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Emma Goldman

Emma Goldman was born in 1869 in a Jewish ghetto in Russia where her family ran a small inn. When she was 13 the family moved to St Petersburg. It was just after the assassination of Alexander II and so was a time of political repression. The Jewish community suffered a wave of pogroms. The severe economic hardship of the time meant that Emma Goldman had to leave school after six months in St Petersburg and work in a factory.

It was here that Goldman secured a copy of Cherychevsky's 'What is to be done' in which the heroine Vera is converted to nihilism and lives in a world of equality between sexes and co-operative work. The book offered an embryonic sketch of Goldman's later anarchism and also strengthened her determination to live her life in her own way.

At 15 her father tried to marry her off but she refused. It was eventually agreed that the rebellious child should go to America with a half sister to join another sister in Rochester. Goldman quickly realised that for a Jewish immigrant, America was not the land of opportunity that had been promised. America, for Goldman meant slums and sweatshops where she earned her living as a seamstress.

What initially drew Goldman to anarchism was the outcry that followed the Haymarket Square tragedy in 1886 in Chicago. After a bomb had been thrown into a crowd of police during a workers' rally for the 8 hour day. Four anarchists were eventually hanged. Convicted on the flimsiest evidence; the judge at the trial openly declared; *Not because you caused the Haymarket bomb, but because you are Anarchists, you are on trial.*

Emma Goldman had followed the event intensely and as the day on the day of the hanging she decided to become a revolutionary. By this time Goldman was 20 and had been married for 10 months to a Russian immigrant. The marriage had not worked out so she divorced him and moved to New York.

Here, she befriended Johann Most, the editor of a German language anarchist paper. He quickly decided to make Goldman his protege and sent her on a speaking tour. Most instructed Goldman to condemn the inadequacy of a campaign for the eight hour day. Rather he argued we must demand the complete overthrow of capitalism. Campaigns for the eight hour day were merely a diversion. Goldman duly conveyed this message at her public meetings. However, in Buffalo, she was challenged by an old worker who asked *What were man of his age to do? They were not likely to see the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist system. Were they also to forego the release of perhaps two hours a day from the hated work?*

From this encounter Goldman realised that specific efforts for improvement such as higher wages and shorter hours, far from being a diversion were part of the revolutionary transformation of society.

Goldman began to distance herself from Most and became more interested in a rival German anarchist journal 'Die Autonomie'. Here she was introduced to the writings of Kropotkin. She sought to balance the inclination of human beings towards the socialsability and mutual aid which Peter Kropotkin stressed with her own strong belief in the Freedom of the individual. This belief in personal freedom is highlighted in the story where Goldman was taken aside at a dance by a young revolutionary and told it did not become an agitator to dance. Goldman wrote *I insisted that our cause could not expect me to*

behave as a nun and that the movement should not be turned into a cloister. If it meant that, I did not want it. I want freedom, the right to self expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things.

In the early days Goldman supported the idea of propaganda by deed. In 1892, together with Alexander Berkman she planned the assassination of Henry Clay Finch, who had suppressed strikes in the Homestead Pennsylvania factory with armed guards. She even tried unsuccessfully to work as a prostitute to raise money for the gun. They believed that by killing a tyrant, a representative of a cruel system, the consciousness of the people would be aroused. This didn't happen.

Berkman only managed to injure Finch and was sentenced to 22 years in prison. Goldman tried to explain and justify the attempted assassination insisting that true morality deals with the motives not the consequences. Her time in post-revolutionary Russia meant that she re-assessed this belief that the end justifies the means but I'll come to that later.

Her defence of Berkman made Goldman a marked woman and her lectures were regularly disrupted by the authorities. In 1893 she was arrested for allegedly urging the unemployed to take bread 'by force' and was given a year in Blackwells Island penitentiary.

She was imprisoned a second time for distributing birth control literature , but her longest sentence resulted from her involvement in setting up 'No Conscription' leagues and organising rallies against the first world war. Goldman and Berkman were arrested in 1917 for conspiring to obstruct the draft and given two years. Afterwards they were stripped of their citizenship and deported along with other undesirable 'Reds' to Russia. J. Edgar Hoover, who directed her deportation hearing called her *one of the most dangerous women in America*.

The plus side to deportation meant that Goldman got a free ticket to Russia where she was able to witness the Russian Revolution at first hand. Goldman had been prepared to bury the hatchet of man's conflict with anarchism in the 1st international and support the Bolsheviks . However, in 1919 as Goldman and Berkman travelled throughout the country they were horrified by the increased bureaucracy, political persecution and forced labour they found. The breaking point came in 1921 when the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers rebelled against the Bolsheviks and sided with the workers on strike. They were attacked and crushed by Trotsky and the Red Army. On leaving Russia in December 1921, Goldman set down her findings on Russia in two works - 'My Disillusionment in Russia' and 'My Further Disillusionment in Russia'. She argued that 'never before in all history has authority , government, the state, proved so inherently static, reactionary, and even counter-revolutionary. In short, the very antithesis of revolution.

