

As to “Crammers of Furnaces”

A Reply E. C. Walker’s Article in No. 46 “Truth Seeker.”

Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Harry Kelly

December 1906

It requires a very brave mind to be just to one’s opponent. We are apt, only too often, to misstate facts in order to gain victory in an argument or discussion. But the really honest man, the truly broadminded, scorns such tactics; to him the triumph based on falsehood is bitter fruit.

This was the thought that persisted and kept obtruding itself at our perusal of Mr. E. C. Walker’s article “Crammers of Furnaces and Sitters on Safety Valves.” Perhaps the article might have never been written had Mr. Walker realized that sincerity in literature and honesty towards opponents are as desirable as good weight and full measure in the matter of groceries. Or may be that, the opportunity being given, the temptation to lecture Anarchists on Anarchism was very, very strong and—Mr. Walker weak? Has he again succumbed to the passion for reiterating the claim—as ancient as it is stupid—that the Anarchist-Communists have no right to be called Anarchists.

Mr. Walker waxed eloquent over the “crime” of holding Czolgoz memorial meetings. As a matter of fact, no such memorial meetings took place and none were contemplated. The meeting in question was called for the purpose of discussing whether Czolgoz was an Anarchist or not. We claim the right of discussing—even under the present iniquitous law—whatever subject interests us. If free speech and free press mean anything, they mean freedom of discussion. We, therefore, claim the right to discuss how it is and why it is that a native born American, in this—politically the most advanced—country, the “land of opportunity,” enjoying universal adult suffrage, should wish to kill the President of the United States, elected as that official is by a majority of the voting population, in accordance with our political institutions. The Czolgoz act was an entirely new phenomenon on the horizon of our country,—neither sectional feeling nor personal interest played any part in the act. A social phenomenon of this character should, in our estimation, receive our most earnest attention; it should be intelligently discussed in order to help us arrive at a better understanding of causes, and at a solution, if possible, of effects.

An unpopular subject? Granted. Shall freedom of speech, then, mean the discussion of only such subjects as are popular? And is the sex question a popular subject? And yet Mr. Walker has been discussing that question for more years than some of us can boast of since our birth. And we venture to say that the sex question is more obnoxious to the great American public than the McKinley episode.

“When a minority drops the pen of reason,” says Mr. Walker, “and draws the sword of physical force, does it expect still to be opposed by reason and waved back by olive branches?” Not at all, Mr. Walker. It is true Czolgoz drew the sword; he paid the penalty without a murmur. We, however, are using the pen of reason. On what grounds, then, should we be persecuted any more than the so-called philosophical Anarchists? And does not Mr. Walker know that eight out of the twelve arrested and held for criminal court were mere spectators, and that one of the chief speakers at the alleged “memorial” Czolgoz meeting—Mr. Moscow—is a comrade of—Mr. E. C. Walker, an Individualist Anarchist absolutely opposed to violence.

We are open and avowed Revolutionists; but we defy any one to produce a single line from any English Anarchist paper or magazine published in this country within the last twenty-five years where assassination is advocated or even implied. And if this be true, can a just and honest man maintain that the followers of the Communist-Anarchist school of Thought should be treated as criminals?

Yes, literary honesty is a rare jewel, Mr. Walker. If you read in an article in “Mother Earth” that “Czolgoz was a soul in pain,” you immediately declare the writer to be an apologist for Czolgoz. Is sympathy for an unfortunate man identical with justification of or apology for the man’s act? As real Anarchists we neither condemn nor justify; our business is to try to understand, understand, understand, Mr. Walker. In view of this, is it not foolish to say, “Yes, the police have acted foolishly, badly; almost or quite as foolishly and badly as the Communist Czolgoz apologists?”

“To return to our examination of the policy of those who stand forth as apologists or quasi-apologists for political assassination in the United States: In the first place, as heretofore intimated”—thus spake Mr. Walker—“they are not Anarchists, for if Anarchism means one thing more than another, it means opposition to the government of man by man. To take a man’s life without his consent is the last supreme step in governing him.”

Let us see, Mr. Walker. Government is an invasive organization; it taxes people without their consent; it butchers Philippino men, women and children; establishes bull pens at Idaho and sends colored troops to inflame race prejudice, by allowing those troops to obtain liquor and then ill-treat the people. Government kidnaps men like Moyer and Haywood; it violates its own laws and then delegates the secretary of war to give his official indorsement to the illegal acts. In short, government and its representatives assassinate liberty at every step. At last a man arises who embodies in himself all the revolt of the people—he strikes down one of the invaders. According to Mr. Walker’s logic he invades the invader. Is it not farcical to maintain that two persons can invade each other at the same time? Is this the celebrated “philosophic” logic?

We neither advocate nor advise acts of violence. But those who have come to realize that government is invasive of the liberty of the individual, can object to the assassination of tyrants on only two grounds—sentiment and expediency. Mr. Walker, who summons everything, except his own pet theories, to the bar of reason, would eliminate sentiment. Expediency is a matter of opinion and judgment.

As to that old, hoary chestnut about our not being Anarchists, do not permit it to worry you, Mr. Walker. We shall continue our Communist-Anarchist education of the people, and for the rest, let posterity judge.

Emma Goldman,
Alexander Berkman,
H. Kelly.

Nov. 20, 1906.

(The "Truth Seeker" declined to print the above article on the ground that the "editor thought it best not to open up another discussion." Since it was Mr. Walker's article in the "Truth Seeker" that really opened up the discussion, we think it strange that a liberal paper should decline hearing the other side.—The Editor.)

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Retrieved on 25th April 2021 from wiki.libertarian-labyrinth.org
Published in *Mother Earth* 1, no. 10 (December 1906): 21–24.

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