Guy Aldred

Scottish Bakuninist and Anarcho-Communist from Glasgow
(1886 - 1963)

Description: Guy Alfred Aldred had worked ceaselessly at his propaganda, writing, publishing and public speaking, he took on injustices wherever he saw it. He had spoken at every May Day for 60 years except the years he spent in prison. (From: Glasgow Caledonian University)

Tags: scottish, british, anarchist, anarcho-communist, communist, bakuninist, journalist, publisher.

Quotes:

"Anti-Parliamentarism is now the recognized Socialism of the Proletariat." (From: Socialism and Parliament.)

"It is only the effect of this menace, only the fear of the power of the revolutionary agitator outside parliament, that persuades the capitalist class to tolerate the presence of Labor members inside." (From: Socialism and Parliament.)

"To dream of a society not founded on the 'law of constructive murder,' of a social state in which all are brethren and peace and good fellowship"
prevail, of a society founded on truth and freedom, is to become an enemy of the society that is, and to be regarded as a dreamer of the most fanatical type." (From : Studies in Communism.)

Biography:

GUY ALDRED, 1886-1963.

ORIGINS.

Though born in London and spending the early years of his life there it was Glasgow that he spent most his adult life and in Glasgow that he died. Because of his popularity in the City we can rightly claim him as one of the City's Sons.

Guy Alfred Aldred was born in Clerkenwell London on the 5th of November 1886 as a result of a short liaison at the beginning of 1886 between his father, a 22 year old Naval Lieutenant and a 19 year old parasol maker, Ada Caroline Holdsworth. Ada was socially unacceptable to the young Lieutenant, however he did the "respectable thing", marrying Ada on the 13th September 1886 but leaving her at the church after the wedding to return to his mother. On Guy Fawkes night the 5th November 1886 Ada gave birth to a son, hence the name "Guy", his middle name Alfred was after his father. Guy was brought up in the home of Ada's father, Charles Holdsworth a Victorian radical.

BOY PREACHER.

In 1902 at the age of 15 he printed his own leaflets and set about London as a "boy preacher" handing out leaflets and receiving ridicule and disdain in return. He eventually found work as an office boy with the National Press Agency in Whitefriars House. Soon he was writing articles for the agency and was promoted to position of Sub-Editor. At this time Guy met an evangelist called McMasters, together they founded the "Christian Social Mission". Five days after his 16th birthday the Mission opened with Guy as the "Holloway boy preacher", giving his
first public sermon however it did not go down too well with his audience nor the other preachers due to its non-conformist approach.

By persistent writing to the Reverend Charles Voysey - BA, Guy was eventually granted an audience on the 20th December 1902. The 74 year old well-to-do Voysey was taken aback when confronted with a coarsely dressed 16 year old working class boy as his letters had indicated otherwise. After cautious preliminaries on the part of Voysey they settled down to a discussion that lasted three hours. The friendship was to continue until the old man's death in 1912.

In January 1903 the Reverend George Martin an Anglican Minister arrived at Guy's home holding one of Guy's leaflets from six months earlier and asking to meet the "Holloway Boy Preacher". Martin was a gentle, compassionate and learned man who lived and worked in London's worst slums. Guy joined him in his work with London's poorest. Many nights were spent in long discussions in Martin's damp attic, the friendship lasted six years and had an immense impact on young Guy. At the end of January 1903 the "Holloway boy preacher" gave his last sermon from the pulpit and left the "Christian Social Mission".

AGNOSTIC.