Her time in Russia led her to reassess her earlier belief that the end justifies the means. Goldman accepted that violence as a necessary evil in the process of social transformation. However, her experience in Russia forced a distinction. She wrote *I know that in the past every great political and social change, necessitated violence.... Yet it is one thing to employ violence in combat as a means of defence. It is quite another thing to make a principle of terrorism, to institutionalise it to assign it the most vital place in the social struggle. Such terrorism begets counter-revolution and in turn itself becomes counter-revolutionary.*

These views were unpopular among radicals as most still wanted to believe that the Russian Revolution was a success. When Goldman moved to Britain in 1921 she was virtually alone on the left in condemning the Bolsheviks and her lectures were poorly attended. On hearing that she might be deported in 1925, a Welsh miner offered to marry her in order to give her British Nationality. With a British passport, she was able to travel to France and Canada. In 1934, she was even allowed to give

a lecture tour in the States.

In 1936 Berkman committed suicide, months before the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution. At the age of 67, Goldman went to Spain to join in the struggle. She told a rally of libertarian youth *Your Revolution will destroy forever [the notion] that anarchism stands for chaos.* She disagreed with the participation of the CNT-FAI in the coalition government of 1937 and the concessions they made to the increasingly powerful communist for the sake of the war effort. However she refused to condemn the anarchists for joining the government and accepting militarisation as she felt the alternative at the time was communist dictatorship.

Goldman died in 1940 and was buried in Chicago not far from the Haymarket Martyrs whose fate had changed the course of her life.

Emma Goldman has left behind her a number of important contributions to anarchist thought. In particular she is remembered for incorporating the area of sexual politics into anarchism which had only been hinted at by earlier anarchists. Goldman campaigned and went to prison for the right of women to practice birth control. She argued that a political solution was not enough to get rid of the unequal and repressive relations between the sexes. There had to be massive transformation of values and most importantly in womens themselves . She argued that women could do this.

First, by asserting herself as a personalities and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right to anyone over her body; by refusing to bear children unless she wants them; by refusing to be a servant to God, the state, society, the husband, the family etc, by making her life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is, by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities, by freeing herself from fear of public opinion and public condemnation. Only anarchist revolution and not the ballot , will set woman free, will make her a force hither to unknown in the World, a force of divine fire, of giving a creation of free men and women.



To my

Anarchism & Womens liberation page

I'd love to hear your comments on my pages, email me at
aileenoc@acadamh.ucd.ie

To a more general anarchist page

Go to the Paris GeoPage

Government? Who needs it?

People use the term 'anarchy' recklessly, Daniel Morley Johnson says. They might b

t wasn't your usual government leak. Jeffrey Monaghan, a contract employee at Environment Canada, was arrested at his office by the RCMP in May for allegedly leaking the Harper government's climate plan a month earlier. What made this leak more interesting is that Monaghan plays in a punk band that has targeted Stephen Harper in song lyrics, and he has also been involved with Ottawa's anarchist bookshop in a similar project. His band's website has links to the radical environmental group Earth First. All of which led one Calgary newspaper columnist to label Monaghan's "odious" beliefs - what we might call anarchism - "political chaos."

Anarchism is typically associated with some sort of menace and, increasingly, with terrorism. David Graeber, a self-proclaimed anarchist and formerly associate professor of anthropology at Yale, was dismissed by that university despite being hailed as one of the world's foremost young anthropologists. Many believe Yale's decision not to rehire Graeber - who will take a position at the University of London this year - was based on his personal politics, his writings on anarchism and his support of unionized teaching assistants. Yale has given no reason for Graeber's dismissal.

Rather than being understood as a complex political philosophy, anarchism is popularly regarded as chaos (the word actually comes from the Greek meaning "without rulers"). Anarchy conjures up images of bombing government offices or the total disarray that would apparently follow social revolution. We tend not to think of anarchists as intellectuals or teachers or bus drivers. Anarchism is dismissed as utopian and/or violent, hence the reaction against it.

