

Obituary Manolo Gonzalez

Lawrence Jarach & artnoose

2004

Manolo Gonzalez was born in Spain in the late 1920s, escaped from Franco with his anarchist family in 1939, and eventually settled in the SF Bay Area, where he wrote, and taught at the University of San Francisco as well as briefly at New College of California.

Nothing like this should ever happen. We found out that long-time Contributing Editor Manolo Gonzalez had died when issue #58 came back to us marked “Return to Sender. Deceased.”

I first met Manolo when we both lived in San Francisco. Jason gave me his phone number, I called him up, and we made a date to meet at his apartment. I spent the next five hours visiting as we got to know each other. My then-partner joined us after her workday ended, and Manolo served us tea and cookies. Hovering over us, among the stacks of books and papers from his long career as an academic, was that famous (probably posed) photo by Robert Capa of the Spanish Republican soldier falling backward as he is shot. It was probably three feet tall and five feet long.

We spoke of his early childhood in Barcelona and his experiences in pre-school from 1936–38, of how one day a Basque friend came to school with what Manolo thought was a toy gun and grenade; they turned out to be real. The head of the school had some serious words with the little girl’s parents (she eventually wound up living in the Bay Area, “forgetting” the entire episode when Manolo brought it up while visiting decades later). Another person who chose to forget those initially exhilarating and then devastating times was Manolo’s mother, who can be seen in another famous photograph — the one of the several women militia members marching arm in arm in Barcelona. When I asked which miliciana she was, he answered “The most beautiful one.”

A staunch anti-cleric (as befit his Catalan anarchist upbringing), in later years he would find a job teaching Latin American history at the University of San Francisco, a private Jesuit university. “The Jesuits are all Marxists,” he told me. “Liberation Theology is just a clever way of continuing what Castro and Che started.” Not only that, but most of them were gay as well. “When they go on vacations or sabbaticals to Central and South America, they hang out naked on the beaches and have sex with each other and with local boys.” While I don’t find either story to be too far-fetched, knowing his antipathy toward the Church makes me somewhat skeptical. At least regarding the part about the beaches.

After I moved to the East Bay and started up the anarchist study group, Manolo would often come to our weekly discussions, especially enjoying when we studied the Spanish Revolution. It was wonderful to have as part of our group someone who’d lived through it, whose parents had been active militants. That kind of continuity is something that is sorely lacking among today’s anarchists.

Manolo came to every party I hosted. He seemed to brighten up in the company of so many younger people, temporarily able to forget the many physical ailments and frailties brought on by his old age (kidney trouble is what I remember most).

After he moved to Daly City, Manolo fell out of touch with most of the things I am involved in. I had to call to remind him of the annual Bookfair, and he was usually too exhausted after making it up to San Francisco to attend the BASTARD conference. Last year before the Bookfair, I called him to let him know about it, but there was never any answer. I didn’t know whom to call to find out if he was doing poorly, and that was how I left it. Seven months later, the last issue of the magazine came back to the PO Box. As I said, nothing like that should ever happen. I miss his laughter and his sly smile, his temper and his graciousness, his generous and gregarious spirit.

As I used to say whenever we parted, *salud y anarquia, compañero*.

— Lawrence Jarach

I was at the Underground Publishing Conference in Bowling Green Ohio in the warm, sticky, Midwestern summer of 2000. While socializing on the front porch on the night before the conference, I found myself in an only somewhat-interesting conversation. Out of the corner of my half-listening ears, I heard someone behind me mention “...Anarchy Magazine...” and “...made-up writers.” Abruptly, I disengaged from whatever conversation I was in and turned around. I knew a couple of people on the AJODA staff at the time, so I was interested in slyly discovering what was being said about them.

“Oh,” I said to the guy doing the talking, “what magazine are you talking about?”

“Anarchy Magazine,” he said, “Have you ever heard of it?”

“Hmm, yeah,” I replied, “What about it?”

He had a couple complaints, but the one that grabbed my attention was the accusation that all the articles in the magazine were really only written by one or two guys who used pseudonyms to make it look like they had a big editorial staff . “ I mean, this guy ‘Manolo Gonzalez,’” he ranted, “is a totally made-up person! He’s some young guy pretending he was alive during the Spanish Civil War! His chronology is all wrong!”

I let him rant for a bit about Manolo, and when he seemed to be done, I said, “Um, well, actually he is a real person.”

“Really,” he said, “and how do you know that?”

“Well, because I’ve met him,” I said, “He comes to my weekly anarchist study group sometimes. And I’ve hung out with him at parties.”

“Oh, so he’s a young guy then, right?” asserted Mr. Skeptic.

“No, he’s a grandfather,” I corrected, “He’s definitely old enough to have been a child during the War.”

“Well, his chronology’s inconsistent,” he added.

“Do you have chronologically consistent memories of when you were a child?” I asked.

That was basically the end of the conversation that evening. After all, I had kind of shut him up in front of the half-dozen people he had been ranting to. Later on in the conference, the skeptic told me he had been glad to have that conversation with me. I told him I would send Manolo his regards when I saw him next, and that maybe they could get together if Mr. Skeptic ever came to San Francisco. (Yes, I was laughing a little when I said it.)

I did tell Manolo the next time I saw him. He laughed very hard at the story. He tapped on his own arm — “Look! I’m a real person! How much more real do I have to get? It was a war! I remember it! When you live through something like that, you don’t forget it!”

And I never forgot this story.

— artnoose

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