

REVIEWS

Mark Bray and Robert H. Haworth (eds.), *Anarchist Education and the Modern School. A Francisco Ferrer Reader*, Mark Bray and Joseph McCabe (trans.)

Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019; 352pp; ISBN 9781629635095

Part original research, part anthology, this excellent volume makes for engaging and instructive reading on a towering figure in the history of the international anarchist movement and the tradition of libertarian pedagogy. With a relatively broad thematic angle – Ferrer, his School, pedagogical views and their legacies, his revolutionary politics, as well as his own memorial afterlives – the book covers many grounds, in a lucid, lively yet erudite style.

The introduction opens with Ferrer's poignant parting words: 'Muchachos, aim well and fire without fear! I am innocent! *Viva la Escuela Moderna!*' (p1). Nonetheless, far from striking a hagiographic tone, it then sets out to dispel a few myths surrounding Ferrer. These relate to his pedagogical practice, with the reminder that despite being chiefly remembered as a pedagogical innovator, Ferrer is more aptly described as an organiser who put existing traditions into practice. As far as his politics are concerned, there is also the irony of the constant accusations levelled at him that he was fomenting a massive working-class rebellion, when he always occupied a 'liminal status' (p13) in the world of European radicalisms. The limitations of his pedagogical project are also stressed from the start, such as the lack of horizontality, reliance on corporeal punishment and discriminatory gender views.

The biographical overview of Ferrer which follows takes us through his private, public and posthumous peregrinations, through landmark moments such as his move to Paris in the mid-1880s and the encounter with his benefactor Ernestine Meunier, who funded his first school, which opened in Barcelona in September 1901 and was followed by *Modern School Bulletin*, initially an internal publication which soon became a subscription-based organ for the promotion of rationalist education. This leads up to his first arrest in 1907 and eventual execution after the 1909 Tragic Week, marked by global and cross-partisan campaigns to try and save 'the Spanish Dreyfus' (p3). The book sheds light on the making of 'Ferrer the freethinking, pacifist, pedagogical giant' and 'Ferrer the epitome of anarchist martyrdom whose school was the embodiment of libertarian pedagogy in practice' (p4), while offering nuanced assess-

ments of the great educator who ‘seems to have given his own children a surprisingly small amount of his time’ (p31) or, in the later sections, an exploration of ‘Anarchist critiques of Ferrer and the Modern School’, which broach sensitive questions regarding Ferrer’s alleged political neutralism and relatively affluent finances.

One of the many merits of this richly-documented and beautifully illustrated Reader is to provide the first English-language collection of Francisco Ferrer’s writings on pedagogy, the general strike and social revolution. *The Modern School* (published here in English in its entirety for the first time) and *The Modern School Bulletin* form the book’s central and longest sections. These are especially effective in presenting a more comprehensive and balanced overview than could ever be found in secondary literature, in the authentic voice of the man and his many local and international collaborators. These primary sources bring home the striking modernity of the pedagogical principles developed by Ferrer (leaving aside oddities about grading and cursory pigeonholing of pupils), and what can only be described as extremely naïve views regarding the post-General Strike ‘Golden Age’, where Ferrer envisaged the rich willingly giving away ‘their superfluous wealth’ and being happier ‘without seeing others suffer’. The faulty premise was possibly his assumption that men were fundamentally ‘reasonable’ (pp216-7).

The closing sections of the book are Bray’s overview of ‘Ferrer: the Martyr’, which covers the unprecedented 1909 global mobilisation, combining local snapshots and a truly global outlook with extracts from testimonies to Ferrer by many famous contemporaries. Haworth’s afterword, ‘Learning from Ferrer’, restates the contemporary relevance of his pedagogical ideas, under the headings ‘Theory and Practice’, ‘Spontaneity’ and ‘Desire’. These two sections show that there is much more work to be done on Ferrer, in the study of pedagogy as well as social and political history, examining his local and partisan appropriations and afterlives. It is quite surprising, and perhaps the result of the romanticisation processes examined in this Reader, that English-language scholarship on the subject remains relatively scant – but this is a brilliant, comprehensive starting point.

