

# DISABLED COMMUNISTS AND ANARCHISTS VOL.2

Disability Action Research Kollektive





**Like many people in history**, when communists and anarchists are remembered, their disabilities often go unacknowledged, even though they likely deeply impacted their lives and perspectives. Disabilities should not be seen as a shameful personal failure but as a neutral characteristic within the natural variation of humanity. This is the second zine of brief biographies of some of those revolutionaries.

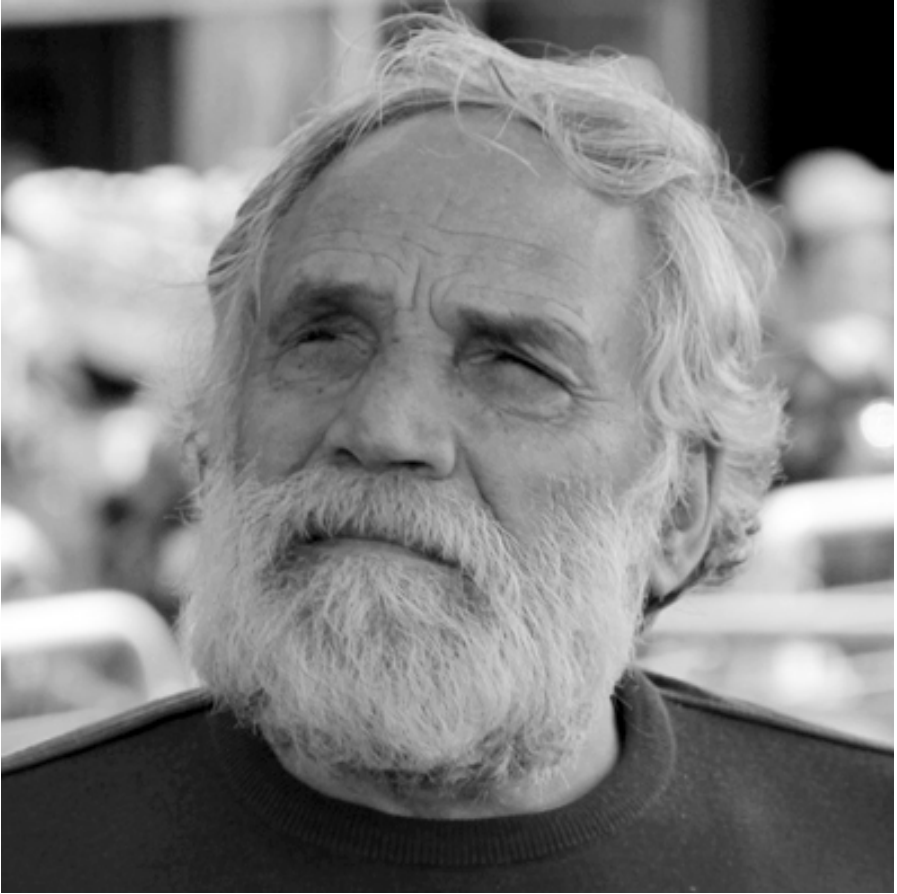
**Communism** has the goal of a stateless, moneyless, and classless society. Through political revolution or democratic capture, capitalism would be abolished. All private ownership and profit from farms, businesses, and factories would be collectively owned by society, and businesses would be operated by the workers themselves. This would be achieved by taking over the power of the state and using that to abolish the divisions between the owners and the workers. The state is seen as something that would wither away on its own over time, as it only existed to maintain exploitation.

**Anarchism** shares the same final goal of a stateless, moneyless, and classless society, but the methods of how to get there are distinctly different. Power is seen as inherently corrupting, and taking over state power is seen as inevitably leading to an authoritarian dictatorship. Once people have state power, they do not give it up. Capitalism and the state are seen as mutually reinforcing structures and so both must be dismantled, either through revolution or by building social structures that make the state obsolete.



