

# SHALOM

*Jewish Peace Letter*

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## *Murray Polner: Sasha & Emma*



*Emma Goldman and Alexander ("Sasha") Berkman circa 1917-1919.*

*Stefan Merken: **What Does the Future Hold?***

*Rabbi Sheldon Lewis: **Peacemaking and Reconciliation***

*Shaul Magid: **A 'Historic Right' to Israel?***

*Timothy Kudo: **Was I Wrong to Kill in Afghanistan?***

Stefan Merken

## What Does the Future Hold?

**I** ASSUME MOST AMERICANS ARE DEEPLY INTERESTED in creating a strong and prosperous future for generations to come. But because of the huge national debt, our children and grandchildren, we are regularly told, will have to bear the costly burden of paying it down. But there are other vital issues that need everyone's attention, such as America's repeated involvement in wars. Far too many Americans who are hardly Washingtonian hawks have become too accepting of our past, present and future wars which, by the way, also cause our national debt to soar. The best example is how the Bush administration convinced Americans, and especially the mass media, that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The war in Iraq began soon after, cost us billions of dollars, and ended in something far less than "victory."

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STEFAN MERKEN is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.



All too many Americans have become so accepting of wars that they seem not even to flinch at the possibility of another conflict against Iran or North Korea. Robert Jay Lifton, psychiatrist and prolific author, has written extensively about this phenomenon, calling it *psychic numbing*. It is this numbing that comes into play when politicians and a pliant media convince us that it is America's duty to fight yet another war.

I think about the wars the US has been involved in during my lifetime. In Vietnam we lost 58,209 young men and women — not to mention those scarred by grievous mental and physical wounds. In the Afghan and Iraqi wars we have lost at least 6,518 men and women, plus the wounded. Civilians have also paid a very heavy price. What will it take to convince more and more Americans that nothing is gained by war? We lose too many young people and in the end nothing is gained, and so much is lost. ☆

### HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN'S JEWISH ORGANIZATION EQUALITY INDEX

A new study from the Human Rights Campaign for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equal rights gives the results of an eighteen-month survey of Jewish religious attitudes and policies. The report, issued in January, is available at [hrc.org/joei](http://hrc.org/joei), where it may be downloaded for a summary and highlights.

The survey's major findings: The majority of Jewish denominations have come out in favor of LGBT equality. A New York City study found that about half of the Jewish organizations there had LGBT staff and fourteen percent had LGBT board members. LGBT Jews are far less engaged in the Jewish community than their heterosexual counterparts, primarily because they are unsure

whether they are welcome. Keshet, a non-profit organization that works for full inclusion of LGBT Jews in Jewish life, provides training and resources for Jewish organizations around the country [[www.keshetonline.org](http://www.keshetonline.org)]. The Orthodox Jewish community is divided on the question. Conservative Jews, since 2007, ordain LGBT rabbis and allow LGBT clergy to officiate at same-sex commitment ceremonies. The Reform movement, the largest, has not viewed gay sex as a violation of Jewish law since 1977 and welcomes LGBT people as members and clergy, as has the Reconstructionist movement since 1985.

JPF is in full support of LGBT equality and nondiscrimination. ☆

## Rabbi Sheldon Lewis

# Peacemaking and Reconciliation, Jewish Style

*In the aftermath of 9/11, Rabbi Sheldon Lewis sought solace and a path to reconciliation in Jewish texts. Peacemaking is arguably the key pillar among Jewish values, and his new book, Torah of Reconciliation (Gefen Publishing House), seeks to reveal this primary value in diverse scriptural and rabbinical texts, revealing the rich, wise resources available in Judaism for the crucial task of peacemaking in the modern world. While there are, to be sure, contradictory messages to be found in the length and breadth of tradition, there is an obsession with overcoming conflict and avoiding violence in the service of a world*

*at peace. A people that has known repeatedly the agony of conflict has never stopped longing for and searching for the keys to security and tranquility.*

*Rabbi Sheldon Lewis received his rabbinic ordination at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was a student of Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel. After ordination he was a US Army chaplain, and served a year in Vietnam. He is rabbi emeritus of Congregation Kol Emeth in Palo Alto, California.*

*Following are several excerpts from Torah of Reconciliation.*

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### LETTING GO OF HATRED, NURTURING LOVE

The attitude toward a fallen enemy is connected to a more general approach to hatred. It is named and acknowledged as very real in the human heart. Yet hatred directed at another is always a state of mind to overcome. It never is nurtured and accepted but rather is viewed as an unfortunate given in human affairs.

