

*The Alexander Berkman Social Club*



# PRISONS & PRISONERS

Program for August 28, 2008

**BARRY PATEMAN**

will speak on the early days of the  
*Anarchist Black Cross*

**ISAAC ONTIVEROS**

of Critical Resistance will speak on  
*Prison Abolition*

Music provided by the

**HIPPOLYTE HAVEL HOUSE BAND**

#### Next month's program

The theme of next month's program will be education. **Audrey Goodfriend**, a cofounder of the Walden School in Berkeley and **Andrej Grubačić**, author and historian, will speak.



#### What is anarchism?

Anarchism began as what it remains today: a direct challenge by the underprivileged to their oppression and exploitation. It opposes both the insidious growth of state power and the pernicious ethos of possessive individualism, which, together or separately, ultimately serve only the interests of the few at the expense of the rest.

Michael Bakunin, the man whose writings and example over a century ago did most to transform anarchism from an abstract critique of political power into a theory of practical social action, defined its fundamental tenet thus: "In a word, we reject all privileged, licensed, official, and legal legislation and authority, even though it arise from universal suffrage, convinced that it could only turn to the benefit of a dominant and exploiting minority, and against the interests of the vast enslaved majority."

If anarchists have one article of unshakable faith then it is that, once the habit of deferring to politicians or ideologues is lost, and that of resistance to domination and exploitation acquired, then ordinary people have a capacity to organize every aspect of their lives in their own interests, anywhere and at any time, both freely and fairly.



#### About us

The Alexander Berkman Social Club is a group of anarchists who want to talk about what anarchism is, how anarchists see things, and what anarchy could look like. Named for the irrepensible anarchist author, editor and fighter Alexander Berkman, we hope to have continual monthly meeting that are open to all. Meetings include music, entertainment, speeches, raffles, quizzes, refreshments, and more!

### Alexander Berkman Social Club funds

All money made from ABSC meetings is donated to an anarchist cause. Funds raised from the first meeting were used to cover the costs of renting the ABSC meeting room for six events. We collected \$240 at the July meeting which was donated to the Prisoners Literature Project. All funds raised at this meeting will be sent to the Los Angeles chapter of the Anarchist Black Cross Federation.



### A call for speakers

Are you working on a project that you think would be interesting to ABSC members? Let us know and we will provide you with time to speak at a meeting. We would love to hear how ABSC members are active in the community. Email us at [absocialclub@gmail.com](mailto:absocialclub@gmail.com) or introduce yourself to an organizer at a meeting.



### Notes from our last meeting

Last month's program was devoted to anarchism and sexuality. Esteemed anarcho-archivist Jessica Moran began the discussion with a fascinating introduction to anarchism and free love in the United States in the late nineteenth century.

Terence Kissack, author of *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Sexuality in the United States 1895-1917* (available from AK Press), spoke on Alexander Berkman's experiences with sexuality in prison. He is active in the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco (<http://www.glbthistory.org>).

Joey Cain closed the meeting with a lively presentation on Edward Carpenter, who was arguably the great-grandfather of the modern gay rights movement. For more information on his work with the Edward Carpenter Forum please visit <http://www.edwardcarpenterforum.org/>.



### Future meetings

All of our meetings are held at 7 p.m. at 522 Valencia St. (between 16th & 17th Sts.) in San Francisco, but please check the website the most up-to-date information.

- ◆ September 25, 2008: Education
- ◆ October 30, 2008: Capitalism
- ◆ December 4, 2008: Class Struggle

### ANOTHER "BLAST" FROM THE PAST

#### Boris Yelensky's statement on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund

*Boris Yelensky (1889-1974) was a Russian-born anarchist who was active in Chicago. This celebratory history of the IWMA Alexander Berkman Aid Fund, written by Yelensky in 1946, chronicles the long-standing anarchist tradition of providing support to people in prison. In 1958 he published In the Struggle For Equality: The Story of the Anarchist Red Cross.*

#### DEDICATED

*To All Fighters  
uncompromising in their belief  
that freedom of thought  
of conscience  
is fundamental  
to a more wholesome humanity*

The Russian Revolution of 1917 released all political prisoners from Czarist prisons and exile. The various Anarchist Red Cross organizations which had been organized by Russian Revolutionary immigrants in Europe and United States for the purpose of moral and material help to those who were suffering in Czarist exile and prisons were disbanded. Many of these Red Cross workers returned to their Russian motherland to participate in the building of the new, free society. But the months of freedom in Russia proved to be short-lived. Freedom disappeared with the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution of November 7, 1917.