**E.T. (Eugene Thornton) Kingsley (1856-1929)** described himself as “An uncompromising enemy of class rule and class robbery”. He also founded and led the Socialist Party of Canada. Kingsley was an organiser, a writer and a double amputee who wore prosthetic legs. Politically he was a Marxist-De-Leonist, which is an approach that believes in class struggle using militant industrial unions as well as a political party.

He was also a prominent proponent of “Impossibilism”, which points to the limited value of reforms under capitalism, as they stabilise the existing system. He was described by Canada’s chief wartime press censor as “an out-and-out red Bolshevik Socialist of pronounced literary capacity and unquestionably one of the most dangerous men in Canada.”



**Eşber Yağmurdereli (1945)** is a Turkish Marxist writer who was imprisoned for more than thirteen years. He lost his eyesight as a child and went on to study and practice law. He was arrested for allegedly founding and operating the Marxist-Leninist organisation the People's Liberation Party of Turkey. This resulted in being given a life sentence in prison, but he was released early after a campaign that collected a million signatures.

He has since been re-arrested for his speeches several times. He had an award-winning biographical play written about his life, called "The Scorpion". He said "True, those scorpions no longer harm our bodies much. But for centuries, there has been a scorpion on these lands that has been threatening our lives and honour."



**Joseph Stalin (1879-1953)** was a Marxist-Leninist Soviet dictator and one of the most influential figures of the 20th Century. Under his hierarchical centralised command economy, the USSR underwent a period of rapid industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation. Millions of citizens were executed or sent to forced labour camps. Millions also starved to death as a direct or indirect consequence of his policies.

While initially in a non-aggression pact with the Nazis, after being betrayed the USSR became a primary factor in the defeat of Nazi Germany. Stalin had facial scars from smallpox, and a webbed foot and didn't have use of an arm. "It is difficult for me to imagine what "personal liberty" is enjoyed by an unemployed hungry person. True freedom can only be where there is no exploitation and oppression of one person by another"



**Leslie Feinberg (1949-2014)** was self-described as an anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish, transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist. Feinberg identified as gender fluid, used the pronouns she/zie and her/hir and was considered a founder of the contemporary transgender movement. Zie had untreated Lyme disease which significantly impacted her work, which contained themes of disability, chronic illness and the intersections of class, gender and sexuality.

Feinberg's writing laid much of the groundwork for gender studies and zie was best known for writing the novel "Stone Butch Blues". Zie was also involved in the IWW union and was an active labour rights activist. Feinberg once said "My right to be me is tied with a thousand threads to your right to be you."



**Marinus van der Lubbe** (1911-1934) was a Dutch communist who burned down the Reichstag and was falsely denounced as a Nazi agent by the Communist Party. Due to industrial accidents, he was hospitalised for months and left mostly blind. Marinus unsuccessfully tried to set up a free library for workers and the unemployed.

He once falsely claimed to be the ringleader of a strike to prevent fellow workers from being punished. While he was a union and Communist Party member, when he set the Reichstag fire he claimed to be working alone. He hoped to inspire resistance against fascism, but it backfired and was used as a pretext to justify violently suppressing anti-fascists instead.





**Mike Oliver** (1945-2019) was a British sociologist, disability studies professor, disability rights activist, quadriplegic and wheelchair user. Frameworks like Marxist political economy and materialism were foundational to his theories about disability. He argued that the oppression faced by disabled people is rooted in the economic and social structures of capitalism and that disability was a social oppression produced by capitalism rather than an individual medical issue. He is remembered as the father of the Social Model of Disability, as he popularised it after it emerged from UPIAS which he was a part of. "it is an attempt to switch the focus away from the functional limitations of individuals with an impairment on to the problems caused by disabling environments, barriers and cultures" and "Not only must we make our own history, we must record it for ourselves as well otherwise it will not be ours."

