

'THE FAMILY'

Pa Chin's Chinese anarchist novel

By Meg Keene

Family, by Pa Chin. Anchor Books, \$2.95.

Family is Pa Chin's semi-autobiographical novel about growing up in China in the 1920's and breaking out of the family and society. The book contains a fine explication of basic anarchist beliefs and their application. It also contains valuable information about China in that turbulent period.

Pa Chin was one of the most popular modern authors of China. He depicted real situations, and showed people a possible way to behave with integrity. His

heroes and heroines were all anarchists—a fact he was forced later, by the Chinese Communist government, to disguise.

Born into a wealthy family, Pa Chin, a pen-name constructed from the Chinese for Bakunin and Kropotkin) abandoned his family ties for the anarchist movement in the 1920's. He wrote many essays on the libertarian movement and translated anarchist works into Chinese, including the entire works of Kropotkin.

This anarchist movement in China developed from the early 1900's and reached its peak in the Twenties and

early Thirties, but was greatly weakened by the Japanese invasion of 1935. The following year was a year of revival buoyed by great hopes for the Spanish Revolution. In Shanghai, Pa Chin and other anarchists reorganized and held demonstrations in support of their comrades in Spain. The weekly bulletin of the CNT-FAI was reprinted regularly in Chinese from 1936-38. Pa Chin and friends also helped establish the first Vietnamese Anarchist group during this period.

The Chinese Communist Party approved of the parts in Pa Chin's work that condemned the old family and society, but they didn't like the references to anarchism. He tried to cooperate with the Party, partly because he believed things were better than before the revolution. His works were published by the Communists, but with the party's anarchism deleted, making them historically inaccurate. He was alternatively praised, criticized, accepted, and condemned according to the whims of various Party lines.

"Finally, after months of threats," writes Olga Lang in her introduction to **Family**, on June 20, 1968, Pa Chin was dragged to the Peoples' Stadium of Shanghai. Those present and those who watched the scene on television saw him kneeling on broken glass and heard shouts accusing him of being a traitor and enemy of Mao. They also heard him break the silence at the end and shout at the top of his voice, "You have your thoughts and I have mine. This is the fact and you can't change it even if you kill me."

For his defiance Pa Chin, now an old and frail man, was "sent to labour for re-education."

Three Rich Brothers

In his work **Family**, Pa Chin tells the story of three brothers growing up in a large rich patriarchal family in the 1920's. Each of the brothers has a different attitude toward struggle and how to live his life.

The oldest brother, Chueh-hui, was a man who was emotionally broken through a life policy of the "silent bow." This means—obey and go along with others on the outside, while maintaining his rebellion to yourself. His father had died and Chueh-hui swore to keep the family in order. He con-

tinually sacrificed himself to his family's wishes, including a marriage to a stranger instead of to the woman he loved.

The two younger brothers, managed to escape the family. All three brothers read articles about the "new thought" but only Chueh-min and Chueh-hui practiced their ideals. Chueh-min's struggle was mainly to marry the woman he loved, also a rebel and a new thinker. In **Family**, romantic love is depicted as a vital alternative to the old-style family and arranged marriages. Pa Chin seems to hint, though, that Chueh-min might stop at this accomplishment whereas Chueh-hui went further.

Chueh-hui was the fighter both in the family and outside, publishing a radical magazine with some friends. Chueh-hui had both a broad social outlook and acute personal consciousness of his oppression. This is one of my favorite things about this book: its demonstration of the relationship between personal and political struggle. Chueh-hui's consciousness of his own misery and

in **Origins of the Chinese Anarchist Movement** that the later success of the Chinese Communists may be due in part to the work of the anarchists in overcoming family domination and religious superstition "all of which the Marxist considered beneath his notice, but without the disappearance of which Marxism could never have come into power."

I consider **Family** to be feminist as well as anarchist because of the emphasis on family and personal change, women's liberation, and Pa Chin's treatment of the female characters. Although the women in the book don't play as important roles as the three brothers, they have their own struggles and characters and aren't just objects necessary for male action.

At one point I was amazed that Cousin Chin's (one of the two main female characters) greatest concern was whether or not to cut her hair. It seemed as though the girls' struggles were shown as being sillier than the boys'. Later, reading some Chinese history, I discovered that hair cutting was a major event.

Family demonstrates that life and social change are dependent on more than exterior oppression and blind historical determinism. While the choices we're given in an oppressive society are limited, we can still (as each of the three brothers did choose to fight and struggle or to submit and be destroyed). To some extent, we create our fate and that of others when we make this choice.

How Now, China? A new 80-page pamphlet, **Class Struggles in China**, presents a critical historical summary of social trends from a revolutionary perspective. A minimum donation of 50 cents per copy is needed to cover printing and mailing costs. Write: Charlatan Stew, 264 Bowery, New York, N.Y. 10012.

Eyewitness accounts of current events in China are carried in **Minus Eight**, an anarchist journal published by Chinese anarchists based in Hong Kong. Copies can be ordered by writing to 189 Lockhart Rd., First Floor, Wanchai, Hong Kong.

