

**The Anarchist Response to War and  
Labor Violence in 1914.  
Rebecca Edelsohn, Alexander Berkman, Anti-  
Militarism, Free Speech and Hunger Strikes**

Rebecca Edelsohn (Becky) was a young and active anarchist militant in New York. In 1906 she was living with Emma Goldman, through whom she met Berkman, she had relatively long affair with Berkman, which included a pregnancy, with an abortion performed by Ben Reitman in 1911, though by the time she was most active in the anarchist movement in New York, she and Berkman were no longer intimate.

Edelsohn became known to the world for her activities during the 1914 unemployment protests, her anti-militarist work and protest against US intervention in the Mexican revolution, her activities in protest of the Ludlow Massacre and the Tarrytown protests and finally her refusal, when she was arrested to quietly apologize, promise not to misbehave and pay a fine. Instead, Edelsohn declared a hunger strike in protest, It was this act that catapulted Edelsohn into the public's eye and made her one of the "leading" woman anarchists in New York at the time. But Edelsohn was really part of something larger, a revolt on the part of anarchists in 1914. To understand the history of Edelsohn and her hunger strike we must look at the history of anarchist activity in New York, beginning with the winter of 1914.

By early 1914 the country was experiencing massive unemployment, with over one quarter of a million people out of work in New York City alone. At the same time, the strike of Colorado coal miners for recognition of the United Mine Worker against the Rockefeller owned Colorado Coal mine had been going on since September 1913, and on the borderlands between Mexico and the US revolutionists were experiencing first hand the United States vested interest in the Mexican revolution, and the government's active involvement in suppression the revolution. Member of the anarchist Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) were arrested and put in prison and their paper suppressed, and in Texas a band of PLM members traveling to Mexico were attacked and arrested. These incidents, together with the Patterson, New Jersey IWW led silk workers strike, all helped to lead to a general sense of dissatisfaction with the treatment of the working class in America. By February 27 Frank Tannenbaum, a young IWW member and Ferrer Center regular had led his first group of unemployed people into a church demanding food and shelter. By March, Margaret Sanger had published the first issue of her new paper, *The Woman Rebel* that called for social revolution through the liberation of women, and published the work of both Goldman and Voltarine de Cleyre in the first issue.

This was the world Edelsohn inhabited in 1914, with her time spent between living and working at the *Mother Earth* office and the Ferrer Center, where anarchists,

socialists, IWW members, radicals and intellectuals from all over the city gathered to explore new means of expression and organize groups to foster and support anarchism. In March, a Conference of the Unemployed was organized by Berkman at the Ferrer Center to support the work of Tannenbaum and others and find ways to help the masses of unemployed. On 21 March the Conference of the Unemployed held their first mass meeting in Union Square in New York City. Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Carlo Tresca and others spoke before those assembled marched through the city to the Ferrer Center where they were fed and offered shelter. The mood of the city however, was not willing to tolerate the militant and angry demands for basic rights such as food, shelter and work. At the second meeting of the Conference of the Unemployed violence broke out between the police and the protesters. This meeting, held on 4 April also took place at Union Square, but the crowd was violently dispersed by the police. Among those beaten were IWW unemployed organizers and Ferrer center regulars Arthur Caron and Joe O'Carroll. In fact O'Carroll was so badly beaten, that had it not been for Edelsohn throwing herself over his body to stop the police from beating him, he most likely would have died. As it was it took him a month in the hospital to recover from his injuries. The following week another mass meeting of the Conference of the Unemployed was held in Union Square. This time the meeting, on 11 April was held without a police permit, and though a group of around 10,000 listened to the "revolutionary" tone of the meeting, the police, after the violence of the week before allowed this meeting to go on unmolested.

### **The Ludlow Massacre and the Protests**

Then on 20 April two companies of the Colorado National Guard, paid by the coal companies, machine-gunned and burnt a tent colony of striking miners and their families in Ludlow, Colorado. Some families had dug cellars beneath their tent platforms beforehand, and after the fighting was over 2 mothers and 11 children were found dead in one of these cellars. Trapped and unable to escape, they had all suffocated. At least five miners were also killed in what became known as the Ludlow massacre. Miners then took up arms against the mine owners in Colorado in retaliation for the massacre, and in the next ten days before President Woodrow Wilson calls in the National Guard, at least 50 people are killed and 9 mine properties are attacked and burned.

