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Letters of Emma Goldman and James Colton

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1936

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Letters 1 – 4 and 6, by Emma Goldman. Letter 5, by Jim Colton.

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the long illness of my old pal and the expense of laying him to rest has completely sapped me out. My dear, my dear it is cruel to have worked for an ideal all one's life only to be ill and helpless in our old age, and so frightfully poor. My heart goes out to you my dear staunch comrade. But what is sympathy and solidarity when we can do nothing to make life easier for our comrades.

I am so glad your family has remained devoted and willing to take care of you in your predicament. It is more than some of our comrades have and it should cheer you and help you back to health.

There is nothing I can say about myself. The bottom has been knocked out from under me with the untimely end of our great and wonderful comrade⁸. It is no small battle to go on living without him. Everything seems empty and futile. But I will have to continue the struggle for Sasha and myself.

I am very much discouraged about England. Yet I will have to go there once more. If only not to disappoint Edmunds and the group Tom has been holding together. It is all so vague and meaningless.

Let me hear again from you soon how you are. I can be reached here until the end of Sept. The only light in this present European darkness is the heroic struggle of the workers in Spain. It will be frightful if their battle should be crushed by the European powers. But for my ignorance of the language I should go to join our comrades. I could not imagine a more heroic end to my life than to lose it for the Spanish revolution. But without the language I could not help but only hinder our people.

Goodbye dear Jim, with heartfelt wishes for your recovery.

Fraternally.

E. G

⁸ A reference to the death of Alexander (Sasha) Berkman who shot himself on 28 June 1936.

My Dear Dear Emma,
I am writing this from a very sick bed where I have been confined for over 4 weeks. During that period I haven't eaten a solid bit of food. This position is very bad but nothing like what yours is and I hasten to extend to you my Deepest Sympathy and Condolences in the sad position and harrasing state you find yourself in today. The Parrys called to see me yesterday when I told them about the whole affair they were very much grieved about the matter and extend their sincerest sympathies in your awful predicament. To loose such a Brave Comrade as Alexander Berkman is a Calamity and again Extend to you my Deepest Sympathy in your Terrible Predicament.

Dear Emma, these few lines has taken me some trouble so you can realise how I feel. This is the worst illness I have ever had. Lye in bed Cant look at food I am Helpless. The family are caring for me most wonderfully.

With my Deepest Sympathy and hope for the Best,
Yours in Deepest Sorrow
Jim.

Letter 6

St Tropez
August 5th 1936⁷

Jim, my Dear.
I would have replied to your letter sooner, but I was waiting for a bit of English currency from Paris. One cannot get it here, and I did want you to have at least £1. It is so little. It makes me most unhappy that I cannot do more for you in your present illness. But

undated letter of sympathy on the death of Alexander Berkman was probably written in July 1936.

⁷ Jim Colton never read this last letter from Goldman. He died of cancer on 5 August 1936, the day the letter was written.

Letter 1

Redland, Bristol
Nov 4th 1925

My Dear Jim,
I found your letter on my return from Birmingham Monday, but as I had to lecture here in the evening I could not possibly write to you.

Yesterday I spent from 10 am to 6 pm preparing my notes for the last lecture here tomorrow night. I had planned to write you this morning and then your letter arrived with one from Swansea enclosed. Thank you my dear Jim.

I have written to the Hon. Secretary of the Jewish Club in Swansea, here is a copy so you will know what I wrote. I simply have to charge a fee. I cannot keep up lecturing without some recompense to enable me to live. I am sure the Jewish Club must have some means and there is no reason why they should not pay. I take it that they are all shopkeepers so they are sure to be able to afford it. Anyway, I must insist on some remuneration.

So Bassett wants to be present at our gathering of comrades?¹ Well, as we are not going to discuss 'conspiracies' there is no reason why he should not be. I take it that the private discussion you and

¹ A reference to Edgar Bassett (1893–1949). The son of the Revd David Bassett, a Baptist minister at Gadlys, Aberdare, Edgar Bassett, known to Ammanford residents as 'Bassett y Co-op', was the manager of the Ammanford and District Co-operative Movement for twenty five years. James Griffiths wrote of him in 1949: 'There were times when our unorthodox views made us something of a terror to our elders. But I think it can be claimed that we produced a generation of men and women who today play a full part in every phase of public activity in the neighbourhood, and every member owes something to Edgar Bassett'. See 'Mr Edgar Bassett: A Tribute', The Amman Valley Chronicle, 27 January 1949. Amanwy also paid him a warm tribute in his Welsh column 'Colofn Cymry'r Dyffryn', in the same edition of the Chronicle. See also 50 Years of Service and Progress, 1900–1950. Ammanford Co-operative Society Ltd., (Ammanford, 1950).

