

In the Jungle

Bruce Calvert

February 1910

But I started out to tell you of my intellectual bat in the city. The jag opened with 'Gene Debs' lecture at Orchestra Hall, where the idol of the socialists received the plaudits of three or four thousand enthusiasts.

Then I listened to prim and scholarly John Spargo, another socialist speaker and writer, well known to students of economics. Spargo looks for all the world like a Presbyterian deacon, though he doesn't talk like one by a darn site. I heard Arthur M. Lewis, also, at the Garrick Theater, and a lecture by ex-Senator Billy Mason on the postal savings bank. Next I went to hear Mangassarian spout his dainty and lady-like parlor rationalism to his usual big audience at Orchestra Hall, and I finally wound up at the German Hod Carriers' Hall out on the West Side, where Emma Goldman held forth for four nights on the beauties of Anarchy to all the people that could crowd into the meeting place.

Emma Goldman! What a surprise in every way — both the lady herself and her utterances! I had read so much about this terrible woman whom the police so fear that the whole force is called out whenever she comes to town, and who is usually followed about wherever she goes by a loving escort of ten to a hundred bluecoats, that I expected to see an ogre fierce and untamed, shrieking bombs and crying for blood.

But what I did see was a plump, motherly little woman, whose very presence would seem to inspire hope and courage in the downtrodden, and abused of society. A woman who appealed in the most intense and eloquent terms to what she believes to be the highest in men and women.

Before everything else in this world I do dearly love a good speaker. I am sure that the most potent factor in human affairs is the living voice, and I am sure also that the day of the supremacy of the printed page is passing. The world must begin now to develop a new race of orators and speakers. The redemption of man from social evils and the regeneration of society will come, I think, not from cold type, but thru living speech, hot from the hearts of great souls filled with a great love, on fire with a great theme.

And so I think Emma Goldman the greatest woman speaker I have ever heard. I wish every woman who has a message or who wants to speak could hear this little Russian Jewess in her sincere and terrible earnestness.

When you speak to her you look down into a round chubby face, lighted by quick expressive eyes. You see a shapely, intellectual head rising from a short, plump figure. But when she speaks, Emma Goldman seems to fill the stage. The tones of her voice seek all the hidden springs of the

heart. Her words ring clear — I am sure she could be heard easily by an audience of five thousand. Now she appeals with pathos, a woman whose mother heart feels the sorrows of her children; again she pleads; she can be sarcastic, too, sharp as a two-edged sword, in denouncing the shams of society; and she can rouse her hearers to the wildest enthusiasm, filling them with the courage to do and dare, to suffer and hope, and work for the better day when the world's social injustices shall be righted. At such times she seems like a Jean D 'Arc, leading her legions on to victory.

I really do not see what the police have to fear from Emma Goldman. I don't think they know, either. She preaches an enlightened humanity that is as far ahead of brutal policemen, ward bosses, and grafting mayors, as the gentle Nazarene was ahead of the mad scene he looked in upon at the temple in Jerusalem that morning when he gave way to his anger and lashed the dirty loan sharks and note shavers from the house.

Police interference on the ground of apprehended violence or destruction of property at or thru Emma Goldman's lectures is too absurdly ridiculous. The police might with equal reason station armed guards at Christian Endeavor Societies, or break up the Wednesday afternoon Mothers' Meetings. The pretext is so flimsy it deceives no one. We know why free speech is suppressed. We know from whom police officials take their orders. The people who go to hear Emma Goldman are not rioters. They are the most intellectual class in the world today. They are not law less. The police and officers of the law themselves are the violent ones, they are the lawbreakers when they deny her the right to speak and drive away citizens who have peaceably and lawfully assembled to hear her. Such action on the part of policemen is a thousand times more dangerous to liberty, more destructive to government than all the anarchists and all the bombs in creation. This is worse than Anarchy ever could be. It is chaos. It is mob rule. What right have we to talk of freedom, of government, of law, when one low-browed policeman with a club can set aside the highest law of the land — trample upon the most sacred rights of citizens?

If the police expect to suppress the truths for which this woman stands they are acting the part of sodden idiots. They might just as well try to stay Niagara's mighty flood, or prevent the sun from rising tomorrow morning. Violence never did suppress a principle. Truth will not down. It goes on and on. Nothing can stay it. Nothing can subdue it. Races, religions and governments pass away, but truth which is eternal principle endures forever.