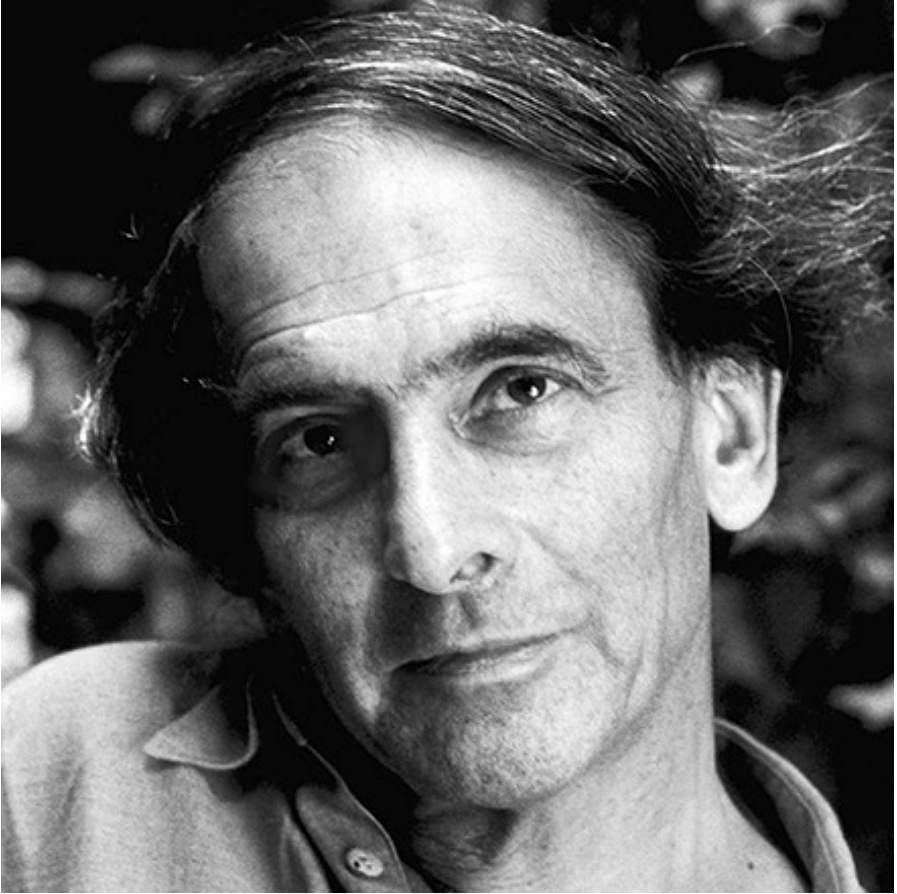


**Marta Russell** (1951-2013) was a writer and disability rights activist who grounded her analysis of capitalism in Marxist theory and the political economy of disability. She described her political position as “Left, not liberal.” and is known for the “Money Model” of disability which explores how capitalism creates and perpetuates disability oppression. She had cerebral palsy and was involved in the anti-war, civil and disability rights movements. Russell analysed topics such as healthcare, the prison-industrial complex, physician-assisted suicide, and poverty through the lens of disability rights and anti-capitalism. “Disability is a social experience which arises from the specific ways in which society organizes its fundamental activities. Work, transportation, leisure, education, and domestic life disable persons when they are not accessible. We are ‘disabled’ by the way a society is organized.”

