphasized in connection with Tabachinsky's letter is that he tries to impress upon Abrams the smallness of our movement by saying, "the group of your people in France totals- according to my knowledge, since I was there- at a maximum, 25-30 persons." In this way he seeks to create the impression of generosity on the part of the Jewish Labor Committee for having given so much to so few people.

In fact, in Paris alone the people under our care amounted, not 25-30, but to several hundreds. And even if we leave aside this deliberate misrepresentation of facts, other small groups received, in proportion, far more than the Anarchists in France. During the period when relief was being organized, the Jewish Labor Committee collected million of dollars, of which a considerable proportion came from groups containing strong libertarian elements. Out of this great sum the Anarchists in Europe received the following help; the figures are taken from a list, which Tabachinsky sent to Abrams with his letter:

To 3 persons to come to Mexico and U.S.A.....	\$ 1,050
To Frydman's child.....	5,000 fr.
For a French paper in Paris.....	\$ 500
For the cooperative in Paris.....	\$ 3,000
For a printing shop in Poland.....	\$ 2,500

Total \$ 7,050 and 5,000 francs.

During this period the J.L.C. also sent about 40 food parcels to our people and paid a small amount (unspecified) for clothing to the Paris J.L.C.

It will be seen that there is in fact no provision indicating in Tabachinsky's figures for Anarchist refugees in general, and in reality all that the Jewish Labor Committee ever did for our comrades was to help a few isolated individuals when a particular pressures happened to be brought to bear upon them. As Alexander Shapiro suggested, what this so-called non-partisan organization gave to the libertarians was "in the form of a bribe" to avoid public protest.

Our experience with the Jewish Labor Committee showed that we could get very little positive help from organizations dominated by Socialists. Even worse was the fact that Socialist influences worked against us in connection with various non-political organizations which at one time or another gave their support to the work of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund. To give one example, the large Jewish Fraternal organization known as the Workmen's Circle for many years endorsed at its conventions our work in helping political prisoners in Russia, and gave an annual donation to our funds. In 1939, as usual we sent an appeal telegram to The Workmen's Circle Convention, but that year we received no donation. We accordingly sent a note of inquiry, and received this answer:

Dear Friend Yelensky:

Our donation of \$300 for the Russian Prisoners was sent to Mrs. Strunsky, the Treasurer of this Fund for the past two years.

Sincerely yours,
J. BASKIN, General Secretary
Workmen's Circle

Mrs. Strunsky, it should be explained, was the head of the committee, which helped the Socialist in Russian prisons; in this way the Anarchists were squeezed entirely out of the help given by the Workmen's Circle conventions.

In 1944, for the sake of the record, the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund made a further attempt to gain endorsement of our work from the Workmen's Circle, and also a donation, as in the past. This time we received the following letter:

THE WORKMEN'S CIRCLE

175 East Broadway
New York, N.Y.

January 10, 1944.
Alexander Berkman Aid Fund Committee
2422 North Halsted Street,
Chicago, Illinois
Dear Friends:

We are in receipt of your letter asking for an endorsement of you Committee to the Branches of the Workmen's Circle and also for a direct contribution for purposes indicating in your letter.

We wish to inform you that since The Workmen's Circle is an integral part of the Jewish Labor Committee and all our work for the aid of refugees is done through that Committee, we have therefore referred your request to them for consideration.

Fraternally yours,
National Executive Committee
Workmen's Circle
J. BASKIN, General Secretary

Once again we had been passed over in favor of a Socialist-dominated organization- and that by The Workmen's Circle, of whose rank-and-file membership at least 95 percent had no connection with social-democratic political parties.

Later on we had a similar experience with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Originally the Union was friendly, as can be seen from the following extract from the Proceedings of the 26th Convention of the Union in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1947:

Delegate Jacob Katz appeared before your Committee to ask for financial assistance to the Alexander Berkman Fund, an organization that is rendering assistance to individuals needy of the labor movement all over the world.

The record of our International indicates that this fund is listed among the many organizations who have heretofore received financial assistance. Your Committee, therefore, refers this matter to the incoming GEB for continued support.

The same decision applies to the request by the same delegate for assistance to the International Aid Fund, an associate organization of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund.