The Torah explicitly forbids hating an Egyptian, the earliest enemy of the Jewish people: Do not despise an Egyptian for you were a stranger in his land.

While it is true that Amalek, the people who attacked Israel cruelly in the desert, is stubbornly recalled, there is no sense that this conscious nurturing of memory is pervaded by hatred. For most of Jewish history, Amalek had disappeared without a trace.

### JUDGING OTHERS WITH MERCY

Judging another human being is fraught with stumbling blocks, and therefore the advice given by Rabban Gamaliel, the son of Rabbi Judah the prince, is “Do not judge another until you have occupied his place.”

### SELF-CRITICISM

A witty Chassidic teaching asks this question: Why does

a human being have two eyes? The answer: “The purpose of one eye is to see the good in others while the other is to focus on one’s own shortcomings!”

### SEEKING AND GRANTING FORGIVENESS

Since being human is so deeply linked to imperfection and to conflict, the rabbis look upon *teshuva*, or repentance and reconciliation, as fundamental to creation itself. It was viewed as inherently part of the divine plan to help provide remedy for a constant need. It is always available, and it is a daily theme in the life of an observant Jew.

### NURTURING EMPATHY FOR THE OTHER

The arena for holding up the good and the possibilities for good in others is expanded beyond the world of kinsfolk. In the text of Torah itself is embedded the directive that one must stretch oneself to know the “other.” It begins with the attitude toward the stranger on the margin of one’s own society: “Also you shall not oppress the stranger, for you shall know the soul of the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” In a later passage, the commandment is enlarged: “you shall love him as yourself, search for one’s own sins and the quest for forgiveness and reconciliation with God and with others.” ☆

Shaul Magid

## Because God Tells Me So Do Jews have a ‘historic right’ to Israel?

*The cabinet on Sunday unanimously passed a resolution completely rejecting the UN decision Thursday to upgrade the Palestinians to non-state observer status. “The Jewish people have natural, historical and legal rights to its homeland with its eternal capital Jerusalem,” the resolution stated. — Jerusalem Post, December 2, 2012*

*Khaled Meshaal, the Hamas leader in exile, has rejected any concessions over a future Palestine state at a rally marking the 25th anniversary of the armed Palestinian group... “Palestine is our land and nation from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river, from north to south, and we cannot cede an inch or any part of it,” he said. — Al Jazeera, December 9, 2012*

**N**OT LONG AGO B’NAI JESHURUN, AN INDEPENDENT progressive synagogue in Manhattan, made the front page of *The New York Times* after its leadership sent a membership-wide e-mail applauding the UN vote granting Palestinians nonmember “state” status. While B’nai Jeshurun predictably met with mixed reactions, it became the most visible American synagogue to break ranks with the pro-Israel lobby protesting the UN vote.

A few days later the Reform Movement issued a statement criticizing the Israeli government’s decision to revive settlement construction in the E1 area of the West Bank. This has long been considered a “red line” by the US and other states friendly to Israel, in that it would geographically make a two-state solution (with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital) impossible.

Back in November, in a *Times of Israel* blog post, Rabbi Dr. Daniel Gordis, senior vice-president of the Shalem Center in Jerusalem and self-appointed “defender of Israel,”

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penned a scathing critique of a letter written by Rabbi Sharon Brous to her congregation IKAR in Los Angeles. Brous, Gordis’ former student, had “dared” to express sympathy and concern for Gazan civilian casualties of Israeli air strikes as she had for Israeli victims of Palestinian rocket fire. “At the same time, supporting Israel’s right to protect and defend itself does not diminish the reality that the Palestinian people are also children of God, whose suffering is real and undeniable,” she wrote in a rather temperate acknowledgment of human suffering, apparently crossing a “red line” that resulted in Gordis’ accusation that Brous has somehow “abandoned” her people.