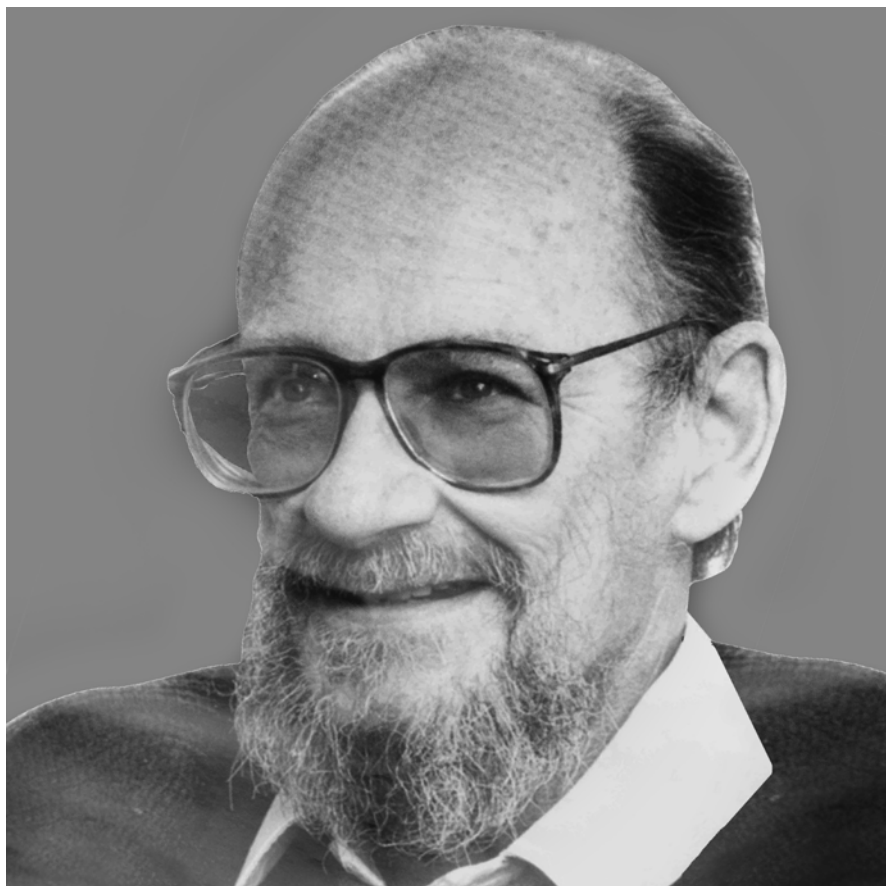


**Musa Piroğlu (1968)** is a communist politician of the Revolutionary Party and a member of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. He became a wheelchair user due to a spinal injury and went on to work as a history teacher. During a protest, he tried to stop water cannons being used on the crowds by blocking the road with his wheelchair. The police subsequently knocked him out of his wheelchair and arrested him.

Piroğlu has also spread awareness about the connection between the Turkish state and the mafia, connecting human and drug trafficking being used to fund political murders and dirty wars. “If we cannot evaluate the conditions in order to break this chain, one link breaks, and another comes into play. Then again, this revolving wheel only crushes the labour of poor people.”



**Raphael Samuel** (1934-1996) was a British Marxist historian, intellectual and anti-authoritarian activist. He founded the “New Left Review” which was an influential magazine in the 1960s. Raphael experienced ‘acute emotional and mental discomfort’ at multiple points in his life but didn’t explicitly use the word depression. He also founded the History Workshop movement that promoted ‘history from below’, focussing on the history of ordinary working-class people and grassroots organising. This innovative approach challenged traditional historical narratives, democratised historical knowledge, and reclaimed historical authorship from the ruling classes. “It is the little platoons, rather than the great society, which command attention in this new version of the national past; the spirit of place rather than that of the common law or the institutions of representative government.”



**Vic Finkelstein (1938-2011)** was a disability rights activist, writer and psychologist. He was born in South Africa and became involved in the anti-apartheid movement and was imprisoned under the Suppression of Communism Act. He escaped to England as a refugee and formed UPIAS, a powerful force in the UK disability rights movement, which created the Social Model of Disability. Of becoming quadriplegic, Finkelstein said: "Becoming a person with a disability is being branded with a stigma as surely as any slave carrying the mark of an inferior station in society. This, I was expected to accept and suffer for the rest of my life. But nobody seems to have caught on that 'stigma' is only the sanitised prejudice of ablebodied bigots who discriminate against disabled people, blame us for being treated differently, and then expect us to cope with the stigma imposed on us!"



**Yakov Batyuk** (1918-1943) was a communist and antifascist leader who fought the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. He was born to a peasant family, lost his sight in early childhood and went on to study law. During World War II he became a leader of an underground resistance movement, the Communist Youth League. He stole weapons from Nazi storehouses and supplied them to the resistance. Batyuk organised the sabotage of Nazi war equipment, which included poisoning cavalry harnesses and derailling a train. His secret printing house distributed thousands of leaflets calling for revolt. Batyuk was eventually captured, tortured, and executed by the Nazis only 10 days before his city was liberated from them. He was named a hero of the Soviet Union and had a school for blind children named after him.



