



Interview in the *New York World*, September 17, 1893

Nelly Bly Again.

....
She Interviews Emma Goldman and Other Anarchists.

....
[...]Emma Goldman.

Do you need an introduction to Emma Goldman? You have seen supposed pictures of her. You have read of her as a property-destroying, capitalist-killing, riot-promoting agitator. You see her in your mind a great raw-boned creature, with short hair and bloomers, a red flag in one hand, a burning torch in the other; both feet constantly off of the ground and "murder!" continually upon her lips.

The was my ideal of her, I confess,¹ and when the matron stood before me saying, "This is Emma Goldman," I gasped in surprise and then laughed.

A little bit of a girl, just 5 feet high,² including her boot heels, not showing her 120 pounds; with a saucy, turned-up nose and very expressive blue-gray eyes that gazed inquiringly at me through shell-rimmed glasses was Emma Goldman!

Her quiet little hands held rolled a recent copy of the *Illustrated American*.³ The modest blue serge Eton suit, with a blue muslin shirtwaist and scarf, had no suggestion of bloomers, and the light brown hair, not banged but falling loosely over the forehead and gathered in a little knot behind, was very pretty and girlish.

The little feet were decorously upon the floor, and the rather full lips parted, showing strong white teeth within, a mild, pleasant voice, with a very fetching accent, said not "murder," but---

"What is it you wish, madam?"

I told her. I sat down beside her, and we talked for two hours.

"I do not want anything published about me," she said, "because people misjudge and exaggerate, and, besides, I do not think it looks well for me to say anything while I am in jail."

"But I want to know something about your former life; how you became an Anarchist, what your theories are, and how you mean to establish them."

She Tells Her Age.

She smiled at me, rather amused, but the smile was a very becoming one, lighting up the gravity of her face and making her look more girlish than ever.

"How old are you?" I asked as a beginning.

"Twenty-five last June," she replied without the faintest hesitancy.

What greater proof do I need that she is an unusual and extraordinary woman?

"But the month of roses has not brought many into my life," she added, with a little smile.

"When did you become an Anarchist, and what made you one?"

"Oh, I have been one all my life, but I never really entered into the work until after the Chicago riot, seven years ago."⁴

"Why are you one?" I asked. "What is your object? What did you hope to gain?"

She smiled again, and slowly smoothed the book upon her knee.

"We are all egotists,"⁵ she answered. "There are some that, if asked why they are Anarchists, will say, 'for the good of the people.' It is not true, and I do not say it. I am an Anarchist because I am a egotist. It pains me to see others suffer. I cannot bear it. I never hurt a man in my life, and I don't think I could. So, because what others suffer makes me suffer, I am an Anarchist and give my life for the cause, for only through it can be ended all suffering and want and unhappiness.

A Word About Capitalists.

"Everything wrong, crime and sickness and all that, is the result of the system under which we live, she continued earnestly. "Were there no money, and as a result, no capitalists, people would not be over-worked, starved and illy housed, all of which makes them old before their time, diseases them and makes them criminals. To save a dollar the capitalists build their railroads poorly, and along comes a train, and loads of people are killed. What are their lies to him if by their sacrifice he has saved money? But those deaths mean misery, want and crime in many, many families. According to Anarchistic principles, we build the best of railroads, so there shall be no accidents. There is the Broadway cable, for instance.⁶ Instead of running a few cars at a frightful speed, in order to save a larger expense, we should run many cars at slow speed, and so have no accidents."

"If you do away with money and employers, who will work upon your railroads?" I asked.

"Those that care for that kind of work. Then everyone shall do that which he likes best, not merely a thing he is compelled to do to earn his daily bread."⁷

"What will you do with the lazy ones, who would not work?"

No one is lazy. They grow hopeless from the misery of their present existence, and give up. Under our order of things, every man would do the work he liked, and would have as much as his neighbor, so could not be unhappy and discouraged."

"What will you do with your criminals if everyone is free and prisons unheard of?"

Why Are There Criminals?

She smiles, sadly.