What is wrong in Emma Goldman's philosophy will die of itself. What is true will be here when policemen, politicians, tyranny, soldiers and wars shall be no more.

But one thing is too true. Policemen with their clubs can trample upon human rights. They can and they do break up meetings, drag lecturers from the platform and drive law abiding citizens from lecture halls. Albeit when the police do interfere with any man or woman in exercising the right of free speech they create more disorder, do more in a few minutes toward disrupting society than all the Anarchist speakers and agitators could do in a life time.

Free speech is the cornerstone upon which our government was founded. With out free speech and a free press, democracy cannot stand; our republic must and will fall.

Emma Goldman is within her rights when she essays to speak anywhere in our country upon any subject she may choose. And so are you, and so am I comrades. But when police officials deny her or any one that privilege they are acting entirely out side of right or law. They strike at the very vitals of government, stab freedom to the heart, and outrage the liberties of ninety million people.

If policemen with drawn clubs can do this brutal thing, then indeed is liberty dead in this land. We may as well abandon our citizenship and install an emperor over us at once.

Let us make no mistake on this point, comrades. The law of the land, and the spirit of our American institutions make no reservation or exceptions as to what you may or may not speak. The right of free speech is fundamental, basic, unequivocal. It could not be otherwise, else were liberty a ghastly joke and freedom a maniacal dream. Emma Goldman has just as much right to speak from any platform in this country as has President Taft, both being responsible under the law for their utterances. And my right to hear Emma Goldman if I want to is just as sacred as my right to hear the president or any holy Joe from his pulpit.

What do you think then of five thousand people being clubbed away from a hall where they had peaceably assembled and paid their good money to hear Emma Goldman lecture? Sounds like darkest Russia, doesn't it? But it wasn't. It was in good old Quaker Philadelphia, just a few weeks ago. I wonder bronze Billy Penn did not topple from his proud pinnacle at the top of city-hall tower.

In New York City, East Orange, N. J., in San Francisco and in Indianapolis audiences have been dispersed or Miss Goldman refused the right to fulfill her lecture engagements. Happily in Chicago she was not molested this week. I saw no police uniforms at any of the meetings. The last night I heard her she spoke on "The Drama as a Disseminator of Radical Thought." It was about the worst night of the winter. Streets were over ankle deep with slush, while rain and sleet added to the discomfort. The meetings were held at a most inaccessible place on the West Side. The weather was so bad that the managers gave up the large hall which had been secured and instead took a smaller one, seating three or four hundred which was more than they expected. But by eight o'clock the room was packed, and people still coming. They adjourned to the large hall and by the time the lecture began that too was packed with a crowd of fifteen hundred or more.

And such an audience. It was a revelation to me. A proletarian gathering of all nationalities. But such great vital force, as you could plainly feel; such deadly serious earnestness I never saw. They were students every one of them. They do not waste any time with sociological and economic frills, are not deterred by any conventional bogies, but have plunged at once right into the heart of human philosophy. They are getting right down to bed rock principles. I saw young girls from the shops and factories there following the lecturer over the most difficult metaphysical ground with the keenest interest and evident comprehension. And no wonder when I heard these same children speak familiarly of philosophical questions. They know their Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Hauptman, Kropotkin, Tolstoy; their Emerson and their Whitman. They are deeply alive and they are thinking with a deadly earnestness which bodes ill for the hypocritical grafting society and codfish aristocracy of our times.

As I sat among these people, many with the marks of their toil still upon them, I felt the conviction stealing into my soul, that right down here in the ranks of the lowest, there was at work the saving force that will redeem humanity. The real uplift will come from these people, from below and not from the bourgeoisie or the upper crust. Just picture to yourself what such an atmosphere of free thought and what such training means to the boys and girls who are to be the fathers and mothers of the next generation. Multiply this little society by thousands which are growing up in all parts of our country and across the seas, and does one need to be a prophet to foretell what is to come. Can you not almost hear the shouts of victory and the trumpets of joy welcoming the morning of that glad new day when man shall be free?

Why weren't these meetings broken up? Oh simply because the present chief of police in Chicago just happened to be a man with some sense of humor. Two years ago Emma Goldman

was not allowed to speak there. Crowds were clubbed away, and Miss Goldman was trailed about the city with an escort of forty of the finest. When she comes again another chief may be in power and she or you or I may be dragged from the platform and the audience driven home.