On 22 April, as the battle raged in Colorado, and the US continued to talk about its involvement in intervention in the Mexican Revolution, Becky Edelsohn and another anarchist, Samuel Hartman were arrested at Franklin Statue in New York City after causing a disturbance during a soapbox protest against war in Mexico and the Ludlow massacre. The next day Edelsohn and Hartman are tried before the

Magistrate. Police Captain Jeremiah Mahoney testifies that they spoke disrespectfully of the American flag, while other witness refute his testimony and the case is held over until the next day. Meanwhile that same day Alexander Berkman announces the formation of the Anti-Militarist League to promulgate international propaganda against war, not just against war with Mexico, but against all war. He also announces that the Anti-Militarist League will be holding a mass meeting at Union Square the next day with both anarchist Leonard Abbott and Theodore Schroeder of the Free Speech League present. Also that same day, Marie Ganz, an associate of both Berkman and Edelsohn is attacked by an angry mob when she tried to give a speech at Franklin Statue against the war.

The next day, 24 April, the Anti-Militarist League held its first meeting. Berkman, Lincoln Steffens, Joe O'Carroll and Leonard Abbott spoke, protesting against war and the "Colorado outrage" and asserting that the only war recognized by anarchists is the war between capital and labor. However, newspapers report the meeting was a washout because of rain, with policemen outnumbering the anarchists two to one. That same day Edelsohn and Hartman are both found guilty of disturbing the peace and are sentenced to \$300 bonds to keep the peace for ninety days. While Hartman pays the fine, Edelsohn refuses the imposition upon her right to free speech. She is instead sentenced to the Tombs prison for ninety days and upon hearing this sentence, she announces she is going on a hunger strike to protest the courts "taking away agitators' rights to free speech." Edelsohn's case causes a stir and the International Defense League and Free Speech League meet at bohemian Mabel Dodge's home to discuss her case and fine a way to have her released. Leonard Abbott, Lincoln Steffens, Hutchins Hapgood, and Justus Sheffield, her lawyer decided to appeal the decision of Magistrate Simms. Meanwhile, AB, Abbott, Steffens and socialist artist, Art Young send Edelsohn a letter of support.

On 27 April there are false reports in the *New York Times* that chocolates and roast beef broke Edelsohn's hunger strike, however Edelsohn was in fact released on bail after lawyers from the Free Speech League were able to gain her release on appeal for a retrial. Edelsohn is freed and proclaimed a heroine at a reception held at the *Mother Earth* office, where both she and Berkman denounced the capitalist papers for their the false reports of her eating cake and roast beef. Edelsohn also states that she was released on a bail bond for re-trial, not a bond to keep the peace and declares she will go back on hunger strike if at her re-trial she receives the same sentence.

Outrage and controversy over the massacre at Ludlow and the revolt of the striking miners heats up as more and more people join the protests. On 28 April, socialist author Upton Sinclair, his wife and Laura Cannon, wife of James P. Cannon, president of the Western Federation of Miners, attempt to visit John D.

Rockefeller Jr., but he refuses to see them. Sinclair then decides to conduct a “mourning picket” in front of the Standard Oil Company offices in New York City. Also on the 28<sup>th</sup>, President Wilson announces that he will protect the states from domestic violence by sending in the Federal Troops to suppress any domestic insurrection or violence. He orders that all citizens engaged in domestic violence or insurrection to disperse and return to their homes by 30 April 1914. Berkman states that the Anti-Militarist League will be holding nightly sessions to collect as much money as possible to be sent to the striking miners to buy weapons and ammunition. The United Hebrew Trades adopts resolutions, already passed by the Women’s Trade Union League demanding that Congress refuse to send Federal Troops to the Colorado Strike regions to suppress the strike.

On 29 April, Sinclair and a number women stage a “silent parade” outside of the Standard Oil Company office, anarchists Leonard Abbott and Arthur Caron also take part. Sinclair and four women are arrested. Leonard Abbott, an active member of the Free Speech League, names the parade the “Free Silence Movement.” Meanwhile in Colorado 15 men are killed in fighting and Berkman sends a telegram to President Wilson. In the telegram, Berkman warns Wilson that he will be held personally responsible for any striking miners who are killed by Federal Troops sent to protect Rockefeller’s interests. Berkman announces to the press that the Anti-Militarist League will hold a large meeting on May Day to call for volunteers to create a regiment to assist the strikers in Colorado.