"The subject takes a lifetime of study," she answered, "but we believe that we would not have a criminal. Why are there criminals to-day. Because some have everything, others nothing. Under our system it would be every man equal. The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not steal.' Now, to steal, it is granted, there must be something to steal. We do not grant that there is anything to steal, for everything should be free.

"Do you believe in God, Miss Goldman?"

"Once I did. Until I was seventeen I was very devout, and all my people are so, even to-day. But when I began to read and study, I lost that belief. I believe in nature, nothing else."

"Where were you born?"

"I was born in Russia and afterwards my family removed to Germany. Although my people were of a good family, I was always in deep sympathy for the poor. I did not think of being an Anarchist then, but I was always trying to see some way to benefit the working classes. I was taught a trade. My father thought that no difference what one's position was, one should master a trade, so I learned dressmaking at a French school. I have worked at this for years, sometimes in my own rooms, and again in establishments."

She Likes to Bathe and Dress.

"Do you care for dress at all?"

"I know that the right of free speech was once guaranteed to every man and woman in this land.

"Oh, of course," she answered, laughing. "I like to look well, but I don't like very fussy dresses. I like my dresses to be plain and quiet, and, above all things," here she laughed as if recalling the oft-declaration of Anarchists' hatred for soap, "I love my bath. I must be clean. Being a German, I was taught cleanliness with my youth, and I do not care how poor my room or my clothes are so long as they are clean."

"What did you do with the money you earned by sewing?"

"Spent it all on books," she said emphatically. "I kept myself in poverty buying books. I have a library of nearly three hundred volumes, and so long as I had something to read I did not mind hunger or shabby clothes."

Think of that you girls who put every dollar upon your backs! Can you not testify to this woman's earnestness of purpose when she sacrifices her looks for books?

Miss Goldman speaks Russian, German, French and English, and reads and writes Spanish and Italian.

Her Ideas of Marriage.

"There is something else I must ask you. We look upon marriage as the foundation of everything that is good. We base everything upon it. You do not believe in marriage. What do you propose shall take its place?"

"I was married," she said, with a little sigh, "when I was scarcely seventeen.⁸ I suffered--let me say no more about that. I believe in the marriage of affection. That is the only true marriage. If two people care for each other they have a right to live together so long as that love exists. When it is dead what base immorality for them still to keep together! Oh, I tell you the marriage ceremony is a terrible thing!

"Tell me," she added very seriously, "how can a woman go before a minister and take an oath to love 'this man' all her life? How can she tell but to-morrow, next week, she may get to know this man and hate him. Love is founded on respect, and a woman cannot tell what a man is until she lives with him. Instead of being free to end the relation when her feelings change, she lives on in a state that is the most deprived of all.

"Take the woman who marries for a home and for fine clothes. She goes to the man with a lie on her lips. Still"--with a little uplifting of the hands--"she will not let her skirts touch the poor unfortunate upon the street who deceives no man, but is to him just what she appears! Do away with marriage. Let there be nothing but voluntary affection and there ceases to exist the prostitute wife and the prostitute street woman."

"But the children? What would you do with them? Men would desert; women and children would be left uncared for and destitute," I protested.

"On the contrary, then men would never desert, and if a couple decided to separate there would be public homes and schools for the children. Mothers who would rather do something else than care for their children could put them in the schools, where they would be cared for by women who preferred taking care of children to any other work. In this way we would never have diseased or disabled children from careless and incompetent mothers.

"Besides this," she went on, "in our free schools every child would have a chance to learn and pursue that for which it has ability. Can you imagine the number of children to-day, children of poor parents, who are born with ability for music or painting, or letters, whose abilities lie dormant for the lack of means and the necessity to work for their daily bread as soon as they are out of their cradles."

Her Relatives.

"Have you any brothers or sisters, Miss Goldman?"

"Yes; a married brother,⁹ who does not bother about anything, and only reads the papers when there is something in them about me. My sister is also married and, while not actively engaged in our cause, is bringing up her children to our principles.¹⁰ My father and mother are also living, near Rochester, and, while not Anarchists, sympathize with me and do not interfere with my work."¹¹

"What is your future?"

