



Published Essays and Pamphlets

"Impressions of the Trial" by Guido Bruno Excerpted From *Pearson's Magazine*



Oppression has dragged revolt before the tribunal of the Grand Inquisition. Dead words of the Law lay ready as instruments of torture. The District Attorney acted as accuser for the offended divinity. In the box sat the jurors, men with set faces, steadfast worshippers of the dogma. Soldiers and detectives formed nine-tenths of the audience; only a few friends of the accused had been fortunate enough to gain admission to the court.

On his elevation beneath the purple canopy--stretched by another generation--in his solemn high-backed chair behind the huge table laden with law books sat the Judge, the almighty of the hour.

It was the afternoon of the seventh of July, in the Federal court-room situated on the fourth floor of the old Post-office Building in New York.

City Hall Square below was crowded with thousands of people who had assembled to witness the spectacle of the City fathers welcoming the Russian Commission on the steps of the City Hall, just across the square. The Russian tricolor in close embrace with the Stars and Stripes flew from buildings and flagpoles. It was a sunshiny, jubilant afternoon, the Friday which the people of New York had chosen to show their love for the new Russian democracy and to try Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman for conspiracy.

From the windows of the court-room we could see the festive procession, the waving of flags, the enthusiastic faces that hailed the dawn of a new era, we could hear the music of the band playing that grandest of all songs of liberty, "The Marseillaise," and the cheering of the crowds, who, in the bottom of their hearts, believe in freedom. But the people of New York could not look into the court-room on the fourth floor of the Post-office Building and could not hear the cry of strangled Liberty, nor the strains of the dreadful litany that tells of prison and punishment and death.

The air was heavy, the audience quiet and subdued, the soldiers in their uniforms among the spectators watchful and defiant. The court attendants in their blue uniforms and shining badges used both gestures

and looks to intimidate the awed spectators. Officers were posted at the doors to refuse admissions to the people of New York who tried to get in.

I sat there at the press table amidst the representatives of our daily papers. Some were older men who followed the proceedings with the mellow superiority of experience. Young reporters were busy making notes, which would never be published.

And there, opposite me, sat Alexander Berkman. A strong, fighting face; decision and action written all over him. Around his mouth plays the tired smile of the fighter who knows what it means to meet stupidity face to face. His hands are clenched, he is armed against attacks and lies, against rudeness and against injustice. He has come to fight. He does not know how to compromise. He does not know how to bow politely to the court, how to invoke in flowery language the attention of the District Attorney or how to arouse the sympathetic interest of his peers--the jurymen. The principles for which he is fighting, which brought about his indictment, are now his only weapons and his only shield. He is a non-conformist who believes in liberty and in freedom uncurtailed in any way.

My memory goes back a few years. I see the very same man surrounded by little children, laughing and merry-making with them. I see him amidst the pupils of the Ferrer School, telling them fairy-tales and admonishing them always to remain brothers and sisters after they have left school and grown up to be adults.

There is Emma Goldman, sitting behind him. I don't see hatred in her eyes but determination; to do to the last minute what she thinks so important for the happiness of future generations. She is reading some report introduced as evidence by the District Attorney. There is a grave seriousness on her features and that wonderful, final resolve that has ever--since time began--caused men to be crucified, to be burned alive, hung, drawn and quartered; the resolve and purpose which have brought to humanity all the good things it possesses.

There is the jury! Twelve men representing the people of New York; the peers of the defendants! I look at their faces: some are old men, some are middle-aged, some are baldheaded and some have gray, black or blonde hair. Some have mustaches and others have not. Some have pepper-and-salt colored suits, others wear suits of brown, black or light-gray. Sometimes they look at the defendants. When they do, it is not for long. It is the casual look at something repulsive, at something that one might be curious enough to look at though one knows that it is bad because it is so different from what newspapers print and politicians praise.

These representatives of the people of New York let their eyes rest with an expression of content upon the District Attorney, that Archangel who guards the gates of their Paradise. Some of the jurors dare, now and then, to glance shyly up at the judge's throne beneath the purple canopy.