Constance Bantman, University of Surrey

Victor Serge, *A Blaze in the Desert: Selected Poems*, James Brook
(trans. and Introduction)

Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2017; 170pp; ISBN 9781629633824

Three decades ago, James Brook first translated poems by Russian-Belgian revolutionary Victor Serge (Victor Lvovich Kibalchich, b.1890-d.1947). That slim volume,

Resistance, included the 1938 collection of the same name and Serge's final poem 'Hands'. *A Blaze in the Desert* presents Brook's retranslations of that volume plus *Messages*, a previously unpublished manuscript assembled by Serge in 1946. His lyric, influenced by francophone Symbolism, has a visionary edge, akin to modernist leftists like Lola Ridge, Guillaume Apollinaire, Muriel Rukeyser, René Char, Nazim Hikmet, or Robert Duncan. In an invaluable introduction mapping the aesthetic and ethico-political foundations of Serge's verse, Brook also compares him to Kenneth Rexroth, Octavio Paz, and Benjamin Péret. By carefully attending to the specifics of his surroundings, Serge extends his personal observations into universalistic, even spiritual, meditations about humanity, social injustice, and the promise of social transformation. As he writes in his early 'Song', 'cities are built on sand / but the deserts will bloom again' (p84).

Such idealistic hope is tempered with what Brook describes as an elegiac tone, or 'mourning the living' (p11). Serge composed his poetry during periods of political imprisonment and exile for being judged 'counterrevolutionary'. He knew firsthand that revolution can perpetuate – not end – suffering. After an anarchist youth in Brussels and Paris, he had journeyed in 1919 to Russia, from whence his anti-czarist parents had fled. Committing himself to the Communist Party and founding the Soviet, he abandoned writing. In 1928, after a brief imprisonment for opposing Stalin's bureaucratic totalitarianism, Serge reclaimed the mantle of author to expose the Russian Revolution's disappointments and shortcomings. 'Revolutionary inspiration prevails over the betrayals and the disillusionments, art is at times its revenge', he wrote toward the end of his life.¹ *A Blaze in the Desert* bears out Serge's visionary revenge. His literary writings – encompassing poetry, memoirs, and novels – record outward historical actualities while also supplying 'testimony to the vast flow of life through us, whose essential aspects we must try to fix for the benefit of those who will come after us'. Although as a Bolshevik he was critical of anarchism, 'basically a doctrine of far more emotive power than intellectual', Serge implicitly aligned his art with anarchism's romantically anti-programmatic spirit. 'Poets and novelists are not political beings because they are not essentially rational'.² Humanity's common inner life is the emotional and idealist wellspring fomenting revolutionary desire, suppressed by Stalinism's scientific socialism. Lyric, as the voice of an individual passionately appealing to the collective, is especially equipped to reignite revolutionary desire and hope.

Brook's detailed annotations supply useful bibliographic information, as well as explanatory notes about the poems' literary allusions and historical references. To help readers situate the verse in relation to the poet's political career, Serge's biographer Richard Greeman provides an accessible afterword. These textual apparatuses intellectually augment the emotional power of Serge's verse (pp153-70). Poetically

speaking, Brook's reworked translations are superior to his earlier versions. Artfully, he condenses syntax and uses more direct diction to generate evocative images and thus creates less prosaic renderings. Consequently, English-language readers can connect better with Serge's language and discover more empathetic connections with his vision. The newly translated folio *Messages*, mostly written at the end of Serge's life during his exile in Mexico, are bracing. He is more forceful, even bluntly stating 'We have been betrayed' ('We have long thought ...', p122). Unsettlingly, he recounts refugees afloat on rafts while '[t]he watery eyes of sharks contemplate our children' ('Our Children', p105). Embodying a memory linking the Old and New Worlds, Serge sings anew of the global history of exploitation and resistance. He apocalyptically presages humanity's destiny of 'inexplicable unity', but only if everyone establishes an ecological harmony like what he observes in Native American rituals outside a Mexican church, where dancers are 'reconciled with the end of the world – and why not?' ('Mexico: Churches', pp115, 117) Indeed, why not? Victor Serge's anarchistic, poetic revenge on the mid-twentieth century's political betrayals still resonate and inspire today, carrying new significance.

