

Judaism and Anarchism Conference in Venice

Julie Herrada

2000

Anarchists from all over Europe and the Americas, as well as several from Israel, attended an International Study Conference on Anarchism and Judaism, held in Venice, Italy, May 5–7.

It was organized by Milan's Centro Studi Libertari Archivio G. Pinelli and the Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme in Lausanne, in collaboration with the Venice City Council and held on the University of Venice campus.

There were no registration fees or forms to fill out, so figures are not exact, but there were about 200 to 250 people in attendance at its peak.

The daily sessions, held in the university auditorium in Campo Santa Margherita, were conducted in Italian, French, and English (with simultaneous translations) and included papers on Utopianism, Messianism and Secular Messianism; Social Utopia and Jewish Spirituality; The Radical Jews of Poland; Judaism and Anarchism in Mitteleuropa: The Franz Kafka Case; Anarchism, Zionism and Anti-Semitism in the Netherlands; The Kibbutz Movement and Anarchism; and Jewish Anarchism and Communitarianism in the United States.

Sunday's session ended with a discussion of "Double Identity," with several anarchists talking about their Jewish upbringing and their activities within the anarchist movement. The session included talks by U.S. anarchists Audrey Goodfriend and Judith Malina, founder (with Julian Beck) of the Living Theatre.

The evening before the conference some of us, including several people who collaborate on the Fifth Estate, were walking the streets of Venice and noticed the windows of a bookstore spray painted with large, black, circle A's. The store was closed, but Russian language literature was displayed in the windows.

Without an Italian present to explain the meaning of the graffiti, we surmised that it was probably a communist bookstore. We also noted that posters advertising the anarchist conference pasted up around the city had been torn down. The next day, when we arrived at the conference auditorium, we saw someone had spray painted the outside of the building with mild anti-anarchist sentiments. During the entire conference, two carabinieri patrolled the street outside. At first, I assumed they were there to protect the anarchists from fascist or communist attack, but was told by someone better informed that the cops were patrolling to "discourage anarchists from violent activity."

Evening activities following the talks were held outdoors in the cloister of the Faculty of Architecture, and were the high point of the weekend for me. They included communal dinners, music (classical guitar, folk, classical, and klezmer), dancing, and Jewish jokes told in Yiddish and translated into English by Goodfriend. One of the highlights was a performance of the Living Theatre's play, "Love and Politics."

The evening atmosphere was warm and lively, with lots of conversation and interaction. I was able to meet and talk extensively with people with whom I had previously only corresponded, as well as meet some young and older people involved in spreading the ideas of anarchism.

The general consensus was that the conference sessions were too academic, without enough group discussion, and too removed from the contemporary anarchist movement. Nonetheless, it was a multi-generational, international group of anarchists meeting and exchanging ideas. The people I met and spoke with were interesting and

engaging, dedicated to education about anarchist principles, trying to live their lives based upon those principles, and putting forth a more truthful historic record.

The conference website can be viewed at <http://www.anarca-bolo.ch/ics1/>



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