During 1903-1904, Guy was speaking at the "Institute on Theism" but felt it was time to set up his own organization. He called it the "Theistic Mission", it met every Sunday and drew a considerable though not always friendly crowd. Guy was becoming known as a forceful young orator. He was also shifting towards atheism. August 1904 the meeting banner changed, it now read "The Clerkenwell Freethought Mission". Meetings from then on were on some instances extremely hostile. On one occasion the crowd charged the platform, knocked Guy to the ground and started to beat him, as he tried to regain the platform they again pulled him off with the police intervening to put an end to the meeting. Around this time he was reading "The Agnostic Journal" and became friendly with its editor "Saladin", William Stewart Ross, a Scotsman. It was at the Journal's office that he met another Scotsman John Morrison Davidson, these two men introduced Guy to Scottish affairs.
1904 Guy heard Daniel De Leon speak on Clerkenwell Green, this lead him to the "Socialist Labor Party". These meetings confirmed his belief in socialism, in 1905 he joined the "Social Democratic Federation". Though only nineteen Guy was an accomplished orator and a tremendous gain to the Socialist platform. 1906 he was appointed Parliamentary Correspondent for "Justice", the organ of the SDF. Guy, an anti-parliamentarian, approached the job with hint of cynicism. Also in 1906 he relinquished the job. Shortly after this in June of the same year he broke with the SDF. The split was in part due to airing his atheist views from the platform when the federation did not want religion, anti or otherwise to muddy the socialist message.

ANTI-PARLIAMENTARIAN.

He was now a confirmed anti-parliamentarian and socialist. In October 1906 the "Islington Gazette" published his "Revolutionary Manifesto" in which he proposed to stand at the next election but refuse to take the Oath. Guy Aldred was by now a well know speaker at Hyde Park. An eloquent speaker with extremist views his platform always drew large crowds. He was also contributing to several socialist papers and contributed to all thirty issues of "The Voice of Labor" an anarchist paper, this lead him to the anarchist club in Jubilee Street.

ANARCHIST.

While visiting the "Jubilee Street Club" during 1906 Guy became more acquainted with Anarchist ideas and with many Anarchists of note from that period. He wrote two articles for "Freedom", the Anarchist paper. The Anarchist Rudolf Rocker referred to Guy as one of the promising young men of our time. It was at the "Jubilee Club" that Rocker asked Guy to stand in for Kropotkin who was to speak but could not attend. Guy's leanings were towards Proudhon and critical of Kropotkin. By now Guy was speaking every night at different places in London and three times on a Sunday in Hyde Park. The Sunday meetings were under the banner of the "National Secular Society". In January 1907, approaching the age of 21, saw Guy leave the "National Press Agency" for the "Daily Chronicle", six months later he left the paper and journalism intent on being a full-time propagandist, relying on
collections and donations for his living, printing and any other expenses. At the "Jubilee Club" in 1907 he was introduced to "Rose Witcop" younger sister of "Milly Witcop", partner of Rudolf Rocker. The friendship developed but not to the pleasure of Guy's mother.

BAKUNIN PRESS.

In 1907 Guy in conjunction with John Turner and others formed the "Industrial Union of Direct Action". A union opposed to reforms its purpose was to organize for social revolution. In a short period there were branches in Dover, Liverpool, Leeds and Weston-super-Mare, plus six branches in London. Shortly after this Guy founded the "Communist Propaganda Group". The group spread rapidly, first with several branches in London, Wales, the North of England, then to Scotland with branches in Glasgow, Paisley, Fife, Aberdeen, Dundee and several towns in Lanarkshire. In 1921 all these groups federated into the "Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation". It was also around 1907 Guy, in the basement of his home, set up the first of his "Bakunin Press". Continued disapproval and resentment from Guy's mother about his association with Rose, she referred to her as "...that bloody Jewess", eventually forced Guy to leave home in January 1908. The two of them entered a period of extreme poverty with all its entailing problems. Rose Witcop was taken from the midst of the May Day parade of the 2nd of May 1909 to Queen Charlotte's Hospital where she gave birth to a boy. Due to the fact that she gave her name as Miss Witcop and did not wear a ring her treatment was cold and what the staff deemed fitting a fallen woman. Guy was not allowed to see her or receive any information about her until her discharge. The baby was called "Annesley", as a mark of respect to their friend the Reverend Voysey.

PRISON.