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NOTE

1. Victor Serge, 'Mexican Notebooks, 1940-1947', Ros Schwartz and Trista Selous (trans.) *New Left Review* no. 82 (July-Aug. 2013): 35.
2. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1951), Peter Sedgwick with George Paizis (trans.), Richard Greeman (ed.), (New York: New York Review Books, 2012), p304, 142, 307.

Jean-Marc Delpéch, *Alexandre Marius Jacob, voleur et anarchiste*

Paris: Nada éditions, 2019; 218pp; ISBN : 9781092457308

Few figures have attracted as much attention in the history of French anarchism as Alexandre Jacob, the epitome of the irredeemable rebel. In this very readable volume, Jean-Marc Delpéch offers the definitive biography of a man whose life story had been told before mostly through romanticized tales (such as that of Bernard Thomas, published in 1970) or in bits and pieces through Jacob's own writings, and in the 1950, comparatively incomplete, biography by Alain Sergent.

Jacob has found his place in the Gotha of anarchism through his creation of the

‘Travailleurs de la nuit’ (the Workers of the Night), a gang of burglars, who specialised in the ransacking of churches and bourgeois villas in the French countryside in the first years of the twentieth century. Going one step further than Proudhon, who considered that property is theft, Jacob decided to steal back from those who stole from the people. He both theorised and practiced the most coherent – and least violent – form of illegalism, at a time when the anarchist movement was trying to find its way, torn between its individualist and collectivist souls. Jacob and his group – which included his mother – were not simple thieves like the equally well-known Clément Duval, or desperate robbers like the Bonnot gang. They applied to burglary the principles of modern Taylorism. ‘*Jacob & Co*, political enterprise of economic and social demolition’ (p64) was responsible for literally hundreds of cases of ‘individual reclamation’. The goal, borrowed from the capitalist playbook, was ‘to minimize risk and to increase profit while reducing expenses’ (p68). The loot was redistributed through a well-organised network of contacts, stores, jewellers, and a foundry for precious metals. A man of principle, Jacob would not rob the homes of people practising socially useful professions, such as doctors, writers or teachers. Indeed, having once realised they had mistakenly broken into the home of the novelist Pierre Loti, the burglars left without taking anything. Ten percent of the revenue would go to the cause. Jacob’s money helped to keep afloat the newspaper *Le Libertaire* and allowed the publication of *Germinal* in 1904, just in time for it to launch a campaign in favour of the burglars, who had finally ended up in the Republic’s jails. All in all, the odyssey of Jacob’s gang lasted only three years, from 1900 to 1903. But arguably, his place in history was secured in the two years that followed, when Jacob used his trial to demolish, through unrelenting irony and logic, the laws and the magistrates who presumed to judge him. Sent to the penitentiary in Guyana – a place few prisoners came back from – he attempted escape seventeen times before finally being freed in 1927. He died in 1954, by his own hand, to avoid the indignities of old age.

Delpech’s painstakingly researched biography is generous in its use of excerpts from Jacob’s correspondence and reports from police archives. It is followed by a short study, ‘Pour en finir avec Arsène Lupin’, aiming to dispel once and for all the legend that Jacob was the inspiration for the creation of novelist Maurice Leblanc’s famous character, the ‘gentleman-burglar’ Lupin. Finally, readers will discover with glee Jacob’s own deadpan style by reading his article ‘Pourquoi j’ai cambriolé’ (Why I burgled), published in *Germinal* during his trial, as well as various excerpts of his declarations during the proceedings. This is a very enjoyable, well-researched and well-written book, just waiting for an English translation.

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Marina Sitrin and Colectiva Sembrar, *Pandemic Solidarity: Mutual Aid During the Covid-19 Crisis*

London: Pluto Press, 2020; 304pp; ISBN9780745343167

Pandemic Solidarity is a collection of essays, primarily nationally based, discussing how various forms of grassroots, mutual-aid inspired, forms of solidarity have manifested themselves globally. The book takes the form of a series of narratives which grew organically from conversations, and existing networks, of Sitrin's, and her colleagues and friends, through a class that she taught on ethnography. This organic approach (described as a prefigurative collective, Colectiva Sembrar, in which it is sometimes not possible, or desirable, to ascribe authorship) means that the topics covered are eclectic. As well as themes that one might expect in such a collection, including food production and distribution, self-organised health (mask and protection making), and self-organisation and solidarity there are also discussions of prisoner solidarity, resistance to settler colonialism, education and teaching, and animal rights. This approach may initially sound disorganised but there are obvious connections between topics in terms of horizontalism and mutuality. Indeed, in her introduction to the book, Rebecca Solnit makes the point that mutual aid, solidarity and resistance are not generated by events, such as pandemics or crisis, but are eternal, inevitable, aspects of human societies.