Once they captured the power of the State the Bolsheviks immediately instituted a reign of terror against all revolutionists whose thinking did not coincide with the official view of the government. Prisons again were filled with revolutionists, socialists, anarchists, workers and peasants. Additions to Czarist jails and new concentration camps had to be constructed to hold the victims of the new Russian State.

Freedom proved to be merely a propaganda catch-phrase used by the Bolsheviks to attain power. Freedom and the Bolshevik Revolution became antithetic and it was necessary to once again organize a Red Cross to help men and women who believed that freedom is and must be a cardinal and fundamental practice of the

Revolution.

However, it is not the purpose of this article to relate the story of the Bolshevik terror in Russia. Much has been written about it. This article desires merely to give the history of the reorganization of the Anarchist Red Cross.

As early as 1918 relief and aid groups for imprisoned anarchists were organized in Russia. In Moscow, in 1919, the Black Cross was organized to help imprisoned anarchists. The All-Russian Red Cross was reorganized in 1919 to help political prisoners of all revolutionary groups incarcerated in Bolshevik prisons. Heading this organization was Mme. Peshkova, the ex-wife of Maxim Gorky.

Because Russia in those days was isolated from the world around her, it was impossible for the aid societies to seek assistance for the world outside of "liberated" Russia. The first opportunity to tell the world of the new prevailing oppression was made possible when delegates from European labor unions visited Moscow for the convention of the Profintern in 1921. By the winter of 1921 Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman had left Russia. They had seen the "Revolution" at work. It was a far-cry of what they had believed it would be. No sooner had they arrived in Stockholm, Sweden, than Berkman issued a clarion call to all Anarchist groups and organizations in Europe and the United States to organize the Red Cross to raise funds for relief and aid of imprisoned and exiled anarchists in the Soviet fatherland. This appeal, twenty-five years ago, was the nucleus for the present organization known as The Alexander Berkman Fund for Imprisoned Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists in Russia.

In 1922 anarchists deported from Russia began to arrive in Berlin. These men and women became the spearhead for the drive to aid their imprisoned comrades in Russia. Uniting with the Left Socialists and the Maximalists these comrades organized the United Committee for the Defense of Imprisoned Revolutionists in Russia and functioned as such up to December 1926. In that year the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) decided to organize through its secretariat The Relief Fund for Imprisoned and Exiled Anarchist

and Anarcho-syndicalists in Russia. This Fund became the rallying point for aid to imprisoned comrades.

During the notorious Palmer raids era comrades in the United States had organized the Defense Committee and Aid Fund for Political Prisoners in United States. While working in behalf of the political prisoners in the U.S. the comrades received Alexander Berkman's appeal for aid to the imprisoned revolutionists in Russia. To help their comrades in Russia this committee immediately organized in New York the Anarchist Red Cross and affiliated themselves with the Fund in Berlin. The Anarchist Red Cross continued to function up to 1929.

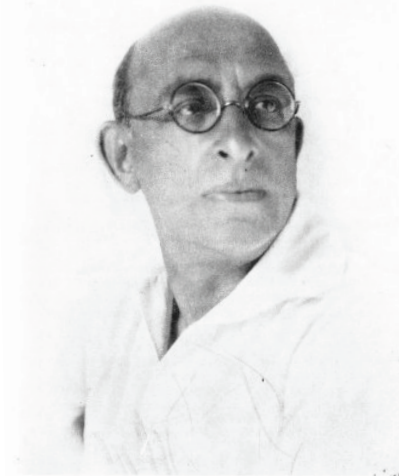
Also supporting the Fund were: the Radical Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Free Society Group, Toronto, Canada; International Committee for the Aid of Russian Political Prisoners, Cleveland, Ohio; Italian Groups and *L'Adunata*; Libertarian Group, Los Angeles, California; San Francisco Group, Jewish Groups from St. Louis, Detroit and Los Angeles.