These three communiqués arguably mark a significant fissure in American Jewish institutional support of Israeli policies, igniting robust debate among American Jews as to their responsibility and allegiance to Israel as Americans and as Jews. As significant as the criticisms are, each reiterates the love of and commitment to Israel as an essential part of American Jewish identity. A number of factors contribute to this commitment, and they have shifted over the past few decades. Among the most tangled and oft-cited, however, is the claim, made by both Jews (inside and outside Israel) and Palestinians, that their people have a “historic right” to this contested land.

### *Theology Won’t Work on the World Stage*

In the ongoing debate about the legitimate rights of Israelis (i.e., Jews) and Palestinians to the land both claim as their own, one often hears the term “historic right.” While this idea was promulgated by David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, he arguably used it in a rhetorical rather than literal manner, one that was a part of his argument for the very legitimacy of the Jewish state in part of the Land of Israel, but not, by definition, the entire “historic” Land of Israel. In a recent talk about his book, *The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership*, Ambassador Yehuda Avner noted that the phrase “historic right” was brought into sharper relief by Menachem Begin, who used it to argue for a Greater Israel ideology; that is, not only to make a case for a Jewish state, which already existed, but to include much



of the “historic” Land of Israel, thus denying the “historic” rights of others.

The “historic right” claim has at least two sources. The first, of course, is the Hebrew Bible and its rabbinic interpretation that bases itself on a divine promise as the fulfillment of the Ancient Israelite covenant. There is, however, an important contextual distinction between the biblical claim and its rabbinic counterpart. The Bible, dictating the fulfillment of the covenant through the Israelite conquest of the land, views this land as the final stage of a promise made to the patriarch Abraham. The Bible is, in fact, a story of the Israelites coming to the land.

The rabbis, however, are living in a diasporic context. For them sovereignty in the land is already a thing of the past and a promise of the future — neither part of their present reality nor, in their minds, the proximate future. They are creating a religion (Judaism) where the land serves as part of the collective imagination linked to a future mes-

sianic promise, even if its fulfillment is hoped for on a daily basis as canonized in Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles of Faith. While they still place sacred value on the land in its exilic state (i.e., a land ruled by others), collective conquest is not their primary focus. For some of them it may even be a transgression. In any case, we can call this a *theological* historic right.

There is also a claim of “historic right” founded on historical memory and continued inhabitation of the land. While this may be *based* on the Bible as a historical narrative, it is not deeply rooted in the Bible as theology, but (closer to Ben Gurion) the Bible as a secular history of the Jews. (Recall that Ben Gurion wanted to publish a version of the Bible without God’s name.)

Adapting the teaching of the Orthodox Israeli philosopher and scientist Yeshayahu Leibowitz, the theological historic right works well as an internal resource for connection to the land in religious practice or national pride, but not as an argument on the international stage. The same holds for the Muslim principle that any land that becomes part of *Dar ‘al Islam* cannot be relinquished: It may work well as a spiritual resource for connection to a particular land, but not as a “historic right” in the arena of modern nation states.

### *It Just Isn’t Zionism*

What we are left with then are two legitimate nontheological “historic rights” — one Jewish, one Palestinian — based on memory and inhabitation that have equal weight in regard to the question of nation states (Israel and/or Palestine). Who was there first or who was there longer is irrelevant, as both were there long enough to legitimately make this kind of nontheological historic claim.

What has become popular in contemporary Zionist discourse, now arguably dominated by the Religious Zionism of Abraham Isaac Kook (even by those who are not his followers, nor even necessarily religious), is a historic claim founded on theological principles that views possession of the land as a prerequisite for the coming of the messiah. While Menachem Begin may have ignited this impulse, or given it legitimacy in his declaration of Israel’s historic right to “Greater Israel,” his claim was not



*Don’t fence me in/out: A portion of Israel’s “security wall” on the West Bank.*

messianic, but rather one that arguably occupied a place between the secular Ben-Gurion and the theological teachings of Kook’s son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, the architect of National Religious Zionism. Nevertheless, while this position fuels passion among many contemporary Zionists, it does not have, nor should it have, any purchase on the world stage. One cannot generalize and universalize an internal theological claim as an argument for denying the equally legitimate nontheological historical rights of others.