On the 2nd of July 1909 the Secretary of State for India, Sir Curzon Wylie was assassinated by Madan Lal Dhingra. On the day he was sentenced to death the printer of "The Indian Sociologist" was also sentenced to six months imprisonment. The Lord Chief Justice at the trial stated this was a warning that printing this sort of matter was a serious breach of the law. The "Times" in an article stated, nobody would dare print this sheet again. Guy, though not in favor of assassination and no
advocate of nationalism was very much against suppression of opinion. So he duly printed the August issue of "The Indian Sociologist" and was arrested on the 25th of August; the trial was set for September the 10th at the Central Criminal Court. Guy conducted his own defense, was found guilty and sentenced to twelve months hard labor. Sir William Strickland heard of the trial and sent Guy a telegram congratulating him on his stand for freedom, he also sent him Â£10. This friendship lasted until Strickland's death in 1938. Guy was released from prison on the 2nd of July 1910.

GLASGOW.

It was the "Clarion Scouts" that brought Guy to Glasgow. In 1912 he accepted their invitation to speak at the City's Pavilion Theater. The theater was packed His fellow speaker was "Madam Sorge" with "Willy Gallacher" in the chair. Guy then went on to speak at nine "Clarion Scouts" open air meetings with a final rally at the Charing Cross fountain. He also spoke at the Renfrew Street Hall of the "Socialist Labor Party" and accepted the "Glasgow Anarchists" invitation to come back to speak at a series of meetings. Guy's skill on the platform and his intellectual breadth went down well with the Glasgow Anarchists. The Clarion had asked him back to Glasgow in 1913 but Guy arrived six weeks early to speak for the Anarchists. During the 1913 Clarion tour Guy spoke at meetings in Paisley, Dumfries, Dundee, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Leith and Kirkcaldy and after that he spoke every night for two weeks for his newly formed "Communist Group". Guy was by now a familiar figure in Glasgow drawing large crowds at street corner meetings throughout the City. 1914 saw Guy back in Glasgow to speak for the Anarchists on May Sunday. It was a grand affair, twenty thousand people with representatives from over 100 organizations set off from George Square accompanied by bands, banners, drums, whistles and singing they merrily marched their way to Glasgow Green.

COURT MARTIAL & PRISON.

In the early hours of April 14th 1916 a police sergeant called at Guy's London home and asked if he had received his call-up notice. Guy stated he had not and did not expect to receive the said notice as he was a married man. The sergeant asked for proof. The obvious proof, the presence of Rose and the child Annesley was not
accepted. Guy and Rose on a matter of principle had no certificate to offer. Without summons or warrant Guy was arrested. He was charged with failing to report for Military Service, in spite of the fact that he had never been asked, and as a married man he was not yet due for service. He appeared at West London Police Court later that day. The Magistrate expressed surprise at the informal nature of Guy's arrest, but said that he "was here anyway". Scott Duckers acting for Guy stated that Guy was a married man by Scots Law of Habit and Repute and was not due to receive his call-up with the present batch. The case was adjourned until the 27th April. Guy continued his anti-war campaigning. The resumed hearing was brief. The Magistrate had still not been advised on Scots marriage law so the case was again adjourned until May 4th. When the Court convened on the 4th of May Guy conducted his own defense. The Magistrate fined him £5 and handed him over to the military authorities. He was taken under escort to Davis Street Barracks. His treatment at the Barracks was typical of the way the military treated conscientious objectors, brutal to say the least. On May 16th Guy was handed a sheet of paper on which to write his defense. It was a long and passionate defense based on his principles and beliefs. This his first Court Martial was to be held on May 17th. After the Court Martial he was held in his cell for two days before sentence was pronounced, six month military detention. On May 26th 1916 Guy appealed against his sentence. The Commanding Officer turned it down. On Monday 16th June Guy was ordered to parade, he refused and was taken before the Colonel who remanded him for court martial (his second). This took place at Fovant Camp on Tuesday 27th June. Guy's defense was that he was not a soldier but a civilian since he never received call-up notice. He was found guilty and sentenced to nine months hard labor. Later at a tribunal Guy was granted a "Certificate of Discharge". On the 4th of July 1916 Guy was moved to Winchester Prison then on August 25th he was transferred to the village of Dyce in the north of Scotland where a camp of tents had been erected in a granite quarry on a sea of mud. In these work camps a total of sixty nine conscientious objectors died. Guy walked out of the camp and returned to London but on the 1st of November he was arrested and sent to Wormwood Scrubs prison. Despite his having a Certificate of Discharge from the Army dated September 21st Guy would face another two cases of Court Martial and a further two years six months hard labor. March the 28th 1917 Guy was released from prison and taken under escort to Exeter Military Camp, his Certificate of Discharge ignored. He was given another order but he refused and was confined to
the guardroom. Due to filthy conditions in the Guardroom Guy contracted scabies. He was returned to Deepcot Military Camp at the beginning of May then on the 9th of May he was ordered to parade which he refused and was therefore remanded for Court Martial. In spite of his Certificate of Discharge, he was deemed a soldier and went on to face his third Court Martial. It took place on the 17th of May 1917 with the very short proceedings resulting in Guy being sentenced to 18 months hard labor and sent to Wandsworth Prison. During this period there had been considerable unrest and protest by the conscientious objectors in the labor and work camps and in prisons. Wandsworth was probably the worst from the point of view of the authorities. A work and discipline strike had been planned. The ringleaders which included Guy were sentenced to 42 days 'No.1' punishment. This consisted of 42 days solitary confinement with 3 days on bread and water and then 3 days off while locked in a bare unheated basement cell. After 3 days they were transferred to Brixton Prison, from their arrival at Brixton they continued their struggle against cruel and unjust treatment of conscientious objectors.