What then becomes of the constitutional rights of the people? Well they haven't any save those allowed by the police department. The policeman's club is the law under which American government is today administered. Nice situation isn't it? Perhaps you haven't seen its workings in your town yet, but it may be your turn next. And remember in a republic, there is no liberty, no law, so long as one single individual's rights are infringed.

The trouble is that we have set up a gorgon among us which is eating us alive. Our institutions are getting further and further away from the people. We are not actually a government by the people any more, but we have created an office holding oligarchy which has forgotten its source and is using the powers we gave it, to exploit and oppress us. Yes that is true. Even the courts are as rotten as the police force. The judge in Philadelphia to whom Emma Goldman appealed for protection from the annoyance of the police denied her petition, endorsing the action of the police in forcibly preventing ten thousand people from hearing her speak.

Whom did that judge and the police represent in Philadelphia? The people? It is to laugh. Everyone knows better. How many people in Philadelphia cared whether Emma Goldman spoke or not? Several thousand did want to hear her, and did come to the meeting. The rest had no objection and did not care who spoke or who went to hear. Who did then! Have the people anything to fear from the truth? Have they anything to lose in the triumph of right over wrong? Who is it that always fears the truth? The rogues, isn't it? Who is it that fears the spread of economic understanding and the education of the masses as the devil hates holy water? Honest men never fear the truth. Look behind the poor ignorant policeman, look behind the venal judge, and you'll find the few men, financial buccaneers, vultures of special privilege, who fear Emma Goldman as a pestilence, because the triumph of her doctrines would be the death of their exploitations; and these men use their willing tools, the courts and police officers to set aside the liberties of the people, trampling the rights of American citizenship into the mud.

And all the time our newspapers at the bidding of their masters the rogues, throw dust in the eyes of the people with scare heads about "Anarchy! Violence! Bombs!"

Are the newspapers afraid of Emma Goldman? Do the editors think she is the terrible archangel of crime which they picture her when they incite the unthinking police to violence against her? Not at all. The men who make the newspapers know that she is a great-hearted, great-souled woman, no more of a rioter than was Harriet Beecher Stowe or Susan B. Anthony. They know that she is well informed, that she is a deep and forceful thinker, and that she knows her human history as few modern students, men or women know it. They know that she is familiar with the greatest literature of at least three languages. They know that her lecture on the modern drama could not be equalled by any University man in America. They know that she stands for human rights and individual freedom, and that her position upon these questions is precisely the same as was that of Thomas Jefferson, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Thoreau, old John Brown, Wendell Phillips, Wm. Lloyd Garrison, Walt Whitman, and Emerson. Yes, our own Ralph Waldo, the supreme anarchist of his age. Read the essay on "Self-Reliance" again.

They know that law and order, which they pretend to worship, has no more to fear from this woman than from the Salvation Army. They know that their hysterical scare heads, and alarmist talk about anarchy are lies pure and simple. Why do they print such stuff? Well didn't you know that the news paper editors of today have no opinions of their own upon any thing. What they

or their writers may know or think cuts no ice whatever. They print what their masters the men who own them order them to print. And do you think for a moment that the masters are running great newspapers in the interests of the people ? It must be apparent even to the most guileless that this is not so.

There were several newspaper men in Emma Goldman's audience. Here was a great gathering of intelligent people earnestly grappling with social problems of the profoundest sequence to humanity. Here was a great virile force at work in the hearts of the people — a great movement gathering strength that will yet shake our social structure to the very foundations, but do you suppose a single newspaper man had the courage to print a line about the meetings? They did not. Not a word appeared in any of the great dailies. Even the Daily Socialist paper, much to my surprise did not mention the lectures, although many leading socialists were present. When government becomes an instrument in the hands of a few to thwart the will of the many — to rob and enslave the whole people, then I want some highbrow to show me wherein such a government is better than anarchy.

No, comrades, we have nothing to fear from Emma Goldman, but we do have everything to fear from the lawless despots who use their tools the courts and the police and the press to assail our rights and de spoil us of our liberties.

How the fetich of ownership, has cursed mankind. We uphold the dogma of "mine" and "thine," but we have only what the race has in common. We focus on the thing for a moment and call it our own, but it is no more ours than the sunshine or the south west breeze.

Too much heaven is hell.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Bruce Calvert
In the Jungle
February 1910

Retrieved on 26th April 2021 from www.libertarian-labyrinth.org
The Open Road 4 no. 2 (February, 1910): 39–57.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net