(Upon motion this portion of the report was adopted)

Until the Chicago Convention of the Union in 1953 we received donations from the ILGWU funds. At the Convention the financial assistance ceased, and, though we wrote several times to David Dubinsky, the President of the Union, he did not see fit to reply to our letter. In the days of bitter strike when the ILGWU was organized many members of our Jewish movement took an active part in its formation, and to this day there are a few old anarchists among its vice-presidents and its top-level executives. But now, when it comes to helping anarchists outside its ranks, the Union chooses to ignore our appeals.

If space allowed, I could bring out many more facts which would bear upon this matter of the exclusion of our activities from aid they had formerly gained from the organized labor movement, but I think what I have quoted is sufficient to show how people who formerly used our movement and its members are now glad to ignore it. The unfortunate thing is that so many of people, for one reason or another, still give their help to organizations which are hostile to libertarian ideals.

We were grateful for the help, but we still felt that Anarchists were not receiving their full share of the millions of relief money that had been collected, much of it with libertarian help. Perhaps this is a promise of the day when solidarity among radicals will be revived, and it will no longer be necessary to have their own relief program; it is evident to us that this day has not yet arrived.

Actually we are passing through a conservative period, which has made it difficult for all radicals. The general decline of our funds cannot have been due to lack of financial means, nor do we think that our efforts have been weaker, or the need less.

While we hope for a return to more favorable conditions, the time may have come for a rethinking of the needs and opportunities of the workers, and of our mission and tactics. May the decline of the program of the past make way for a new and united radicalism of greater vision, freedom, and strength.

APPENDIX 1

TWENTY-FIFTH JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY OF THE ALEXANDER BERKMAN AID FUND

By A. Axler, Secretary, Jewish Anarchist Federation

Our comrades in Chicago, who devoted themselves particularly to relief work on behalf of political prisoners and needy comrades- under the name of "Berkman Hilfs-Fund" (Berkman Aid Fund), are presently celebrating the 25th jubilee anniversary of the

Fund. The details of their activities are set forth in two article by Chaver B. Yelensky, which have been published in the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*.

Following World War II the comrades of the Chicago Berkman Fund plunged into this relief-work for the sake of our surviving comrades in various countries.

The need was so great, and the relief efforts so urgent, that our Federation likewise found it necessary to reorganize the "Interaid Fund" and to set up a Libertarian Refugee Fund, and to conduct assistance on a larger scale- a project which we continue to this very day. For a time the Chicago comrades of the Berkman Fund regarded the Libertarian Refugee Fund as a competitive undertaking, or at best as an overlapping, duplicating effort. Later on, however, they realized that the need was so great and help was so desperately needed that there was room for two relief organizations, in addition to the F.F.F. sections of the Los Angeles and Detroit. The New York and Chicago Relief groups soon came to a harmonious understanding, allocated regions for there relief work and now cooperate in their endeavors, even though they operate autonomously. Let us hope that we may soon see the day when it may be possible to liquidate both these Funds.

Now, upon arriving at the 25th jubilee anniversary of the Berkman Fund and upon concluding a year's activity, the Chicago comrades have issued a 24-page brochure, containing a biography of Alexander Berkman; an historical survey of the Berkman Fund; also letters of appreciations from needy comrades who have been assisted, and a financial report- all in English. The brochure has been distributed to all comrades and readers of the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, so as to acquaint them with, and report to them on, this activity.

Hence we for our part wish at this time to direct the attention of the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* readers, and of our comrades in particular, to the importance of this undertaking through all these years and especially the past two years, on the part of the Chicago division of the Berkman Fund. The Chicago Berkman Fund, under the leadership of B. Yelensky, carries on a large-scale and ramified relief effort, and our comrades ought to cooperate with them eagerly and generously.

We, the comrades of our Federation, esteem highly the endeavors of the Chicago comrades and encourage them to continue their efforts to extend aid to the imprisoned, persecuted and improvised comrades wherever they may be found. It is only our wish that there should be no necessity for celebrating any more jubilees of relief funds; that we should be able to devote our energy and activity towards the enlightenment of the masses and the propagation of the anarchist ideal in its struggle for a better and freer society.

APPENDIX 2

The Lettish Anarchist Red Cross and the Attempt to Kill Rockefeller

By Matthew Hart

Those of us in the Anarchist Black Cross have been burdened by the fact that most of the history of this aid organization has been lost in the pages of time. Many of us have worked diligently in the rediscovery of our history and only recently parts of that history have emerged. Information has been rediscovered regarding the Lettish section of the Anarchist Red Cross. At first glance this section of the organization's history seems rather uneventful, but with closer examination we discover one of the most momentous occasions to have taken place throughout Anarchist history in North America. The event

that I speak of is the attempted assassination of John D. Rockefeller by members of the Lettish section of the Anarchist Red Cross and other co-conspirators.