1918 August the 20th Guy, with two others, their sentences served according to a government ruling should have been returned to their respective Army Units for formal dismissal. Instead they were transferred to Blackdown Barracks, Farnborough where they were given an order which they refused and were once more on remand for Court Martial. Guy Aldred's fourth. Throughout his terms of imprisonment Guy managed to write and was able to smuggle out several articles which were published in his paper the Spur. In his absence the articles edited by Rose Witcop.

Guy's fourth Court Martial saw him speak for himself and the other two prisoners. In spite of showing that their sentences were in contravention of the Army Act and other illegalities in their treatment, a few days later he received a further two years hard labor. During the short period between August and September 1918 Guy managed to have several articles smuggled out and published in the Spur. Among these were "All for the Cause", "Shall we Deny", and "Militarism and Woodland". Another article smuggled out was "Socialism, Unity, and Reality". It was read at the Brixton branch of the ILP on the 14th of February 1918.

GLASGOW AGAIN.
On January the 7th 1919 Guy was released on license and was expected to make his own way back to Wandsworth Prison to be re-admitted on the 3rd of February. Instead he boarded a train for Glasgow. He said he was attracted to Glasgow by its citizen's truculent attitude, rebellious spirit and disrespect for leaders. The Glasgow Anarchists held a welcome meeting in St Mungo Halls, York Street, where Guy spoke on "The present struggle for liberty". The following month he spoke again in Glasgow then on to Wales, back to London; speaking at the Clapham Labor Party, Walthamstow British Socialist Party and then moving north again touring the North of England and Scotland as far north as Aberdeen. He returned to London and on the 10th of March and while speaking on Clapham Common he was arrested and taken to Wandsworth Prison. He stated that he would not eat or work until he was released from his illegal and vindictive imprisonment. In Guy's absence trouble at Wandsworth had not abated, he arrived back in the middle of an inquiry and continued his strike as he said he would. He was released after 4 days, that evening he was back on Clapham Common.

BAKUNIN HOUSE.

A conference under the auspices of the ILP and the BSP formed a "Hands of Russia" committee and on this platform Guy Aldred spoke with Bertrand Russell. Prior to 1921 the words "Communist", "Socialist" and "Anti-parliamentarian", went hand in hand. It was only after that date, after the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain that you had to differentiate. At the time of leaving prison Guy associated himself with the newly formed Communist League, becoming its organizer and editor of its paper "The Communist". Guy was now working ever closer with Glasgow Anarchists, who had their head quarters in an old Victorian terraced house which they called "Bakunin House", it remained an open political center for about twelve years. Guy and his colleagues continued to strengthen the anti-parliamentary groups especially in Glasgow.