The theological claim of “historic right” is embodied in the views of the followers of the teachings of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, and in the ultra-Orthodox Satmar position of Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, both of which are anti-Zionist, at least in terms of how Zionism was framed by its numerous founders. (Contemporary Chabad Hasidism occupies a position in-between.) Although Kook and Teitelbaum come to opposite conclusions — Kook, an active postmillennial messianist, believed sole possession of the land was a prerequisite or sign of the messiah, while Teitelbaum, a passive premillennial messianist, believed that remaining in the Diaspora until being redeemed by divine fiat was the will of God — each founded his position on theological claims he garnered from the Bible and its classic interpreters.

Yet each tacitly rejects precisely what Zionism espoused: normalization of the Jewish people through membership in the international community of nation states. Zionism can use a theological reading of Hebrew Scripture to deepen the commitment of its constituency, but it cannot make that the *basis* of its “historic right” to the land on the international stage, especially when that right is countered by another community with an equally legitimate, nontheological historic right (i.e., historical memory and inhabitation). For the purposes of negotiation, then, Jews and Palestinians possess an equal nontheological historic right to this contested land. Everything else should be labeled “for internal use only.”

The three instances mentioned at the outset may or may

not point to a definitive shift in the way American Jews understand the complex relationship between their commitment to Zionism and the policies of a Jewish state they love but with which they often disagree. The “pro-Israel” camp would like to collapse the two, arguing that one’s Zionist credentials are determined exclusively by one’s uncritical support of Israeli policies (and often basing that support on a “historic right” that ignores the equally valid “historic right” of the Palestinian people). But the American Jewish community may well be considering alternatives. ✧

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Timothy Kudo

## I Killed People in Afghanistan *Was I right or wrong?*

**W**HEN I JOINED THE MARINE CORPS, I KNEW I would kill people. I was trained to do it in a number of ways, from pulling a trigger to ordering a bomb strike to beating someone to death with a rock. As I got closer to deploying to war in 2009, my lethal abilities were refined, but my ethical understanding of killing was not.

I held two seemingly contradictory beliefs: Killing is always wrong, but in war, it is necessary. How could something be both immoral and necessary?

I didn't have time to resolve this question before deploying. And in the first few months, I fell right into killing without thinking twice. We were simply too busy to worry about the morality of what we were doing.

But one day in Afghanistan in 2010, my patrol got into a firefight and ended up killing two people on a motorcycle who we thought were about to attack us. They ignored or didn't understand our warnings to stop, and according to the military's "escalation of force" guidelines, we were authorized to shoot them in self-defense. Although we thought they were armed, they turned out to be civilians. One looked no older than sixteen.

It's been more than two years since we killed those people on the motorcycle, and I think about them every day. Sometimes it's when I'm reading the news or watching a movie, but most often it's when I'm taking a shower or walking down my street in Brooklyn.

They are not the only deaths I carry with me. I also remember the first time a Marine several miles away asked me over the

radio whether his unit could kill someone burying a bomb. The decision fell on me alone. I said yes. Those decisions became commonplace over my deployment. Even more frightening than the idea of what we were doing was how easy it became for me.

I never shot someone, but I ordered bomb strikes and directed other people to shoot.

Many veterans are unable to reconcile such actions in war with the biblical commandment "Thou shalt not kill." When they come home from an environment where killing is not only accepted but is a metric of success, the transition to one where killing is wrong can be incomprehensible.

This incongruity can have devastating effects. After more than ten years of war, the military lost more active-duty members last year to suicide than to enemy fire. More worrisome, the Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that one in five Americans who commit suicide is a veteran, despite the fact that veterans make up just thirteen percent of the population.