Early Anarchist Red Cross organizations were mainly Russian-Jewish groups, focusing on imprisoned Russian anarchists. By 1913, other groups had emerged to focus on Anarchists imprisoned in other regions of the world. The Lettish Anarchist Red Cross was specifically organized to assist imprisoned Anarchists in Latvia. The group had in its membership, three individuals who would soon place themselves forever in the pages of history; Carl Hanson, Charles Berg, and Louise Berger.

Berg, Berger, and Hanson were born in Latvia. Berg, more specifically, was born in 1891 in the city of Angern found in the province of Kurland. His father was a wealthy ship owner and was able to give his son a decent education. While he was in school, a strike broke out among the students, and Charles, one of the most active militants, was expelled. In the 1905 revolution, at the age fourteen, he joined the ranks of the revolutionists and became active in revolutionary propaganda, using religious services to spread this “new religion.” Later that year, he became a member of a guerrilla group active in the Baltic region known as the Forest Brethren. After the group broke up, he assisted in transporting arms across the Russian border, until he was forced to go to Hamburg.

Hanson’s childhood was very similar to his comrade. At the age of nine, he had already been involved in organizing fellow students against the teacher’s lesson plans. By the age of fifteen he began working at a machine shop and was fired six months later for his involvement in a strike. His next job at a silk mill met the same fate. Later he met up with fellow revolutionary, Berg, while working as a merchant sailor in Hamburg. After spending some time working together and becoming close friends, the two men, along with Hanson’s stepsister, Louise Berger, headed toward New York in 1911. Sadly, little is known about Berger’s life prior to coming the United States.

Soon after their arrival, the three Anarchists became active in the Lettish Anarchist Group, a group involved in the publication of Anarchist literature. When a number of Lettish comrades organized a Lettish Anarchist Red Cross in December of 1913, the three became some of its first members.

During this time, Berg, Berger, and Hanson also became active in the movement for the unemployed and joined the ranks of the Anti-Military League. Also active in these movements were those associated with Ferrer Center in New York. The Ferrer Center was part of the Modern School movement of which many radicals participated and it became a center point of organizing within the radical community. Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Luigi Galleani, as well as many individuals from the Anarchist Red Cross, spent a great deal of their time at the Ferrer Center. It was also were plans to assassinate John D. Rockefeller would soon be hatched.

In April 1914, one of the worst atrocities against labor in United States took place in Ludlow, Colorado. Mine workers had been on strike since September 1913 after a United Mine Workers’ organizers had been murdered. The workers demanded better pay, improvement in workplace conditions and the elimination of the feudal domination by the mining company. In response to these demands the miners were evicted from the company-owned homes and were forced to set up tent cities near the mines. John D. Rockefeller Jr., the owner of the mines, hired armed thugs from the Baldwin-Felts

Detective Agency to attack and raid the tent cities in order to intimidate the miners. Gun battles between the workers and the hired thugs ensued.

National Guardsmen had been called out previously to suppress the strikers and assist scabs in crossing the picket line, but the miners resisted in every situation. When the strike lasted through the cold winter of 1913-1914, it became clear that extreme measures were needed to evict the miners from their position.

On April 20, the National Guardsmen closed in on the miners and began to fire on one of the largest tent cities with machine guns. The Guardsmen then poured oil and kerosene on the tents and set them ablaze, killing eleven children and two women. Following this, three individuals, including a strike leader, were beaten and killed. This incident, which became known as the Ludlow massacre, set off a protest across the nation. The protests directed their attention on John D. Rockefeller Jr. for being the one responsible for calling out the Guardsmen.

Demonstrations at Rockefeller's mansion near Tarrytown, New York, became violent and several individuals, including Berg, were arrested, along with future co-conspirator Arthur Caron. The atrocities in Colorado caused one of the most famous battles over free speech to take place in the courts and streets in Tarrytown. The Colorado massacre and the Tarrytown battle enraged most radicals and plots began to emerge within the revolutionary communities to seek revenge against Rockefeller for the crimes committed under his control. Members of the Lettish Anarchist Red Cross, including Berg, Hanson, Berger, as well as members of the Bresci group, an Anarchist group influenced by Italian Anarchist Galleani, known for his ideas and support of 'propaganda of the deed', secretly began to make arrangements to bomb Rockefeller's mansion.