"I cannot say. I shall live to agitate to promote our ideas. I am willing to give my liberty and my life, if necessary, to further my case. It is my mission and I shall not falter."

"Do you think that murder is going to help your cause?"

She looked grave; she shook her head slowly.

"That is a long subject to discuss. I don't believe that through murder we shall gain, but by war, labor against capital, masses against classes, which will not come in twenty or twenty-five years. But some day, I firmly believe, we shall gain, and until then I am satisfied to agitate to teach, and I only ask justice and freedom of speech."

And so I left the little Anarchist, the modern Joan of Arc, waiting patiently in the Tombs until her friends could secure bail for her.

"I shall certainly get a year or a year and a half,"¹² she said to me in parting, "not because my offense deserves it, but because I am an Anarchist." [...]

New York World, 17 September 1893, pp. 1, 3. Excised from the beginning of this article is Bly's declaration that the "labor wars" were the central issue of the period, since racial, regional, and religious tensions had "vanished." The excised remainder of the article includes interviews with Johann Most and Justus Schwab, and an account of EG's visit to Schwab's saloon Zum Großen Michel, a gathering place for radicals. Also included with the article are drawings of EG, Schwab, Most, and Claus Timmermann. For the complete article, see *EGP*, reel 47.

¹ Nellie Bly's was the first extensive interview of EG in the mainstream daily press. The interview, which took place while EG was awaiting trial in the Tombs jail, also marked Bly's return to the front pages of the *New York World* after a three-year hiatus

² Her 1893 Philadelphia arrest record gave EG's exact height as 4 feet 10 and 3/4 inches.

³ The recent issue contained an article entitled "Anarchism in New York," featuring a disparaging account of EG as a reckless agitator among the unemployed of the Lower East Side (see *Illustrated American*, 9 September 1893, pp.295-98).

⁴ The aftermath of the Haymarket riots led to a resurgence of interest in anarchism in the United States. EG, AB, Voltairine de Cleyre, Bill Haywood, and others all point to the injustices of the trial and hangings of Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer as deeply influential in their own development as radicals. EG wrote in *Living My Life* that a speech about Haymarket made by Socialist Labor Party member Johanna Greie while EG was still living in Rochester had a great impact on her, as did articles written by Most in his paper *Freiheit*. Above all, it was Louis Lingg's defiance during the trial and his taking of his own life before the scheduled hanging that resonated with EG and AB.

⁵ For discussion of anarchism and egoism, see note 3 to Letter from Alexander Berkman, 20 August 1892, above.

⁶ Fully operational in July 1893, the Broadway cable car line was the site of frequent accidents, particularly at Twenty-third and Fifty-third streets and at the segment along Fourteenth Street known as "Dead Man's Curve."

⁷ EG's comments on work under anarchism and the following discussion of crime and criminals are similar to those in Peter Kropotkin's pamphlet *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles* (London: Freedom Press, 1891).

⁸ In February 1887 EG married fellow factory worker Jacob Kershner, thereby gaining U.S. citizenship. She divorced him between November 1887 and February 1888, then remarried him and was never officially divorced from Kershner after their remarriage.

⁹ Herman Goldman (1872-1934), EG's younger brother and a Rochester machinist, was interviewed about his sister at the time of AB's attempt on Frick. See *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, 28 July 1892, p. 5.

¹⁰ The sister EG refers to could be Lena Zodikow Cominsky (1862-1950), EG's half sister and the mother of six children, including two who would become close to EG, Stella (Cominsky) Comyn Ballantine (1886-1961) and Saxe Commins, born Isidore Cominsky (1892-1958); or EG could be referring to Helene Hochstein (1860-1920), who was a socialist and had three children, including the violinist David Hochstein (1892-1918).

¹¹ EG's parents lived in Rochester, New York. Her father had a small furniture shop and her mother took an active part in Jewish philanthropy in that city.

¹² EG was in fact sentenced to a year in prison and released after ten months for good behavior.