While I don't know why individual veterans resort to suicide, I can say that the ethical damage of war may be worse than the physical injuries we sustain. To wage war properly, you have to recalibrate your moral compass. Once you return from the battlefield, it is difficult or impossible to repair it.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has started calling this problem "moral injury," but that's as deceptive a euphemism as "collateral damage." This isn't the kind of injury you recover from with rest, physical therapy and pain medication. War makes us killers. We must confront this horror directly if we're to be honest about the true costs of war.

I didn't return from Afghanistan as the same person. My personality is the same, or at least close enough, but I'm no longer the "good" person I once thought I was. There's nothing that can change that; it's impossible to forget what happened, and the only people who can forgive me are dead.



*U.S. Marines with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment leave their forward operating base to conduct a census patrol in the Nawa district of Helmand province, Afghanistan, on July 30, 2009.*

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*Marine Captain TIMOTHY KUDO, a graduate student at New York University, deployed to Iraq in 2009 and to Afghanistan from 2010 to 2011. Follow him on Twitter: @tkudo.*

I will never know whether my actions in Afghanistan were right or wrong. On good days, I believe they were necessary. But instead, I want to believe that killing, even in war, is wrong.

America will participate in other wars in my lifetime. But if the decision to do so is a collective responsibility, then civilians need to have a better understanding of the consequences. The immorality of war is not a wound we can ignore — as is painfully obvious with so many veterans committing suicide.

Civilians can comprehend the casualties of war because most people know someone who has died. But few know someone who has killed. When I tell people I'm a Marine, the next question many ask is: "Did you kill anyone?" To my ears, this sounds like: "What's the worst thing you've ever done?" They don't realize they're asking about an intensely private matter.

Many veterans I know are incensed by this question. It rein-

forces the isolation they feel in a society that doesn't seem to care about Iraq or Afghanistan. But to me, it speaks to the fact that civilians' curiosity about war overwhelms their understanding of it. Most Americans have little idea what war means. Our battles are fought with volunteers, making an intimate knowledge of war voluntary as well — and therefore avoidable.

Veterans are the only ones who can explain the ethical impact of war. For me, this means being open and honest about the deaths I caused and how they have changed me.

The question "Did you kill anyone?" isn't easy to answer — and it's certainly not one every veteran wants to. But when civilians ask, I think I have a duty to respond.

And if explaining what I did six thousand miles away in a conflict far from the public's consciousness makes the next war less likely, then maybe my actions weren't in vain. ☆

## Sasha & Emma

# Murray Polner

## Two Rebels

**Y**EARS AGO PAUL AVRICH, MY HIGH SCHOOL CLASSMATE and later a colleague in a college where he was a professor and I an adjunct, invited me to spend an evening with an aging group of Jewish anarchists. At the gathering a woman told me that, other than Eleanor Roosevelt, the country's most remarkable woman had been Emma Goldman. Ahrne Thorne agreed. He was the last editor of the anarchist *Freie Arbeiter Shtimme* (Free Worker's Voice), which closed in 1977 after eighty-seven years of publication when it had seventeen hundred subscribers. He said he had met Alexander Berkman and knew Emma Goldman well. It was hard for me to imagine the people at this gathering as threats to the Republic. They were also despised by Communists because anarchists had the temerity to reject their Soviet paradise.

These old men and women had devoted their lives to an unachievable, impractical utopia in which governments would play minimal roles and were supplanted by voluntary communes. As an old anarchist tune went, "there is no supreme savior, neither god nor king nor leader." On that long ago evening there were reminiscences about strikes, picket lines, prison terms and battles against an oppressive American state as well as an oppressive Soviet Russia, which had betrayed their long sought for "revolution." The names of Goldman and her occasional lover and lifelong friend Berk-

man, known as Sasha, were lovingly recalled.

"Red Emma," as her critics called her, loved America but was deported and died in exile in Canada. Ironically, her family needed government permission for her body to reenter the US for burial in the same Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago where the anarchists executed for the late nineteenth-century Haymarket Affair were interred. Sasha, seriously ill, committed suicide in France and was buried there.