Berg, Hanson, and I.W.W. member Arthur Caron began collecting dynamite from Russia and storing it in Louise Berger's apartment. Several meetings were held at the Ferrer Center, where they devised a plan in which Caron, Berg, and Hanson were to plant a bomb at Rockefeller's home in Tarrytown. But for reasons unknown, the plan was called off at the last moment and the three men returned to Berger's apartment from Tarrytown, with the bomb in hand.

According to eyewitnesses, the three men along with Alexander Berkman met once more that night at the Ferrer Center to discuss further plans. According to some of those individuals involved in the plot, Berkman was the chief conspirator and the only person who had the experience in such an act. Because of his probation for a previous case, Berkman chose to remain behind the scenes of the plot rather than on the front line. Despite claims by others, Berkman denied any involvement or knowledge of the plan. The meeting went late into the night and the men decided to make a second attempt at Rockefeller the next morning.

The story of the fateful day is as follows: At 9 a.m., July 4th, Berger left her apartment and headed over to the office of the Anarchist paper known as Mother Earth on 119th Street, probably to inform Berkman the bomb had been readjusted and was ready. At 9:15 an explosion occurred from the sixth story of a tenement at 1626 Lexington Avenue, between 103rd Street and 104th Street in the thickly immigrant populated area of Harlem, only a few blocks away from the Ferrer Center. Passers-by witnessed a shower of debris and rubble fall into the street. The three upper floors of the tenement building were wrecked from the explosion, while debris showered rooftops and the

streets below. Large pieces of furniture were thrown hundreds of feet in the air due to the power of the blast.

The bomb intended for Rockefeller exploded prematurely killing Carl Hanson, Charles Berg, Arthur Caron and Marie Chavez, who had not been involved in the conspiracy but merely rented a room in the apartment. The blast threw Caron's body onto the mangled and twisted fire escape. The mutilated bodies of Marie Chavez and Hanson were found inside of the apartment. The blast had torn the body of Charles Berg into pieces, which were seen by spectators being thrown through the air onto the streets. In total, twenty other people were injured, seven of them severely enough to be hospitalized.

Another man, a Wobbly named Mike Murphy, was spending the night in the apartment, when the explosion occurred, causing his bed to fall into the apartment below. Slightly dazed and confused, Murphy was able to walk away from the incident with only the loss of some clothes and a few minor bruises. Supposedly, Murphy was unaware of the plan or that there had been so much explosives in the apartment. During the chaos after the bombing, Murphy was able to slip away to the Mother Earth headquarters, where Berkman quickly sent him away accompanied by Charles Plunkett, another co-conspirator of the bombing. Murphy was first taken to New Jersey and then to Philadelphia by members of the Radical Library and finally on to Canada.

On the day of the accident, a member of the Bresci group, Frank Mandese, was arrested in close proximity to Rockefeller's home in Tarrytown. With a lack of evidence, the police were forced to release Mandese. Though soon afterwards, the police raided the Bresci group and roughed up its members, whom they suspected were involved in the bomb plot against Rockefeller, but had little proof.

The incident caused immediate repercussions against the Ferrer Center. Police agents infiltrated the adult classes in order to detect any of the co-conspirators of Hanson, Berg, and Caron. The center acquired the reputation of a bomb factory and a hotbed for subversion. Support for the center dwindled to such an extent the collective was later forced to move outside New York City and began again in Stelton.

Despite the increased repressions caused by the incident, the majority of the Anarchist community remained loyal to their comrades, hailing them as heroes. Poems written by Mike Gold and Adolf Wolff were laminated in *Di Shtime fun di rusishe gefangene* the newspaper of the Russian section of the Anarchist Red Cross, which printed a black box with the names of Berg and Hanson. Berkman was able to obtain the bodies of his dead comrades for cremation and funeral demonstration at Union Square but the authorities refused to allow a public funeral to take place for the Anarchists. Regardless, their friends were insistent that a funeral of their beloved comrades would take place. And on that day over twenty thousand supporters gathered in Union Square to mourn for Berg, Hanson, and Caron.

The police refused to allow the funeral to continue, but instead of attempting to remove the crowd from Union Square, detectives arrived at Berkman's house in an attempt to seize the urn that contained the remains of Caron, Berg, and Hanson. One step ahead of the police, Berkman was able to slip out the back door where he had a red automobile waiting for him, just in case. He sped towards the demonstration in hopes of being able to make it to the speaking podium before being caught. As he approached the crowd, the police mistook Berkman's car to be that of the Fire Chief and eagerly cleared a lane for the car all the way up to the platform. By the time the police realized what had

transpired, Berkman was already up on the platform. Any attempt to seize the urn at this point would have caused a riot.