Edmunds have in mind will take place Saturday evening. Am I right?

Now as to a meeting on Monday at Gwaun Cae Gurwen. Unless you can do so with a very small expense, I do not think it ought to be undertaken since you have been ill and out of work so long and the other comrades too have been under the difficulties and hardship of unemployment. I just can't bear the idea of comrades covering difficulties for my meetings. Of course there will be no expense connected with me except my stay. I have to insist that the trades council pay my fare and let me make my appeal for the R.P. And the Jewish Club will have to pay some fee. So if a meeting is arranged for Monday, the expense will be the hall and printing. Do you think they could be covered with a collection? Else it ought not be undertaken. It were difficult if you people had been at work. Though you earn little enough still I should have felt no regrets if you were to pitch together, we have all done that in the past when there was still some enthusiasm. But without work, comrades cannot be expected to stand losses. So you and the others better think it over about a meeting on Monday.

I had a large attendance in Birmingham on the Russian theatre. There is a likelihood that I may go back for more lectures after the Christmas holidays. It is a slow grind, and so discouraging. In this city there will probably not be much more than ten pounds surplus for three weeks hard labour for I certainly worked here from morning until night. If I had to pay my upkeep I would not have a penny left from my ten pounds. But I am with Julie Gibson and Chris Lewis, dear comrades.

But it does not make me very happy that I must burden them for they are by no means able to feed people for three weeks. Then there is the fare from London and return. So you can see that in a material sense I have gained precious little for my efforts in this city. The only consolation is that I now have my lectures for the London course prepared and that I have aroused some interest in

other is also a girl, a wonderful comrade who was given 15 years prison in America, was then deported to Russia; there she was arrested and deported because she is an Anarchist. She too needs the country badly. Finally there is a comrade who used to work with us in Mother Earth. He went to Russia after the Revolution, has gone through tortures of the damned and was deported from Russia. He is without work and in bad health so we want to give him a vacation. I will feel better when I have our comrades here, so they can share with us. Wish I could give you a holiday, perhaps some day if I am successful in C[anada]!

Give my fraternal greetings to Edmunds, Parry and the rest.

Affect.

E. G.

Letter 4

Banfonds zur Erweiterung der Bakuninhütte

March 1st 1932

Dear Jim

I received your note saying you had been ill. I meant to write you – but I have been racing from town to town, speaking every night. I arrived here too ill to stand on my feet, but pulled through three meetings, then I was forced to take to my bed. I am up today, but still very weak. I must speak tonight.

Affect.

E. G.

Letter 5

Tircoed, Glanamman, Cwm, South Wales

Friday [? July 1936]⁶

⁶ Candace Falk, Ronald J. Zboray, Daniel Cornford, eds, *The Emma Goldman Papers: A Microfilm Edition*, (Alexandria, VA, 1990–1993), Reel 38. This

I wrote Geo. Davison a letter telling him I am not far from him⁵. He replied saying he'd be glad to see Berkman and myself when he and his wife return from a trip they are now making. They have gone to England and will be back by the 20th of July. A.B. and I will then go over to Antibes and see the kind of man he is. How little people with money know what to do, yet there is so much, so very much that could be done. For instance I have a lot of material about the appalling condition about the destitute children in Russia. It is too ghastly to describe. I have been trying for a year to get some people interested in the matter and help me out with a book, but without success. I intend speaking to Davison about it when the opportunity will present itself. Perhaps he will help.

Dear Jim, it is now certain that I will be able to sail for C[anada]. The comrades in America are raising the expense money. I shall sail on the 23rd of September and if everything goes alright, will be able to do some good in C[anada]. I hope I will not have trouble in landing. I leave our wonderful place here on the 1st of September and go to Paris where I will be until we sail. After, I will ask you to send me a letter saying you do not object to my going, I may need that at the border. There is no hurry for it.

It is wonderful here and we enjoy every minute. We have been thinking that it is criminal on our part to have such a glorious place and some of our comrades to have nothing. So now that my family have sent me some money for my birthday, I am bringing three comrades here for a month to give them a holiday. One is a girl who has been dragged from prison under the Czar and the Bolsheviks, she is in very bad health, a month here will build her up. The

⁵ See T. Brennan, 'The White House', *The Cambridge Journal*, 7 (1953–1954), 243–8; T. Brennan, E. W. Cooney and H. Pollins, *Social Change in South-West Wales*, (London, 1954), 27–8, 149–50. On George Davison (1856–1930), see Brian Coe, 'George Davison: Impressionist and Anarchist', in Mike Weaver, ed., *British Photography in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1989), 215–41; Idem, *The Birth of Photography: The Story of the Formative Years 1800–1900*, (London, 1989), 107.

this city which may develop into something more profitable in the future. I don't know, I cling to hope, that is all one can do.