The lives of these two rebels and the saga of American anarchism is the subject of *Sasha and Emma: The Anarchist Quest of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman* (Harvard University Press), an engrossing dual biography. We are fortunate that the historian Paul Avrich, our most eminent scholar of American anarchism and author of histories of the Haymarket affair, Sacco and Vanzetti, as well as the invaluable *Anarchist Voices* and *Anarchist Portraits*, interviewed a wide assortment of surviving anarchists. Before he died he handed his copious notes to his daughter Karen and asked her to complete this book, which can stand alongside Alice Wexler and Candace Falk's biographies about Goldman. A special virtue of this book is that it deals as well with Berkman, whose life has never before been the subject of a full-scale biography.

**SASHA WAS BORN** in 1870 into a prosperous Jewish merchant family in Vilnius, Lithuania, then part of the Russian Empire. Goldman, born in 1869 to a poor Jewish family in

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MURRAY POLNER is co-editor of *Shalom*.



Kovno, also in Russian Lithuania, immigrated at the age of sixteen to Rochester, New York, and worked as a seamstress in that city's garment factories. They met in 1889, in a coffee shop on Manhattan's Lower East Side, and remained the closest of friends and allies for the remainder of their lives.

Americans have always feared and despised anarchists — real and imagined — and occasionally with good reason. Sasha Berkman, an early devotee of “propaganda by deed” — assassination — was indirectly influenced by the heavy hand of autocratic tsarist Russia and its anarchist and nihilist enemies who believed that Romanov despotism was best relieved by violence. Most famously, the Narodnya Volya (People's Will) group murdered the “reformer” Tsar Alexander II in 1881 (he had abolished serfdom in 1861 and established the *zemstvos*, or local self-governing councils.) As luck would have it, his successor proved far harsher.

Sasha arrived in the US at age eighteen. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were an era of bitter class conflict between unions and corporations and their governmental defenders. Andrew Carnegie's steel mills in Homestead, Pennsylvania, were managed by Henry Clay Frick, who battled the striking Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers with Pinkertons and the National Guard.

It was Sasha's fury at what had happened in Homestead that moved him to enter Frick's office in 1892 with a gun and dagger and try — unsuccessfully — to kill Frick. Many Homestead strikers rejected Berkman's act, as did many anarchists. Karen Avrich points to the MIT-educated anarchist Benjamin Tucker, editor of *Liberty*, who wrote, “The hope of humanity lies in the avoidance of that revolution by force



*W.P. Snyder recreates for Harper's Weekly Alexander Berkman's attempt to assassinate Henry Frick during the Homestead strike in 1892.*

which the Berkman's are trying to precipitate.” It was this resort to violence from which anarchism would never recover that became a cautionary lesson for socialist and liberal reformers.

Berkman's eighteen years in prison proved beneficial in one regard. After his release he wrote a trenchant revelation of prison life and the treatment of prisoners in *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912), a biting description of the brutality and corruption of prison life rarely heard since Dorothea Dix, the great prison and mental health reformer of the nineteenth century,