On 30 April President Wilson orders federal troops to Colorado, effectively ending the strike. Rockefeller, in bed with cold at his estate in Tarrytown, New York, gives a telephone interview with the *New York Times* in which he states that it was the strikers themselves who killed women and children and who were destroying hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property. Rockefeller also asserts that the trouble only started after the strikers killed a non-union man. Anarchists, in retaliation for Rockefeller’s callous remarks stage a number of protests. Arthur Caron, an anarchist and IWW organizer of the unemployed, leads seven men in a march in front of the Rockefeller home in New York City. The *New York Times* reports that two men, Ralph Simon and Morris Rudomic (probably anarchist Maurice Rudome) are arrested. At the same time, Berkman, Edelson and Marie Ganz marched from Franklin Statue with between 500-1000 men to the Standard Oil Co. building. Ganz leading the way, reportedly shouting, “kill Rockefeller, shoot him down like a dirty dog.” Ganz then made it into the Rockefeller building where she stated “Tell Rockefeller that I come on behalf of the working people and that if he doesn’t stop the murders in Colorado I’ll wake this town up, I’ll shoot him down like a dog.” Edelson then began a speech outside the Bowling Green Subway station, where along with Berkman and Ganz, she denounced Rockefeller as the cause of the

trouble in Colorado and Mexico. An angry crowd surrounded her and the police had to protect her from being mobbed.

Leonard Abbott takes over the organizational work of the “Free Silence Movement” with Sinclair in prison for three days. He marches in front of the Standard Oil Co. building with “nearly all the students from the Ferrer School” as well as IWW members and anarchists. The Free Silence “mourners” marched outside the Standard Oil Co. building without intervention from the police, despite the loud arrival of Ganz, Edelsohn and Berkman, who announced he wanted to join the march to protests against the arrest and imprisonment of Sinclair and the other women.

The next day, May Day, Berkman, Edelsohn and other anarchists take part in an International May Day celebration at Mulberry Bend Park under the auspices of the Anti-Militarist League. Berkman criticizes Rockefeller for his part in the Ludlow massacre and urges a general strike, while many carry banners linking Ludlow to the US intervention in Mexico. The demonstration ended with a procession to Union Square where they join the socialists in a mass revolutionary demonstration. The next day Sinclair pays his fine, appeals his conviction to the district attorney and rejoins the protesters. Marie Ganz is arrested on her way to Bowling Green for a meeting, when she threatens to shoot Rockefeller. Berkman bails her out, but she insists that she will continue her threats. Caron and others continue to picket outside of Rockefeller’s home in New York City, Socialists from the Rand School for Social Science begin protesting outside the Calvary Baptist Church Sunday School, the church Rockefeller attends.

On 3 May, Caron and six other demonstrators leave off protesting outside Rockefeller’s city residence and travel to his country estate at Pocantico Hills outside Tarrytown, while Sinclair continues to march in front of the Standard Oil offices. That night Sinclair speaks at a meeting before an audience of 500. He speaks on “How to Kill Rockefeller,” and suggests that protesters make use of the “social chill” making Rockefeller a social outcast, because his physical murder would further no causes. Sinclair attempts to shift the focus of the protests from Rockefeller personally to the Standard Oil and the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. He sends telegrams to Socialists in cities across the nation to establish Free Silence protests at local offices, but the Socialist Party refuses.

On 6 May, Sinclair attempts to visit Rockefeller, and the protesters continue to march. Marie Ganz is convicted of disorderly conduct for threatening Rockefeller and is sentenced to sixty days in the workhouse. Becky Edelsohn accompanied Ganz to the Tombs and gains permission to visit her. Demonstrators again protest outside Rockefeller’s New York City residence. The next day more than 500 anarchists and IWW members gather at Mulberry Bend Park to denounce war with Mexico and to protest conditions in Colorado. Berkman announces the purpose of the meeting is to

generate interest in the even bigger meeting planned for next Saturday 16 May in Union Square. Edelson repeats the threats upon Rockefeller's life, saying she speaks as the defender of Ganz. Anarchists Arthur Caron, Pietro Allegra and Isadore Wissotsky also speak. Caron announces that he will travel to Tarrytown with 25 to 35 protesters. Sinclair leaves for Colorado, saying he is "through with the Free Silence Movement" and Frank Shay declares the reason the Free Silence Movement is no longer needed is because the Anti-Militarists (Alexander Berkman and Becky Edelson) and the IWW (Arthur Caron, et al) have taken over and are doing such good work.

The following day, 10 May, Mrs. Sinclair announces that the Free Silence League has officially disbanded by unanimous vote. She explains that they disbanded because they had too many offers from crazy men to do acts of violence. The same day sixteen men and women, led by Arthur Caron traveled to Tarrytown, where they picketed the entrance to Rockefeller's estate. Four guards, all armed with clubs and guns, guarded the entrance to the estate. Bouck White of the "Church of the Social Revolution" led a demonstration to the Calvary Baptist Church. The protest leads to a fight after anarchist Milo Woolman reads, "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." White, Milo Woolman, and nine others are arrested for disturbing a religious service. The next day Caron again leads a contingent of protesters to Tarrytown. Mother Jones also makes plans to see William Rockefeller in his office and then later proceeds to Pocantico Hills to see Rockefeller Jr., as a representative of the United Mine Workers of America.