Sitrin introduces the collection by reflecting on the structural inequalities that have defined the consequences and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic with the familiar metaphor that although we are in the same storm, we are not in the same boat. The assumption is that grassroots support and mutual aid exist globally so there is no need to foreground salient examples of solidarity in a limited range of countries. This is a truly global collection, with a concentration, and a centring on, the Global South (Rojava – NE Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Taiwan, South Korea, India, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe, Argentina and Brazil) rather than the North (Europe – Portugal, Greece, Italy and the UK, and Turtle Island – North America). Each of these chapters offers a unique perspective on social solidarity but several of the chapters are particularly instructive in challenging the centrality of nation states in pandemic narratives. Sahin and Abbas's chapter on AANES (Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria) shows how a model of direct democracy, on the fringes of what might be pejoratively called 'failed states', resolves itself into citizen democracy without a state, a 'de-commodification of life', (p5) which presented a horizontalist form of dealing with the pandemic. This chapter absolutely challenges the co-dependent narrative that the state is somehow a 'social partner' in crisis that has largely emerged in the Global North. Similarly, Turtle Island is covered by bergman, rabasa, Patchen and Özdemir who focus on indig-

enous organising but where the very refusal to accept a settler / coloniser state as a nation state is, in itself, enabling of collective resistance.

Other chapters in the book consider mutual aid and resistance. Özdemir's chapter on Turkey demonstrates how food production and distribution can be collectively re-imagined and organised to provide meals in the pandemic when the Government was barely acknowledging the existence of a crisis. Khudhur's interviews in Iraq, particularly around people who were not previously involved in organising, show the malleability of networks and resources, and the tenacity of communities. Chang's chapter on Taiwan is concerned with the intersection of communal practices with local, indigenous, knowledges. Similarly, Roy draws attention to classed, caste stratified, and gendered public health discrimination in authoritarian India, and Duarte and Lima also foreground intersectional discrimination in Portugal, and how anti-racist and pro-migrant movements challenged pandemic nationalism and historical colonialism. Finley's chapter on Italy, EP and TP's in Greece, and Howard's in the UK discuss online and offline networks of solidarity, and foreground the punitive nature of the state in 'non-pandemic', as well as pandemic, periods, particularly in terms of the treatment of migrants and prisoners. Piñeiro and Mason-Deese show the particular discrimination suffered by women and LBTQI people in the pandemic in Argentina and how art and education can provide points of resistance. Zettler raises the difficulties, and possibilities, of organising in fascist Brazil against a Government who, as in Turkey, India and Trump's USA, did not even acknowledge a crisis.

The decentred nature of this global collection of narratives is instructive in reclaiming mutual aid from state narratives around volunteerism and social partnerships that can disguise the co-option of individual activity by authority. The solidarity that 'Pandemic Solidarity' discusses is the solidarity of resistance to state authority to protect collective health. In the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic this was a compelling narrative. It even seemed, for some, to herald the possibility of a different, solidaristic and co-operative world, beyond exploitation. However, as the pandemic has progressed the nexus between health, capital and the bio-security state has been strengthened. Two chapters in this collection particularly foreshadow these developments. Monjane focuses on militarisation and the use of the Repressive State Apparatus in attempting to crush opposition to public health-based authoritarianism in Mozambique and South Africa. Shin concentrates on disability activism in South Korea and is perhaps the most critical of normative public health practices in drawing attention to ableist, public health discourses on social distancing. This has resonance in terms of the work of some grassroots anarchists (for example, South Essex Radical Media in the UK) who see the enhancement of state powers through lockdowns and vaccine passports as heralding a new state authoritarianism connected to Transhumanism and the Fourth

Industrial Revolution. This is an argument that we have some sympathy with (Preston and Firth, 2020) in terms of how the interests of state, capital and class intersect around COVID-19 inspired public health initiatives (that also allow for the co-option of grass-roots mutual aid). It's a further task to understand how pandemic solidarity (or what emerges from this) manifests itself on a global scale, how it disentangles itself from conspiracy theories to reveal real threats to autonomy and humanity, and how to take collective action but this remarkable book produced by Sitrin and Colectiva Sembrar provides a valuable starting point for these discussions and actions.