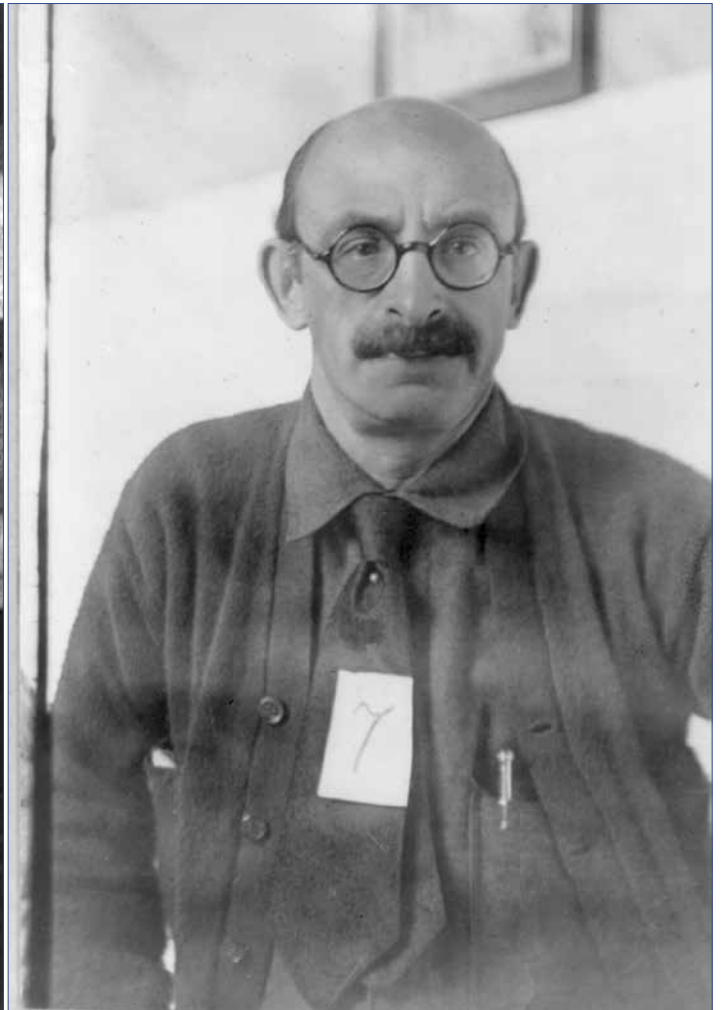
had condemned conditions inside prisons and mental institutions.

All the same, sporadic individual and state violence never ceased. The assassination of President William McKinley in 1901 by Leon Czolgosz, the son of Polish immigrants and a mentally unstable anarchist acting on his own, alarmed and infuriated millions. It wasn't the first or last murder of a president, but it proved to be yet another devastating blow against anarchists, who were unfairly blamed for the killing. Many of their publications were shut down and their right to speak drastically curtailed, especially following the 1914 Ludlow massacre in Colorado, when the Rockefeller-owned Fuel and Iron Company fought the strikers, “many of them immigrants from Greece and Italy,” comments Karen Avrich, who “were demanding appropriate safety precautions, eight-hour workdays, cash wages rather than scrip, and the freedom to organize — all rights to which they were entitled under existing Colorado law.” Disregarding the law, the company hired Pinkertons and brought in the National Guard, who ended up killing miners' wives and children.

Emma fumed at the Ludlow killings. “This is no time for theo-



*September 8, 1901: The Chicago Tribune blames Emma Goldman for Leon Czolgosz's assassination of President William McKinley.*



**1919: Photographs of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman prior to their deportation during the Wilson administration's "red scare."**

riking," she heatedly wrote in her magazine *Mother Earth*. "With machine guns trained upon the strikers, the best answer is — dynamite." Carlo Tresca, the Italian-born anarchist and IWW leader who scorned the Mafia, Nazism and Communism, joined the protest. (Tresca was assassinated in Manhattan in 1943, some say by the Mafia and others think it was the Soviet NKVD). And while a scheme to assassinate John D. Rockefeller was aborted, the memory of Ludlow left the tycoon the most hated man in the country, which he remedied a decade later by following the advice of a shrewd public relations man who convinced him to donate enormous sums to all Americans.

Berkman, like Goldman, a prolific writer, once tried to explain that anarchism was more than violence — a difficult stance given his past. "It is not bombs, disorder or chaos," he wrote in his 1929 book *What Is Communist Anarchism?* (also titled in other editions *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism*): "It is not robbery and murder. It is not a war of each against all." What it is, he explained, is that "you should be free to do the things you want to do; and that you should not be compelled to do what you don't want to do" — sounding a good deal like many twenty-first century Ameri-

cans.

It was their article of faith. *Mother Earth* was founded in 1906, and Sasha began his own magazine in San Francisco, *The Blast*, where he led the fight to free Tom Mooney and Warren Billings, who had been falsely judged guilty for a 1916 bombing in San Francisco during the city's Preparedness Parade, "a massive event staffed by the city of San Francisco to demonstrate America's readiness for war," writes Karen Avrich. Sasha's magazine charged that the effort to blame the attack on the two anarchists was nothing more than a replay of Haymarket, when five anarchists were hanged in 1887. After serving two weeks in jail for advocating birth control and distributing contraceptives, Emma arrived in San Francisco to deliver a public talk: "Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter." Sasha followed up in *The Blast*: "The enemy is athirst for blood."