SINN FEIN TACTIC.

The "Glasgow Communist Group" produced its own paper "The Red Commune" and in February 1921 it carried an article by Guy called the "Sinn Fein Tactic". This was a reference to the tactic of standing for election but not swearing the oath or taking
your seat. Because of the times, the authorities took the term "Sinn Fein" very seriously. On March the 2nd Guy's London home was raided by the police and special branch, after four hours searching they found nothing. Never the less they decided to arrest Guy, who pointed out that they were acting on a Glasgow Magistrate's Warrant and it was not valid in London. They took him and locked him up anyway and three days later formally arrested him in his cell. The Glasgow police also raided Bakunin House arresting Jane Patrick - the secretary, Douglas McLeish - group member and Andrew Fleming a printer. Guy Aldred was charged with conspiring with Patrick and McLeish to "excite popular disaffection, commotion, and violence to popular authority". They made a formal appearance before the Sheriff on March the 7th and were remanded in custody for two weeks before appearing before Lord Chief Clerk who released Andrew Fleming on Â£200 bail, Douglas McLeish and Jane Patrick on Â£150 bail each but remanded Guy Aldred in custody. He remained in custody until the trial at Glasgow High Court on June 21st 1921. The jury took a few minutes to reach a guilty verdict. Lord Skerrington passed sentence; Guy Aldred 1 year, Jane Patrick 3 months, Douglas McLeish 3 months, Andrew Fleming, 3 months and a fine of Â£50 or another three months. Guy Aldred and Douglas McLeish went to Barlinnie Prison while Jane Patrick and Andrew Fleming were sent to Duke Street Prison. Guy served the full year plus the four months remand, the authorities stated that the remand did not count, the first time ever.

FAMILY PLANNING.

December 22nd 1922 Guy was prosecuted for publishing Margaret Sanger's family planning pamphlet "Family Limitation". The authorities deemed it an attack on the nation's morals. Conducting his own defense, he called as a defense witness Sir Arbuthnot Lane, consultant surgeon at Guy's Hospital London. Sir Lane stated that every young couple about to get married should have this pamphlet. Never the less, the Magistrate, "in the interest of the morals of society", ordered the pamphlet to be destroyed. Rose Witcop continued covertly to produce it.

GLASGOW GREEN.

Guy Aldred brought out a new paper, The Commune, it appeared on May 1923. One
of its tasks was to challenge the Glasgow City Council on the matter of free speech on Glasgow Green. On April 13th 1916 Glasgow Corporation passed a bye-law withdrawing the right of assembly on the Green, but it was not enforced until 1922 and then challenged by John MacLean, Guy Aldred and others. There were numerous attempts to have the bye-law repealed, it was not until March 3rd 1932 that the struggle found success.

In 1933 Guy left the Anti-parliamentary Communist Federation, he was later to form the Glasgow Townhead Branch of the ILP formed the United Socialist Movement. The group met in a hall in Stirling Road with the indoor meetings being held on a Wednesday and Sunday with a fund raising social on Fridays. Guy worked under this banner for the next thirty years. The Group would use elections to discredit the ballot box. At one election Guy managed to get nominated as candidate for 14 of the city's 37 wards managing to get over a thousand votes. An astonishing result as a referendum on less than half the city.

FREE ADVICE.

Guy always lived on the very edge of poverty, never taking fees for speaking, relying on money from sales of papers and pamphlets. Around this time he opened a secondhand book shop in Buchanan Street. No business entrepreneur he was more inclined to "lend" rather than sell books was soon left without stock in the shop and had to close. He opened an "Advice Bureau" in a dingy little office in Queen Street; with no toilet, no lighting and no heating and from here he offered legal advice, letter writing and typing. He never charged leaving it to the client to make a donation. Most of the clients being poor and in debt never left a donation or at most a shilling (10p). Financially it was a failure but was possibly the forerunner of today's Citizen's Advice Bureaus.

STRICKLAND PRESS.

