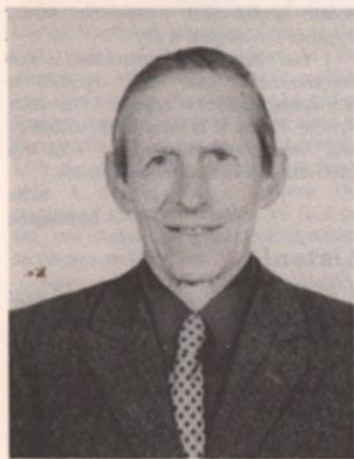


OBITUARY



Giovanni Baldelli

MANY readers of *Freedom* in the 1950s and early sixties will be sad to learn of the death of Giovanni Baldelli at the age of 72. He had been ill for a number of years and for those of us who were in touch with him the news was not unexpected, and though he courageously continued to correspond with some of his friends and to contribute regular articles to the Italian anarchist journal *l'Internazionale*, death must have come as a release.

His first encounter with anarchist ideas came when he went to France at the age of 15. He recounts somewhere that he was already at the age of 13 interested in Mazzini (and since the former revolutionary Mussolini had accepted the monarchy this had determined the young Giovanni's views so far as the fascists were concerned). But by the age of 15 he was interested in mysticism and in a book by one Molacorda he came across a quotation from Malatesta which he approved of; so he made contact with some anarchists as well as other anti-fascists in exile. He returned to Italy in 1932 but had been back only a few months when he was arrested for anti-fascist propaganda and sentenced to five months in prison. His next problem was his military service which he had no intention of doing. Thanks to his father's contacts (he was a fascist for purely business reasons!) he managed to get a passport and in September 1937 he was back in France. He wanted to join the

Spanish struggle, but by then — it was after the May Days in Barcelona — more comrades were coming away from Spain than going there and he was advised not to. He came to London at the end of 1937 and secured work as a French teacher at Frensham Heights in Farnham, Surrey, and later in Southampton. The Spanish struggle had now come to an end and several hundred refugees from the Central zone were landed in Britain by a British cruiser. In 1939 Baldelli was staying in London with some Spanish comrades, but was arrested and shipped off to Canada on the ill-starred *Arandora Star* which was torpedoed in mid Atlantic. He was one of the few survivors. Taken to a Scottish port on a Canadian warship, within ten days he and other survivors were put onto another vessel, the *Dunera*, and taken to Australia, where he was interned for four years. Such was the fate of a proven anti-fascist in the so-called War-Against-Fascism!

On his return to England he re-established his contacts with the Spanish refugees and with comrades of Freedom Press. He was also active in the Anarchist Commission for International Relations from 1968.

As far as I can remember he obtained a degree in science and earned his living as a teacher, though: it was as a writer, a poet and a playwright that he would have wished to devote all his energies. Thanks to the encouragement of our American comrade David Wieck, a volume of Baldelli's writings on *Social Anarchism* was published here and in the USA (still available from Freedom Press), a small volume of poems (in French) was published some years ago, and one of his plays was given two or more performances at the Garrick Theatre. But he did not manage to establish himself in the literary field, and I feel it was one of the great disappointments in his life. In *Freedom* in the '50s and early '60s (when *Freedom* was a weekly) he was a regular contributor. His articles were for many of our readers too philosophical, too theoretical, too difficult. By 1968 when the barricades were erected at the Sorbonne, and student sit-ins took over the LSE, and down in Angel Alley the squatters in 84b and the Freedom Collective in 84a were making the revolution in their own ways, there was no longer a public for Baldelli's moral and philosophical essays. It was so-called Action versus Theory. The Militants versus the Quietists.

The whole language changed. Just as in the commercialised sports we no longer talked of teams or crews but of squads, so in politics those who were devoted to and active in a cause became activists or militants. This violent language does not fit Giovanni; yet there he was at the age of fifteen having to leave his country, for a very minor political indiscretion,

and take a job in Paris; spending five months in prison at the age of nineteen for his anti-fascist propaganda; rounded up as a fascist by the British in 1940 and being one of the few survivors of the torpedoed *Arandora Star* who was then transported in another ship to Australia and kept in detention for four years. Giovanni Baldelli, who had learned and experienced in the first thirty years of his life more disappointments, more class struggle, more political jingoism than the budding Bakunins of 1968 had even talked about, matured into the anarchist philosopher, while most of the Angry generation disappeared into well-paid executives jobs. And that is why I am sure the anarchist philosopher took the prospect of death in his stride.

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SITTING in the train, moving fast back to London, after attending Giovanni Baldelli's funeral, Giovanni Baldelli was only a name two years ago. I knew of him as an anarchist, who had survived the *Arandora Star* tragedy during the Second World War. I came to meet him in Woolston after having been looking for him for a long time. From the very first moment I met him I was struck by his internal energy and sharp sense of humour. I cannot claim to have known him well, but at each meeting I felt more and more drawn towards him, fascinated by his mind and his spirit.

His physical illness was affecting and inhibiting his movements, his eyes carried the vitality. I sat next to him listening to the fragments of his life. A life of political commitment from an early age.

A life where poetry, nature and harmony played a part.

I met Giovanni during the course of a research on Italian anti-fascists. When I left his house after our first meeting, I felt charged by the strong, yet ethereal, form of his beliefs and philosophical thoughts. I grew to appreciate him during the following meetings.

Today he went 'back to nature' as he called death. The memory of him and what he has left me will be for ever. As one of his nieces said: 'To whom ever he came close to, he left something, so he is really not dead'.

Olivella Foresta

Editors' Note:

Giovanni Baldelli's daughter and son — Giovanna and Benvenuto — are proposing to edit a volume of their father's writings and finance its publication by Freedom Press. We feel sure that there are many comrades who will want to make a contribution to this project as a mark of their esteem for our comrade. Contributions should be made payable to Freedom Press. We will forward letters and details of the contributions to Giovanna and Benvenuto.