With American entry into the First World War, Woodrow Wilson, no friend of domestic dissenters, signed the Espionage Act in 1917 (still in effect!) and jailed the Socialist labor leader Eugene V. Debs, calling him "a traitor to his country" for daring to oppose the war and conscription. Sasha and Emma were both shocked when Prince Peter Kro-



potkin, the most revered anarcho-pacifist since Tolstoy, supported the Allied war effort. Sasha and Emma, however, did not. After denouncing the war and the draft, they were subsequently deported along with two hundred and forty-seven anarchists and IWW members. Mollie Steimer, a fellow anarchist and ally, was also jailed for opposing US military intervention against Russia in Archangel, Murmansk and Siberia, and deported in 1923 to Soviet Russia, where she soon became disenchanted. Steimer later moved to Mexico, where she spent the remainder of her life before dying in 1980.

In the new Russia, Emma and Sasha observed Communists cracking down on critics. (Trotsky called for an “end to factionalism” at the Communist Party’s tenth national conference, and Lenin and Trotsky attacked and sought to punish Tolstoyan pacifists — “those who were still alive,” shrewdly notes Karen Avrigh, “many of their brethren had been shot during the civil war for refusing to serve in the Red Army and were imprisoned or exiled.” The Communists killed some ten thousand Kronstadt sailors who in 1921 had the effrontery to demand the right to elect their own representatives to the Kronstadt soviet. Goldman and Berkman were shocked and appalled, and, just as Rosa Luxemburg, the memorable antiwar German leftwing socialist had done, they denounced Communist rule.

Sasha, Karen Avrigh writes, saw the carnage at Kronstadt as “the greatest crime committed by the soviet government against the Revolution and Russia, symbolizing the beginning of a new tyranny.” In 1922 Emma’s book *My Disillusionment in Russia* appeared. She was unhappy, we are told, with Doubleday, Page, the publisher, for eliminating her last chapters which, she angrily insisted, “was sure to convey to the reader that it was the Revolution that had disillusioned me rather than the pseudo-revolutionary methods of the Communist State.” Sasha also added his exposé in *The Bolshevik*

*Myth.*

Outside the US the two survived the repressive Red Scare of the 1920s and they both wrote extensively in support of Sacco and Vanzetti. Emma visited the antifascist and anarchist militias during the Spanish Civil War and spent time in England publicizing the anti-Franco cause. Karen Avrigh, however, says little about how the Communists — answering to Moscow — were eager to control a post-civil war Spain and battled the anarchists during the war. Sasha, meanwhile, began warning about the dangers of fascism and Nazism as well as the similarities between Hitler and Stalin.

To some extent anarchism influenced people like Randolph Bourne, whose epigram, “War is the health of the state,” became a truism among leftwing and libertarian antiwar activists, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker movement, Howard Zinn, the Berrigan brothers, Paul Goodman, Murray Bookchin, Dwight Macdonald, Karl Hess and the young rebels of the ’60s and ’70s. Still, as Vivian Gornick astutely argues in her 2011 book, *Emma Goldman*, anarchism then and now are not identical. Anarchism then was “a serious element in a worldwide movement for political revolution.” Anarchism, in later times — and even among disparate groups today — “was a posture, an attitude, a way of protesting the transgression of democracy that most rebels wanted to see made more perfect.”

While *Sasha and Emma* occasionally borders on hagiography and only slightly touches on their missteps, it is a clear-eyed and impressive demonstration of how even the worthiest of goals cannot be achieved by tainted means. The true legacy of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman today is best epitomized by resistance to continuous wars, corporate dominance, religious authoritarianism, entrenched racism and the defense of freedom of expression and liberty, and most notably insistence that people are not mere automatons. ✧

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