

## About this issue's cover:

Marie-Louise Berneri (1918-1949)

Marie-Louise Berneri was a revolutionary writer, editor, public speaker, and psychologist active in London during a period when Europe was engulfed by war and fascism (1937-49). Articulate, insightful, and accessible, Berneri had a readership that spanned the globe. Her influence as a significant critical thinker, radical, and humanitarian continues to this day. What follows is a short reprise of her biography.

A child of anarchist refugees forced to flee Mussolini's Italy in the late 1920s, Berneri and her sister grew up in France. However, her father, Camillo, was targeted by French authorities as a dangerous subversive while her mother struggled to eke out an existence without identity papers. Eventually Camillo Berneri was deported to Belgium and, in 1936 left for Spain to fight against General Franco's fascists. He was assassinated by a Communist operative in Barcelona in May 1937. Marie-Louise Berneri travelled twice to revolutionary Spain; once to visit her father and once for his funeral. She was then studying psychology at the Sorbonne but moved to London shortly after his death. In London she became a contributing editor for the anarchist journal *Spain and the World* (retitled *Revolt!* after Franco took power in 1939 and *War Commentary* after the outbreak of WWII). In addition to anti-fascist agitation, Berneri and her comrades also provided support to Spanish war refugees who were being treated as criminals by the British for having fought against Franco.

Beneri was very active in the anarchist newspaper *Freedom*. She regularly proposed multiple ideas for stories that were collectively produced or written by her without attribution. Not satisfied with editing, Berneri did everything from setting typeface to selling copies of the paper in the street. This served her well after she and three other *War Commentary* editors were arrested and charged with 'disaffection' (encouraging soldiers to disobey orders). Berneri was acquitted on a technicality, which left her to assume the helm at *War Commentary* during the nine months her comrades were jailed. After their trial, Berneri participated in public engagements across England and Scotland where she spoke out in support of freedom of the press and public opinion.

Beneri was a leader, admired for her intellectual generosity and dedication, who fully participated in whatever project she chose to do. She earned her authority as a critical thinker and commentator by emphasizing humanist values and real social justice. In her reportage, Berneri was respected for a rational style of argumentation that emphasised facts rather than polemics. Bringing her knowledge

of international economics and political alliances to bear on the issues of the day, Berneri targeted the rhetorical machinations of nationalism, demonstrating how the international war machine was propelled by imperialist ambitions rather than 'democracy'. Her words cut through the lies and hypocrisy underpinning the dehumanisation of all victims of war, from soldiers to workers to families on the ground, regardless of if they were the 'enemy' or not. For example, she pointed out the duplicity of American and British attempts to institutionalise segregation in troops stationed in England (as well as noting the racism against the colonised peoples across the British empire), while claiming to oppose fascism. Then, at the end of WWII, Berneri countered a growing revenge discourse against the German people, arguing they, like members of the Allied nations, were *survivors* of war, to be treated with compassion and provided with urgently needed humanitarian aid.

When Berneri spoke out against injustice, she was not only voiced the opinions of those few who agreed with her; she was also asserting influence, using her words to change the minds of others towards compassionate ends. Her power lay not only in her rational articulation of injustices, but also in her ethos of caring, which she demonstrated both in word, (writing and public talks), and in deed (volunteering to help Spanish refugees). In addition to her journalism, Berneri introduced the theories of Wilhelm Reich, who studied the mass psychology of fascism, to English readers. She wrote a book exposing the atrocities of Stalinism and an account of utopian literature, both idealistic and authoritarian, entitled *Journey Through Utopia*. The latter was published after her untimely death in childbirth at the age of thirty-one in 1949. Her loss was a tragic blow to the international anarchist movement.

Marie Louise Berneri was a woman of her time, yet in addressing the pressing matters of the moment, she asserted the timelessness of the anarchist values of freedom and empathy. The portrait on the cover of this issue was drawn from a photograph taken in 1945 (by P.D.) with Berneri standing in the bright sun by the ocean. It is clearly a windy day and her hair is somewhat in her face as she gazes directly at the camera. In representing a thinker such as Berneri, I hope to capture this quality of being in a moment that is also timeless, for her contributions to the movement embody both states of being, as reflected in her writings and her memory.

Kimberly Croswell