Sir Walter Strickland died on August 1938 having left most of his money to peace causes of which Guy was the executor. Due to Strickland's hatred of Imperial Britain most of his money was invested in countries that would be at war with Britain before the will was probated. Guy received Â£3,000, with this he bought some
secondhand printing machinery and Bakunin Press - renamed Strickland Press in memory of Sir Walter - moved into 104-106 George Street Glasgow. Strickland Press set about republishing many of Guy's pamphlets and the Word, which would appear every month for 25 years, for 22 years of this period a free copy of the Word was sent to every Labor MP.

POST WORLD WAR 2 ACTIVITIES.

At a meeting on 7th of April 1946 in Central Halls Glasgow Guy put forward his ideas for world government. His office at George Street became the headquarters of the World Federalists, some Anarchists objected to his use of the word "government".

In May 1945 Guy was asked to stand as a "peace candidate" by the Scottish Union of Ex-service Men and Women. The election was July 5th 1945 and Guy stood as 'Independent Socialist'. During the campaign Guy sometimes addressed three meetings on the same day but in spite of this he polled only 300 votes and Labor won a landslide victory across the country. In the Bridgeton bye-election on the 29th of August 1946 Guy again stood as Independent Socialist against four other candidates. Although the ILP won, Labor, still running high was 2nd and Guy this time polled 405 votes. Another bye-election in January 1947; the district of Camlachie, a win for the Conservatives, this time Guy gained a few more votes and came in above the Liberals. Guy stood in three more elections, February 1950, October 1951, and November 1962.

During the 1950s the Word had a fairly good circulation by postal subscription around Glasgow and Lanarkshire, but Strickland Press was always in financial trouble. A problem that aggravated the situation was the Scottish Typographical Association's refusal to allow suppliers to serve Strickland Press because it employed women. This was not true as nobody was employed, it was a working partnership of two men and two women and was in no financial position to employ anybody. The late 50s and early 60s saw the demolition of large tracts of Glasgow and the premises in George Street were due for demolition. The building was more or less pulled down around his head as Guy sat tight, with no offer of alternative premises, trying to continue in a building that leaked, had plaster falling on the
printing machinery and began to smell foul. Eventually the council, in February 1962, gave him the keys of a small shop in Montrose Street and the Press moved in on March 1962. Guy still addressed meetings on the first Sunday of every month in the Central Halls Bath Street and on occasions spoke at the Workers Open Forum in Renfrew Street Halls and he also continued to take on cases of personal injustice, all without a fee. At the age of 76 Guy stood for the Woodside District in the general election of Thursday 22nd of November 1962. He had spoken every night of the campaign plus interviews and questions while continuing with the next issue of the Word. Sadly he only polled 134 votes. The cold damp fog of the November weather, cold stuffy halls and excessive work load, the press physically falling apart and mounting debts, was beginning to take its toll. As a very cold winter moved slowly on to February 1963 Guy caught a cold but continued to work. His condition deteriorated and at one point was taken to hospital but signed himself out next day. Informed that he had a heart condition and warned against public speaking, he continued his monthly meetings. A compromise was made, he would sit at home and record his speeches and have them played at the meeting but Guy decided that if he could sit at home for an hour speaking into a microphone he could sit for an hour on the platform. His last meeting on Sunday the 6th of October 1963 left him physically exhausted. On Wednesday the 16th he was admitted to hospital, he died on Thursday the 17th of October 1963.

Guy Alfred Aldred had worked ceaselessly at his propaganda, writing, publishing and public speaking, he took on injustices wherever he saw it. He had spoken at every May Day for 60 years except the years he spent in prison. He never once asked for a fee nor sought personal gain, throughout his 62 years of campaigning his principles never faltered.

Some of the writings of Guy Aldred.

Posted by John Couzin.

The book Radical Glasgow.

The website Radical Glasgow.
Chronology :

November 05, 1886 : Guy Aldred's Birth Day.

October 16, 1963 : Guy Aldred's Death Day.


Links :

• Anarchy Archives: Guy Aldred Archive
  http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/aldr ed/index.html

• Anarchist Library: Guy A. Aldred
  https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/guy-a-aldr ed

• Wikipedia: Guy Aldred
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Aldred

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