After the demonstration, the urn was placed in the offices of Mother Earth, which had been decorated with wreaths and red and black banners. The urn, itself, took the shape of a pyramid with a clenched fist reaching out of its apex. The creator of the urn, Adolf Wolff, explained the meaning of the design, "It conveys three meanings. By the pyramid is indicated [sic] the present unjust gradation of society into classes, with the masses on the bottom and the privileged classes towering above them to the apex, where the clenched fist, symbolical [sic] of the social revolution, indicates the impending vengeance of those free spirits who refuse to be bound by the present social system and rise above it, threatening its destruction. The urn further symbolizes the strength and endurance of the revolution in so solid a base. A third suggestion is that of a mountain in course of eruption, the crude, misshapen stern fist indicating the lava of human indignation which is about to belch forth and carry destruction to the volcano which has given it birth."

Thousands of mourners passed through the office to pay their last respects. After the funeral, the urn of the fallen comrades was taken from the Mother Earth offices to the Ferrer Center where it remained there until the school closed several years later. From there it was taken to the Stelton Colony where the ashes were released in the wind. Afterwards, the bronze fist and hollow pyramid of the urn was used by the Stelton Colony as a bell to call children and adults to meetings.

As for Louise Berger, she continued the struggle, traveling to Russia where she took part with armed robbers in carrying out "expropriations." She fell ill during the typhus epidemic that swept through Russia 1920-1921.

Up to this point, these two comrades, Berg and Hanson, have never been given their proper place in the history of the Anarchist Black Cross. Many Anarchists have met the same fate. Too many have actually lost their lives directly because of their involvement in this organization and it is only through the rediscovery of this organization's past can we place them in pages of history once again.

APPENDIX 3

The following article, written by members of the Red Cross explaining its reasoning for its reappearance, was published in the Anarchist journal *Freedom* on May of 1923.

The Anarchist Red Cross in the U.S.A.

Comrades,

The Anarchist Red Cross has been reorganized and we therefore give a brief review explaining the causes for such reorganization.

From 1909 to 1917 the Anarchist Red Cross was active in the aiding both morally and financially the captives of the Russian Tsar in Siberia, Schlüsselburg, etc. The Russian Revolution in 1917 spread new hope for a better world. The news that all the political prisoners were freed and were met by the Russian people as their brothers, with fraternal love and understanding, brought our comrades to the realization that their mission was at an end and that, instead of helping prisoners, their place was among the revolutionary workers and peasants, on the streets and in the cities of the country which sent out a call to the entire world- a call of freedom. But the freedom did not last long.

At the end of 1917 the Communist Party gained power by adopting the prevailing motto they forgot as soon as they got into power, and liberty-loving idealists, who foresaw a new autocracy in the aims of the Communist Party, and who stated it openly, were thrown into jail by the new rulers and sent to Siberia, to Archangel, etc.

Among the thousands of political prisoners there were hundreds of Anarchists, men and women, who were brutally tortured by the servants of the Cheka for protesting against their unjust imprisonment. Among these Anarchists were very young people who had just begun to work in the revolutionary movement, but most of them were the pioneers of the movement, who gave all they possessed, their very lives, to the cause of the Social Revolution, which was stopped by the new autocratic Government of Russia.

Today, under Communist rulership, captives of the new regime are being tortured in the very same dungeons from which they were freed only five years ago by the Russian people. A notable exception is the fortress of St. Peter and Paul, which has been converted into a museum for exhibition to foreign visitors. The new rulers have devised new schemes for torturing prisoners, with which those of the ancient fortress cannot complete. Thousands of men and women are kept in the heavily barred prisons throughout the length and breadth of Russia. From Kiev to Vladivostok and from Odessa to Archangel, the cries of our comrades are being silenced by death.

The aim of the Anarchist Red Cross is to help these and other comrades who are imprisoned for their ideas in every part of the world. We therefore call upon you to assist us in our task morally and financially, and we hope you will do your utmost to let our comrades in prison know that we outside are doing all in our power to comfort them.

The Anarchist Red Cross.

Address all correspondence to Y. Firer, care of *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, 48 Canal Street, New York City, U.S.A.