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David Hargreaves, *Beyond Schooling: An Anarchist Challenge*

London: Routledge, 2019; 242pp; ISBN 9780367187835

I started reading this book on 23 March 2020, the first day of government imposed school closures in England as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The timing could not have been better as, according to the blurb on the back, the book set out to explore 'how the education of our children and young people should be recaptured from the State as the country moves into a precarious future'. Although this is not entirely what Hargreaves gives us, the book will nonetheless be of interest to anyone beginning to think of education 'beyond schooling'.

Hargreaves, by his own admission, is not an anarchist. And this book is written for teachers and the wider public rather than academics. A former Professor of Education at Cambridge, Hargreaves was also, *inter alia*, Chief Executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, policy advisor to the New Labour government and a key figure in the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Inspired by anarchist ideas and principles, he brings this experience to bear on diagnosing the ills of state schooling and developing a vision of an alternative. All this underpinned by a sense of urgency and a conviction that conditions for radical change are more favourable now than they were in the 1960s and 1970s.

Much of the book comprises (often quite lengthy) summaries of other books. These include classics such as Paul Goodman's *Compulsory Miseducation*, John Holt's *How Children Fail* and Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*; historical accounts such as Edwin West's *Education and the State* and Phil Gardner's *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England*; and anthropological studies such as Harold Barclay's *People Without Government*, Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State* and James Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed*. In Chapter Two we get a skim across the surface of

anarchist ideas, focusing on the 'six founding fathers' (Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta) and two more recent 'stand outs' (Goodman and Ward). These descriptive summaries will no doubt be of value to the wider readership Hargreaves is aiming for, and the book might serve well as a primer for teachers.

The summaries themselves, however, are often generalised overviews lacking a detailed engagement with the author's educational ideas. At one point Hargreaves quotes Goodman's call 'to use the city itself as the school – in streets, cafeterias, stores, movies, museums, parks and factories' (p59). This is an idea that offers so much, and could have been used as a springboard to explore the pedagogical operation of social movements and infrastructures of resistance, very much 'beyond schooling'. But nothing more is said. The chapter on 'State schooling versus community education' is really just a generalised discussion of Kropotkin, whose vision of society Hargreaves finds 'unconvincing' anyway, with one single page touching on the idea of 'complete education' (p129). And for a book devoted to bringing anarchist ideas to bear on education, it was surprising to see no mention at all of figures such as Charles Fourier or William Morris.

Roughly half way into the book, Hargreaves poses a rhetorical question. This comes in the chapter on anarcho-capitalism in which William Godwin's defence of property rights is (misleadingly) compared to Murray Rothbard's. Hargreaves then tells us that 'the anarcho-communists, who believe in the abolition of private property, would have detested Godwin's line as much as Rothbard's. At least as a starting position, I know which side I am on – do you?' (p91). Indeed I do, and this points to a fundamental difference in perspective. Hargreaves is a liberal reformer, repeatedly stressing the need for gradual, incremental, piecemeal change, and selectively drawing on some anarchist ideas to help inform his own. From the perspective of an anarcho-communist, the proposals offered will inevitably appear modest and restrained.

What does Hargreaves propose? Essentially the slow evolution of flexi-schooling set within a post-work society. Hargreaves sees home education expanding and sitting alongside schools, which become resource centres offering specialist provision as and when needed. This will be a self-improving school system (SISS), operating in a market environment, in which educators become innovators offering real education choice. Something like a school voucher system will be in place to facilitate choice, but the SISS will also be characterised by voluntary collaborative partnerships between the diverse array of schools (including anarchist) that emerge. This is certainly a vision of something other than state schooling as currently exists. One wonders, however, whether the 'anarchist challenge' to move 'beyond schooling' might have gone further.

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