**Aaron Bushnell** (1998-2024) was an anarchist and anti-imperialist who protested against the invasion of Gaza by self-immolating himself outside of the Israeli Embassy. He was a cyber defence specialist in the United States Air Force and was autistic. He discouraged people from using words like crazy, insane, or lame, saying that they had their roots in ableism.

His friends described him as kind, compassionate, and principled. He became increasingly critical of the military and US support for Israel's actions in Gaza. In his livestream, he said that he could "no longer be complicit in genocide" and shouted "Free Palestine" as he set himself on fire. He died from his injuries later that day.



**Alejandro Finisterre (1919-2007)** was an anarchist and poet who invented table football. He joined the Spanish Revolution early on but was severely injured when his home was bombed. He spent the rest of the war in hospital and had mobility issues for the rest of his life. While in a hospital in Catalonia, he saw many injured children and worked with carpenters to build the first 'foosball' table for them.

While exiled, he was arrested by fascist agents, he hijacked the plane by wrapping a bar of soap in silver paper and pretending it was a bomb. He won over the support of the crew who dropped him off in Panama. He said: "I believe in progress: there is a human impulse towards happiness, peace, justice and love, and that world will one day arrive!"





**Alex Comfort** (1920-2000) was a sexologist, gerontologist, poet and medical doctor who wrote "The Joy of Sex." He was an anarchist and a pacifist and was able to avoid being drafted due to his "crippled hand". He lost several fingers as a child while trying to make gunpowder for fireworks. As an anti-war activist, he campaigned against the bombing of civilian areas. He was a prominent member of the nuclear disarmament movement and was arrested several times for his non-violent protests. In later life, he had paralysis due to a stroke and continued to write on a manual typewriter using his thumb. He once said "Anarchism is that political philosophy which advocates the maximization of individual responsibility and the reduction of concentrated power regal, dictatorial, parliamentary: the institutions which go loosely by the name of "government" to a vanishing minimum."



**Emma Goldman** (1869-1940) was a Lithuanian-born feminist, anarchist, public speaker and writer who advocated free speech, free love, birth control, women's equality, and labour rights. She had depression most of her life, as well as endometriosis, which caused her significant pain and made it difficult for her to travel and work. Goldman founded anarchy-feminism and was at one time considered the most dangerous woman in America by the US government. Unfortunately, she was also a proponent of eugenics. She was arrested and imprisoned multiple times for her revolutionary speeches and was eventually illegally stripped of her citizenship and deported. "The history of progress is written in the blood of men and women who have dared to espouse an unpopular cause, as, for instance, the black man's right to his body, or woman's right to her soul."



**Errico Malatesta** (1853-1932) was an Italian anarchist and writer. His work may be among those most accessible for people new to anarchist literature. He spent much of his life exiled, imprisoned, or under house arrest. Malatesta was sentenced to death three times and was involved in both the Spanish revolt and the Belgian general strike.

Malatesta had a chronic condition that caused inflammation of his lungs, suffering bronchial attacks for weeks at a time throughout his life and eventually dying of pneumonia. “For two people to live in peace they must both want peace; if one of them insists on using force to oblige the other to work for him and serve him, then the other, if he wishes to retain his dignity as a man and not be reduced to abject slavery, will be obliged in spite of his love of peace, to resist force with adequate means.”



**Lola Iturbe** (1902-1990) was a Spanish anarchist who fought for the emancipation of women and for abortion rights. An untreated childhood fall left her with a permanent limp. Lola was a member of Spain's anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT) and an editor of anarchist publisher *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom) and Barcelona's distributor for the magazine of the anarchist women's organisation *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women). During the Spanish Civil War, as a correspondent for *Tierra y Libertad*, she travelled back and forth to the front line, where she would also accompany prolific US anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman on her Spanish tour. Directed to her women readers, she wrote: "Comrades: stray a little from the domestic setting, study, be bold, and enter our struggles publicly and prominently".