In modern times, many philosophers of anarchism have been European: Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (France), Mikhail Bakunin (Russia), Emma Goldman (a Russian who died in Toronto) and Alexander Berkman (Russia). Perhaps the most important theorist of anarchism was the Russian Peter Kropotkin, whose 1892

*Emma Goldman - Russian Jewish
Anarchist deported to "Bufford"
Dec. 31 - 1919.*



Photo of Emma Goldman taken by A. F. Sherman on Ellis Island, on the occasion of her deportation: Philosophers of anarchism took up a surprising breadth of issues. STATUE OF LIBERTY/ELLIS ISLAND

book *The Conquest of Bread* (first published in English by Chapman & Hall; in 1906; available in several subsequent editions) explains Kropotkin's ideal anarchist-communalist society. He asks why so few people are rich while the majority of people live in poverty, causing the latter to sell their labour to the former. The problem with this, for anarchists, is that the exploited masses are not truly free - Kropotkin says they are more like serfs - and are not, therefore, able to realize their creative or human potential.

Kropotkin details a plan to remedy this through social revolution, and his solutions are simple: equal time for work and creative pursuits;

everyone contributes to food production; all people share the work that needs to be done in exchange for housing and freedom. He calls for a redistribution of material goods and an end to greedy extravagance - "to every man according to his needs." This is all based on the belief that people who do not have to worry about starvation or paying for private property will not sell their labour to others, no longer enabling a ruling wealthy class.

Kropotkin is most convincing because he provides examples of how non-hierarchical, non-state-controlled relationships that are fair and efficient already exist. Think of any voluntary association

or collective. Recall the outpouring of spontaneous human generosity that is exhibited after a natural disaster or other tragic event. There would be no need for force because humans only need to be forced to do things that are against their best interests; free people who make their own decisions do not need to be coerced. Dissenters would have the choice to build their own societies with like-minded people, as happens in any voluntary group today.

Emma Goldman lived part of her life writing and speaking in the United States, from 1906-1918 publishing the radical magazine *Mother Earth*, which contained work by

Who needs it?

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a Goldman - Russian Jewish anarchist - deported S.S. "Buford" Dec. 31 - 1919.



Goldman taken by A. F. Sherman on Ellis Island, on the occasion of her deportation: anarchism took up a surprising breadth of issues. STATUE OF LIBERTY/ELLIS ISLAND

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writers and artists including Tolstoy, Man Ray and Eugene O’Neill. Peter Glassgold’s *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth* (Counterpoint, 2001) collects dozens of pieces from the magazine, and is a good introduction to several different anarchist points of view. These texts are wide-ranging in subject, covering anarchist perspectives on education, literature, women’s rights (including Goldman’s 1916 piece on birth control), civil liberties, war, peace and history.

In the anthology, Voltairine de Cleyre illustrates how the libertarian founders of the United States upheld anarchist principles – “that government is best which governs least” – to create a free federation made up of free local communities. Berkman discusses the ways that prisons isolate and debilitate inmates rather than rehabilitating them. In his essay *Without Government*, Max Baginski explains how state institutions suppress human virtue through the use or threat of force. He also recognizes, like many anarchists, that the government only confuses and complicates the most basic transactions. (Waited all day in a passport or driver’s license office lately?) This anthology, which contains a contextual essay by editor Glassgold, illustrates the breadth of issues taken up by anarchist writers.

Anarchism is a philosophy that aims to bring justice to all people oppressed by the elites. Ethnic groups have reinterpreted anarchist theory to support their struggles, for example, the black Anarchist Panther movement in the United States. Canadian Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred elaborates an anarcho-indigenous theory in *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Broadview, 2005).

Much of Alfred’s book is concerned with proposing ways for indigenous peoples to resist settler colonialism and regenerate themselves and their communities. Alfred blends what he calls an indigenous warrior ethic with the anarchist principles of justice, freedom, self-determination and “anti-institutional,

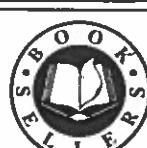
radically democratic” forms of governance. He draws, for instance, on Rotinoshonni (Iroquois) traditions of government, in addition to what Vaclav Havel described as utopia: a decentralized economy, local decision-making, government based on true direct democracy, “a sort of spiritual socialism,” as Alfred understands it.

Alfred sees parallels between indigenous and anarchist ways of living: rejection of legalized oppressive systems, non-participation in those systems that are seen as part of Canadian settler colonization, and a belief in bringing about change through direct action against state power.

The state tends to view indigenous and anarchist action in the same way, and sometimes responds with violence: Think of the 2001 Quebec City protests and the use of force by the Ontario Provincial Police at Six Nations in April, 2006. Alfred points out we are seeing increasing alliances between natives and settler activists in Canada, particularly around indigenous people’s land claims.

Anarchism is not chaos or disorder; it is a complex set of philosophies positing that we would all be better off without rulers, particularly those who greedily disregard the well-being of the majority of people. If anarchism sounds utopian, hence implausible, recall the words of another writer who had anarchist tendencies, Henry David Thoreau: “In the long run men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high.”

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