In 1923 the Free Society Group was organized in Chicago. For two years this group worked in co-operation with the Russian Social Democrat Group to collect funds for Russian political prisoners. However, in 1925 the group began to work independently. They had contacted the IMWA in Berlin and had received names and addresses of imprisoned and exiled comrades and the group was initiated and soon thereafter the Group began to send aid: food, clothing, literature and money to the victims of Bolsheviki terror.

At the suggestion of the Secretariat of the IMWA to a few comrades in Chicago, a section of the Fund was organized in Chicago in 1932. The Section has worked closely with the Free Society Group ever since it was organized.

When Hitler became entrenched in Germany the Fund established headquarters first in Holland and later in Paris, France. Meanwhile the Bolsheviks were making it harder and harder for the political prisoners to have contacts with the outside world and as the bloody purges of so-called counter-revolutionists increased in tempo, the Stalin regime began an intensive persecution of any political

1921  
Alexander Berkman Aid Fund  
25th ANNIVERSARY  
Campaign for Funds for Political Refugees



Alexander Berkman  
ALEXANDER BERKMAN AID FUND  
2422 NORTH HALSTED STREET  
CHICAGO 14, ILLINOIS

*Cover from the pamphlet from which this text has been excerpted, a program for the 25th anniversary celebration of the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund, an organization which aided anarchists and other victims of the great terrors which swept the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution, condemning all rivals and opponents of the Communist Party to death, imprisonment, and the most brutal torture, and cutting them off almost completely from the outside world.*

prisoner who had contact with the world outside the Bolsheviki paradise. Contact with political prisoners in Russia was broken and still remains broken up to this day. What has happened to our comrades who were languishing in Bolsheviki prisons? Thus far we have no definite answer. We can suspect that either they perished from hunger and cold or were executed during those mass purges.

Alexander Berkman suggested, in 1935, to the Chicago section of the fund that a booklet on the plight of Russian political prisoners be published to acquaint the American public with the plight of men and women in Russian who dared to differ with the powers-that-be. Chicago accepted the suggestion, even though, it did not find its work completed until 1940. However, instead of a booklet, it published a 624 page book *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty Years of Terror in Russia (Data and Documents)*. This book is a monument to the victims of Bolsheviki terror as well as a source book for future historians of the

Russian Revolution.

In 1936, when all connections with the Russian political prisoners were broken, the Chicago section decided to give its work more of an international character. During the Spanish Civil War it energetically aided the anti-fascists, especially the CNT and FAI. With the defeat of the Spanish Loyalists the Chicago section began to aid the Spanish comrades in France, Africa, Central and South America. Intermittingly the Chicago section has sent large sums of money to the Anti-Fascist Solidarity, a group which has as its purpose the aid of the Spanish revolutionists.

With the occupation of France by Hitler our Spanish, Russian and especially Jewish comrades were in extreme danger. For the Spanish and Russian Comrades there was either concentration camps or slave labor; for the Jewish comrades there was either a living hell or death. The Chicago section gave financial help to these comrades.

The liberation of North Africa by the Allies made possible renewal of contacts with the Spanish comrades and aid was readily forthcoming to them from the Chicago section.

With the liberation of France and especially the complete destruction of the Nazi armies, the activities of the Chicago Section expanded to include the aid of comrades in such countries as Italy, France, Poland, Holland and at present even with Germany. Special attention is being given by the Fund to the Spanish comrades who are languishing in camps, sanitariums and hospitals in France. Following the example of the Chicago Fund are the Jewish Federation, the Mohegan group, Los Angeles Group, the Detroit Group and the "Why? Group."

The Alexander Berkman Aid Fund expresses its gratitude for the cooperation of the various organizations who have helped in this most noteworthy work.

\* *Letters From Russian Prison*. Published for the International Committee for Political Prisoners by Albert & Charles Boni, New York (1925); *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty Years of Terror in Russia (Data and Documents)* by G.P. Maximoff. Published by the Chicago Section, Alexander Berkman Fund (1940).

## RESOURCES

### **Critical Resistance 10 conference in Oakland, September 26-28**

In September 1998, thousands gathered in Berkeley, California, for the conference that founded Critical Resistance's movement to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC). Each participant, with their own experiences of oppression and resistance, watched as diverse struggles were unified: by humanity, hope, and the shared vision of a different world. We witnessed a vision of a world with truly safe, healthy, and whole communities; a world with unconditional access to self-determination and dignity for all; and, critically, a world without imprisonment, policing, and other forms of punishment and control.