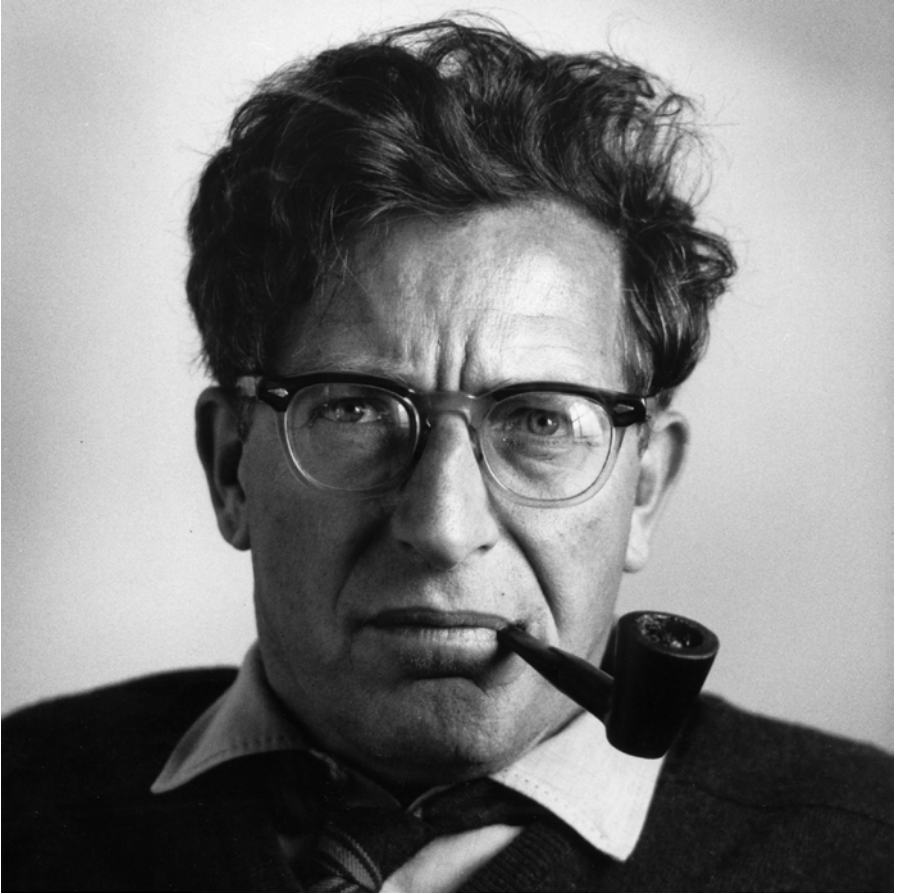
**Manuel Escorza del Val** (1912-1968) was the chief of the intelligence services for the anarchists during the Spanish Civil War against the fascists. He was considered the most powerful person in the CNT, where he oversaw executions, assassinations, interrogations, intelligence gathering and espionage. Manuel used a wheelchair and crutches; he had paralysis and restricted growth from polio.

He was described as honest, reserved, austere, headstrong, highly educated, and efficient. After the war, he moved to Chile and became a cultural journalist. He was greatly feared by his ideological enemies, who only dared to defame him after his death. A friend described him as “An incorruptible and implacable revolutionary.” He said ‘We shall show no mercy in dealing with fascists and neutrals’



**Nicolas Walter** (1934-2000) was a British anarchist, atheist, writer, and anti-war activist. He was a member of Spies for Peace, which broke into a secret government bunker to expose plans for nuclear war. A radiotherapy treatment led to chronic pain and becoming a wheelchair user. Nicolas was imprisoned for his peaceful protests against the Vietnam War.

He also campaigned against blasphemy laws and was involved with the secular humanist movement. He had a long association with the Freedom Press and was a regular contributor. "Many people say that government is necessary because some men cannot be trusted to look after themselves, but anarchists say that government is harmful because no men can be trusted to look after anyone else."