For an overall history of Chinese anarchism, check

Books Received

Letters of Insurgents, Yostaph Nachalo and Verochka Vochek, Black and Red, Box 9546, Detroit, Mich. 48202. U.S.A. A novel, taking the form of letters exchanged between two comrades/lovers who have been separated for 20 years after participating in a workers' uprising in Eastern Europe. Yarostan spent 12 years in jail, Sophia fled to the U.S. The novel deals with a variety of political issues in a very personal form.

Now, Norman Solomon, Out of the Ashes Press, P.O. Box 6284, Portland, Oregon 97242. A short stream-of-consciousness novel dealing with various topics of an existential, political nature.

The Failure of the Sexual Revolution, George Frankl, Kahn and Averhill, London. Frankl does a psychoanalysis of sexuality, the sexual revolution and its failure. His basic thesis is that a sexual revolution can't happen without an class revolution, particularly where sex is distorted and exploited by the market economy.

Anarchism and the National Liberation Movement, Alfredo Bonanno, Bratach Dubh Collective, 83 Langside Terrace, Port Glasgow, Scotland. This pamphlet explores the question of national liberation from an anarchist perspective. Bonanno sees national liberation struggles as expressing the yearning for self-organization and freedom of the national minorities while warning against the machinations of the national bourgeoisie of both left and right.

The International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement edited by Albert Meltzer, Cienfuegos Press, Box A, "Over the Water", Sanday, Orkney Islands, Scotland. Details the history of the First of May group and their struggles against Franco, Franco, the American State and various European governments.

The Anarchists in London, Albert Meltzer, Cienfuegos

Press. This is a companion volume to the above, discussing the role of the anarchists in the development of British anarchism.

The Russian Tragedy, Alexander Berkman, Cienfuegos Press. This contains three essays written by Berkman on his experiences and perceptions of Russia during his travels from 1919 to 1921. Berkman was originally sympathetic to the Bolsheviks and had a unique opportunity to examine the Bolshevik methods of consolidating their revolution.

Alternative America, Richard Gardner, Box 134, Harvard Square, Cambridge Mass. 02138, \$4.00. A very comprehensive directory listing 5,000 alternative co-operative, community, and political groupings covering a wide variety of political activities. Listed by geographical location, subject and name.

The Quebec Establishment, Pierre Fournier, Black Rose Books, 3934 St. Urbain St., Montreal P.Q. A power structure analysis of Quebec studying the connections between the corporations and the business elites and their relationship to the Quebec State, interesting in light of the recent election.

Bakunin on Violence, Community Press, 13 E. 17th St., New York, N.Y. 10013. Donating this letter from Bakunin to S. Nechev reveals the humanist conception of Bakunin and counters Bakunin's alleged authorship of **Catechism of the Revolutonist**.

Homecoming, Azul and Jomo, Union Square Press, Box 40190, San Francisco, CA 94110. A book of original drawings and stories about Native American oppression and resistance.

Two Essays by Murray Bookchin: "Spontaneity and Organization" and "Hierarchy and Domination." This is the first offering by Mutualist Books (formerly Buffalo Black Rose), available for \$1 (cheaper rates for bulk orders) from Box 1283, Rochester, N.Y. 14603.

Flight

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they do each other in, whereupon I leap up and grab Honour./ I writing his neck like chicken/ring it like a bell."

The next section in **Flight**, "Four Poems", takes place in Boston, where he has gone to meet a woman friend. Once again he is in America, but the sense of ambivalence has vanished. The images illus-



"Now they say we're supposed to support Chile and Iran and Pakistan and..."

trate the same destruction, but the language lacks the over-all obstinacy of the first section, as if the protagonist has gained not only strength by his struggle on the train, but also insight. He is tested once again by his love for the woman as he watches that love torn asunder by his decision to leave.

The last poem in the book, "Flight", reaffirms the choice, the individual stance against one's country, one's government, the act that must be performed to become free of the rule of authority. The protagonist is strong, his decision now

often involving whipping, public denouncement as a prostitute, or sale into prostitution from the woman's family and officials.

and the language of the poetry reflects that strength.

America

I'm flying the coop, the whole rat's nest of your promised land already promised to the few manly people experienced because of the Vietnam War, but also the ambience of a significant period in our history. And while some would rather not be reminded of that period, we are confronted with it in **Flight**, an achievement. It's just not me that deserves recognition.

The Origins of the Anarchist Movement in China, a well-documented, 18-page booklet available from Solidarity Bookshop, 713 Armitage Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60614.

Tidler has written an important and powerful poem, one that deserves a wide audience, both in America and America. He has managed to communicate, through his skill with language and the ease and directness of his metaphors, the human in ten people, personal struggle many people experienced because of the Vietnam War, but also the ambience of a significant period in our history. And while some would rather not be reminded of that period, we are confronted with it in **Flight**, an achievement. It's just not me that deserves recognition.