To celebrate 10 years of Critical Resistance, thousands will converge once more, September 26-28, 2008, in Oakland, California, for CR10, a 10th Anniversary Celebration and Strategy Session.

Over the past decade, the movement to eliminate the PIC has faced tremendous challenges. We have witnessed rising levels of imprisonment in the U.S. and around the world. We have endured passage of the USAPATRIOT Act of 2001, the Military Commissions Act of 2006, increasing surveillance and policing in our lives. Meanwhile, US-led wars continue to ravage communities around the globe. We have witnessed the increased repression and criminalization of migrants and immigrants, people of color, young people, and queer communities. We have seen California prepare to embark on the biggest prison building project in history as the Gulf Coast region continues to struggle and to prevail in spite of ongoing neglect and militarization.

During this period Critical Resistance has also developed into a leading force fighting against the use of imprisonment, policing, and surveillance as responses to social, economic, and political problems. During the past 10 years we have:

- Brought the idea of the prison industrial complex (PIC) into mainstream conversations;
- Substantially increased collaboration of PIC abolitionists with organizers in environmental justice, anti-violence, and queer movements;

- Promoted prisoners, former prisoners, and their loved ones as the real experts on the system;
- Provided a platform and jumping off point for new organizations and organizing efforts; and
- Contributed to dozens of local and regional victories across the country.

We have seen only the beginning of what we can accomplish together. CR10 promises to propel this momentum forward, with united, strategic force. Through workshops, skill shares, performances, action, reflection and celebration, CR10 aims to reunite our voices, reinvigorate our collective refusal to be silenced and strengthen our collective will to build a world without walls.

### **The Anarchist Subsistence Fund**

The Anarchist Subsistence Program, operated by the Anarchist Black Cross Federation, seeks to provide material aid to those PP/POWs who come from our own anarchist/anti-authoritarian community. As with the ABCF Warchest, this program is designed to aid PP/POWs who receive little financial aid. However, it is unique because it exclusively assists those from the anarchist/anti-authoritarian community.

Over the last few years there has been an increase of anarchist/anti-authoritarian PP/POWs. Most of these new prisoners have support committees who raise awareness and funds on their behalf. Long held anarchist/anti-authoritarian PP/POWs have had their support overshadowed by these new cases. This program is designed to ensure that support for them remains consistent.

If you want to support this important program contact Philadelphia ABC. Make checks or money orders out only to: TIM FASNACHT, Philadelphia ABC, PO Box 42129, Philadelphia, PA 19101, [timABC@aol.com](mailto:timABC@aol.com), (877) 673-2658.

### **Visit us on the web**

Pictures and audio from our past meetings are posted on the web at <http://alexanderberkmansocialclub.blogspot.com>

## LOCAL RESOURCES

### **Prisoners Literature Project**

*Meets every Sunday 2-5 p.m., and Tuesday and Wednesdays 7-9:30 p.m. Drop by to answer letters and wrap books.*

2022 Blake Street

Berkeley, CA

<http://www.prisonersliteratureproject.com/>

### **East Bay Prisoner Support (EBPS)**

c/o Long Haul

3124 Shattuck Ave.

Berkeley, CA 94705

[ebps@riseup.net](mailto:ebps@riseup.net)

### **California Anarchist Prisoner Solidarity**

PO Box 22449

Oakland, CA 94609

<http://caps.anarhija.org/>

### **Critical Resistance**

1904 Franklin Street, Suite 504

Oakland, CA 94612

<http://criticalresistance.org/>

### **Anarchist Black Cross Federation:**

#### **Los Angeles**

PO Box 11223

Whittier, CA 90603

<http://www.abcf.net/la>

### **Centerforce LIFE Project**

*Mentoring program for youth impacted by incarceration.*

2955 Kerner Blvd., 2nd Floor

San Rafael, CA 94901

<http://www.centerforce.org/>

### **Trans/Gender Variant in Prison Committee**

*An abolitionist organization whose mission is to end the discrimination, medical neglect, abuse and violence experienced by transgender and gender variant people, and people with intersex conditions (TGI) in California prisons.*

1095 Market Street, Suite 308

San Francisco, CA 94102

<http://www.tgijp.org/tip/>