I am so glad you are better dear Jim. I hope you will keep fit from now on. The winter must be more trying in your work than the summer.

Take care of yourself dear friend.

Affectionately

E.G.

Letter 2

3 Titchfield Terrace, St John's Wood, London

15 November 1925

My Dear Jim

Thank you so much for the fine spirit in which you took my suggestion. I knew you would understand the situation. I am glad that a few of the younger men are interested in our ideas. It is the highest time. I will be very happy to talk to them, but when is that to be? Do you people have in mind more than one meeting, or is it to be a private gathering where the boys are to meet me? I would like to know because I always like to come ready if I am to lecture.

It will be quite impossible for me to come on an early train next Saturday. I lecture Thursday and Friday evening, so I shall be too tired to dash out early Saturday to arrive on the train as you suggested. It will be ample time if I get to Neath around five or six if I can get such a train. Since we are not to have an open meeting on Saturday evening, it does not matter if I am not rested. I prefer not to have to rush in the morning. Please tell me about another train, one that would arrive in the late afternoon, and what station do I go from in L[ondon]. Frankly I have forgotten. I think it is Paddington, is it not? Yes, that would be fine if I could get a cheap

rate, the railroad fares swallow up everything. But in any event, the Neath people will have to pay for that².

I will bring along more Bulletins and I am having six copies of my Disillusionment British edition, sent to you, also two copies of the Memoirs, it is all I have now. I will also bring a few of my Essays. I think you have the other literature which was left last time? Some pamphlets, do you not? Please write full particulars about a fast train

Affect.

E.G.

Letter 3

Mm. E. Colton, Maison Mussier, Chemin St. Atoine, St. Tropez (Var), France

June 22nd. 1926

My Dear Jim,

Forgive my slackness in replying to your dear letter. I have started on my Mss. on the Russian drama and as I am also keeping house it really takes all my time and leaves me little leisure for my correspondence. I have, as a matter of fact cut down on my correspondence. I have asked my friends to be satisfied with postcards for a while. But it is different with you my dear comrade. I don't want to keep you waiting too long. Another five days and it will be a year that you have taken the anxiety from me as to where I might have some safety³. I shall always remember that dear friend. I want you to have a little holiday on the 27th especially as it falls on a Sunday. For that I enclose a £1. I wish I could make it a hundred times as much, I'd love to be able to help the miners. But just now I can do

² For a brief account of Goldman's visits to the Neath area, see Len Williams, 'Emma Goldman - Associations With Neath', Neath Antiquarian Society Transactions, 1977, 32-3.

³ Colton and Goldman were married on 27th June the previous year.

nothing. I'm glad in the thought that much is being done. Some of the British comrades write me that a good deal of money is being raised for the miners. I am so glad. They are certainly making a brave fight. If only the leaders had not been such cowards and had stood by the miners the situation would be different by now. Leave it to the leaders of every political color to show the white feather.

What was to be expected has happened. Baldwin is now speaking in the language of the mine owners, what a rotter. On the other hand the Churchills are even more rotten. The fuss they are making about the money contributed by Russia to the miners, as if they would not be willing to help with money, men and munitions if their class were in trouble. Such a farce.

But the Soviet people are really not better, they go on pretending that the workers in Russia are sending the contributions when everybody knows that the Russian workers have not enough to keep their own body intact, let alone send help to others. Besides they have not even the right, if they had the means. At the same time it is contemptible on the parts of Joynson-Hicks and his gang to raise the cry at Soviet money⁴. It is really only an excuse on their part.

I can well imagine how terrible it must be in South Wales. It was appalling enough when the miners were working, how must it be now? I think everyday if I could help I'd give up my vacation without much ado and return to England to help with the struggle. But I know there is nothing I can do. I would be more unhappy than I am if I did not know that you and the other comrades have been doing some good work. Now certainly is a good opportunity and I feel sure you are doing your utmost to show our ideas. Good luck to you my dear!

⁴ William Joynson-Hicks (1865-1932). Born in Cannonbury, the son of a merchant he was elected Member of Parliament in 1902, and became a Baronet in 1919. Was Postmaster General, later Minister of Health and Home Secretary, 1924-29. First Viscount Brentford 1929. According to The Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-1940, (Oxford, 1949), 427-8, 'he dealt successfully with the General Strike of 1926'.