**Paul Goodman (1911-1972)** was an American writer, bisexual, humanist, and anti-war activist. His writing covered a broad range of fields including decentralisation, psychology, arts, civil rights, and war. His work had particular influence on Gestalt therapy, the 1960s counterculture and the free school movement. He actively protested war and promoted draft resistance such as draft-card burning. Goodman's daughter had polio and he had a prolonged depression much of his life, exacerbated by the death of his son. Goodman was extremely social, being described as having an eclectic and cantankerous presence, he loved to shock people and had an aggressive and sharp argumentative style. "Humankind is innocent, loving, and creative, you dig? It's the bureaucracies that create the evil, that make Honor and Community impossible, and it's the kids who really take it in the groin."



**Randolph Bourne** (1886-1918) was an American writer, radical, and anti-war activist. While not an anarchist, his work was influential on the movement because of his focus on individual liberty and critiques of state power. Randolph had a facial disfigurement as well as spinal tuberculosis which stunted his growth and impacted his mobility.

His essay "The Handicapped - By One of Them" is considered a foundational text in disability studies. He is most famous for saying "War is the health of the State. It automatically sets in motion throughout society those irresistible forces for uniformity, for passionate cooperation with the Government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd sense. "





**Silvia Secchiari** (1900-1959) was an Italian antifascist anarchist and self-taught musician. Her family were also antifascists and her son set up the first partisan resistance group in the region. Her family was subject to many violent attacks by fascists, including homicides, beatings, and arson. One attack set fire to her house while her sisters slept and another left her paralysed.

She continued to write many songs about the partisan resistance, eventually becoming a symbol of the movement. Secchiari lived to see the end of the fascist regime. She was best known for the song “Canto della libertà” or “The Song of Freedom”, lines of which can be translated as “The fascists believed their regime was eternal, but their time has come and gone”

# Would you like to know more?

## Free Essays

Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,  
*by Douglas Baynton.*

Impairment as a human constant : Cross-Cultural and Historical  
Perspectives on Variation, *by Scheer & Groce.*

The Fight Against Ableism, *by Itxi Guerra.*

Capitalism and Disability, *by Marta Russell & Ravi Malhotra*

<O/ No Power but Deaf Power \O>: Revitalizing Deaf Education Systems  
via Anarchism *by Michael Skyer, Jessica A. Scott & Dai O'Brien*

Are you an Anarchist? The answer may surprise you, David Graeber.

For a future made by us all-Questions and Answers about Anarchism,  
*by Rebel City.*

Life Without Law, An introduction to anarchist politics,  
*by Strangers In a Tangled Wilderness.*

The Communist Manifesto, *by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.*

Wage Labour and Capital, *by Karl Marx.*

## Books

Black Disability Politics, *by Sami Schalk (Avaliable for Free)*

Capitalism and Disability: Selected Writings, *by Marta Russell*

A Very Capitalist Condition: A History and Politics of Disability, *Roddy Slorach*

Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism, *Robert Chapman.*

Health Communism, *by Adler-Bolton and Vierkant.*

Anarchism - A Beginner's Guide, *by Ruth Kinna (+ all her other books)*

Able to Lead: Disablement, Radicalism and the Political Life of E.T.

Kingsley *by Ravi Malhotra and Benjamin Isitti*

The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development, *Michael Lebowitz.*

Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism,  
*by Ellen Meiksins Wood.*

## Free online resources:

(Primer and Q&A) <https://anarchy.works/primer.html>

(Library) <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/>

(Library) <https://libcom.org/>

(Library) <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/library>

(Multimedia resource) <https://www.radical-guide.com/>





This zine is produced by the **Disability Action Research Collective (DARK)**, which is a disabled-led group working to make disability perspectives, history, and research more accessible to a general audience. We are always looking for disabled (and non-disabled) volunteers to help write, edit and share their perspectives. Be part of something bigger than yourself, join us in the DARK today!

This zine features work by  
**Richard Amm, Sophie Turbutt, Alexandra Morris, Benjamin Isitt,  
Ravi Malhotra, Cassandra Perry & Elif Aybas.**