His Honor seems uncomfortable in the clear rays of the sun which pour in through the shining window panes onto his face. He must face the sun because his duty compels him also to face the jury and the defendants. He is seated and only his head can be seen above the table, his head on his broad shoulders. A thick, sensitive upper lip, between nose and forehead an angle of about 160 degrees, a small chin, big jaws, his eyes hard, not by experience but by purpose. He seems to me to be a man who would really go and do what you bade him do or what he thought was expected of him.

Now he rises. The black toga of his office seems too heavy upon his shoulders and he throws it back with a tired gesture. Or does he feel too warm? His arms are very short and he is a little man.

I try to read his face. I am very near him. I search for something in his eyes. Nothing is written upon his face, nothing in his eyes.

The witnesses! Everybody in the court-room knows that the District Attorney must prove what the witnesses have to answer, what the jurymen must decide in their minds, what the Judge will pronounce as sentence. . . a dreadful monotony--an iron ring presses tighter and tighter around our heads.

The District Attorney is reading part of a speech delivered by Emma Goldman to the effect that the people themselves should be called upon to decide whether there should be war or not: the same thing one reads in the *New York American* editorials. A witness is swearing that he has heard her utter such sentences. And, like mockery, from across the Square come the sounds of "The Marseillaise," played in honor of the Russian rebels, guests of the people of New York.

And now! "The Star Spangled Banner." Life comes into the Judge. He rises. He gesticulates wildly with his short arms: "Everybody must rise in the room," he shouts, with a voice which seems unused to give command. The soldiers poke their neighbors, court attendants run about the room pushing men and women into patriotic attention. Some persons refuse to get up. The Judge excitedly issues orders. The objectors are dragged out. Everyone who wears a badge seems eager now to earn his livelihood by bullying people into patriotic attention. . . . All is over. The jurors again sit down indolently in their seats, the witness continues his narration.

Hopeless monotony again! The English anthem is being played outside on the Square, but the Judge does not command us to stand up. We are allowed to remain seated.

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The hall is filled with men and women, well-dressed and well-to-do people, as well as laborers and factory girls. They were not admitted to the court-room and have waited patiently for a chance to see the two people who were sacrificing their liberty and their comfort to secure the joys of life for others.

Below in the Square a procession had formed to take the Russian Commission with flying red banners of the Russian Revolution through the streets of our city and to show the people of New York that democracy is triumphant. . . in Russia.

Monday. Again I sit in my chair and listen to Alexander Berkman, who tries in simple but eloquent words to tell the jurymen what it means to be an anarchist. . . . He paints with vivid colors the beauties of a free democracy without oppressors, without poverty, with beauty and content for everybody. He shows conclusively that the District Attorney had failed to prove him "to be the head of a country-wide conspiracy to resist conscription." He shows that speeches by Miss Goldman and by himself had been delivered on several occasions and that the District Attorney used in his evidence only the one speech where there had been no stenographer present to take it down for Miss Goldman. He points out that the stenographic report offered as evidence is the work of a policeman who has never reported a speech before and who has failed in a test in this very court.

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He finished and the jurymen look with set faces at the District Attorney, with the faces of men who care only for the dogma.

Emma Goldman speaks in her defense.

Her speech goes to the heart of everyone in the courtroom, even of those whose hearts are made sound-proof and who would never permit other gods to take the place of their own gods.

She speaks of the twenty-seven years of her rebellion against existing conditions.

She states her unshakable principles of independence and of liberty.

Her speech is one of the important documents of our century. It will live as the great plea of our time for liberation from ancient customs and institutions.

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The jury goes out and the jury comes in. "Guilty."

The Judge gives the heaviest punishment he can; these are the worst offenders possible.

The government takes possession of the prisoners at once.

The Judge refuses to grant them time to attend to their personal affairs, to take counsel with each other, and a few hours after the sentence had been pronounced, they are on their way to their prisons.

Emma Goldman to sew women's garments in the prison of Jefferson City, Mo., and Alexander Berkman to do some sort of menial work in the Federal prison at Atlanta, Ga.

Freedom is a great vision. It appears upon the horizon of each of us. Some fear even to look in its direction. It dazzles their eyes.

Some retain the shallow name and use it as a bait to fill their coffers or satisfy political ambition; others cherish it in their hearts.

They are hung or sent to prison.

GUIDO BRUNO in *Pearson's Magazine*