On 12 May Bouck White and seven of his followers are found guilty for disturbing a religious service. Bouck White and Milo Woolman are both sentenced to six months in prison for their words and actions, and Woolman's wife is also found guilty for protesting after police began clubbing her husband on the head. On 14 May Berkman and other anarchists take up the case of Woolman's excessive sentence and on 16 May a meeting of IWW members and anarchists is held in Union Square to protest the six month sentence passed on White and Woolman. Jane Est, Pietro Allegra, Charles Plunkett and Becky Edelson also spoke. Edelson called for a general strike against war and Rockefeller. Then on 18 May the Anti-Militarist League holds a mass meeting in Paterson, New Jersey, titled, "Thou Shalt Not Kill Either in Mexico or Colorado," Berkman, Edelson and Harry Kelly are among the speakers.

On 22 May the plans begin again to hold protests in Tarrytown. Arthur Caron spends the day attempting to gain permission to hold a mass meeting on the 24th. However, F.R. Pierson, President of Tarrytown refuses to meet with him. Instead Berkman, Edelson, Jose Tubio, Caron and others try to hold a meeting in New York

City at the Floral Garden, but when the owner learns that the hall is going to be used by anarchists he refuses to let them enter. Two Italian anarchists are arrested for disorderly conduct after they angrily denounce the hall owner, and one of the men throws a pavement block at the policemen's head. The planned "International Mass Meeting" was sponsored by the Anti-Militarist League, and was organized to aid the Italian anarchist and anti-Militarist Augusto Mansetti, who had shot his colonel rather than fight in the Italo-Turkish War in Tripoli.

Tensions continued to mount regarding Rockefeller's role and responsibility in the Ludlow Massacre. James Lord, head of the mining department of the American Federation of Labor told an audience at a meeting in New York City that if President Wilson takes away the federal troops and turns the militia against the strikers, "We will go after the Rockefeller's themselves." IWW organizer and anarchist Carlo Tresca also announces that as soon as Wilson removes the federal troops and the militia returned an army of "Reds" would be there to protect the striking miners and take part in the war.

### **Tarrytown**

The Tarrytown protests begin in earnest after Carlo Tresca announces, on 29 May that the IWW and others will hold a demonstration at Pocantico Hills without a permit the next day. But when the demonstrators arrive in Tarrytown eleven men and one woman (Becky Edelsohn) are arrested and are charged with blocking traffic and holding a street meeting without a permit. The entire police force met the protesters. As each speaker stepped up to begin speaking, the police would arrest that person. As each person began to speak they were in turn arrested until all were arrested. The arrested included Arthur Caron, Charles Plunkett, an anarchist and unemployed organizer from the Ferrer Center, Jack Isaacson an anarchist who would later edit a number of anarchist newspapers, including *Revolt* in 1916 and *Freedom* in 1919, French anarchist Maurice Rudome, Italian anarchists of the Bresci group, Frank Mandese, Louis Pastorella, Vincenzo Fabriciano, Joseph Secunda, Latvian anarchist and Anarchist Red Cross member, Charles Berg, Jack Butler and Hungarian anarchist Adolph Aufricht. Berkman, outraged by the demonstrators' systematic arrests, sent out a call for protesters to start a free speech fight in Tarrytown the next day.

The following day, Berkman, Helen Harris, Dave Sullivan, Harry Wilkes, Joe De Rosa and others go to Tarrytown, where in three separate groups they attempt to speak, but are stopped by the police. Berkman escapes arrest but according Abbott in *Mother Earth* is "badly bruised by police violence," while De Rosa, Sullivan, and Wilkes are arrested. Later that night another twenty Italian and Spanish anarchists arrive to re-enforce Berkman and the others. However, as they try to speak they are

beaten by the police and forcibly put on a train back to New York, in all fifteen people were arrested. Meanwhile those arrested the previous day are arraigned in court. They are quoted as saying “the only thing John D. Rockefeller ever gave away was oil to bum the mothers and babies in Ludlow,” Becky Edelsohn is particularly denounced for calling Rockefeller a multimurderer. All the protesters are charged with endangering the public health, blocking traffic, and acting in a disorderly manner. Edelsohn, who had again declared a hunger strike at her arrest the previous day, calls this strike off until her trial and sentencing. Abbott and Berkman announce to the press back in New York City that the inundation of anarchists to Tarrytown was the fault of the Tarrytown officials who did not allow the protesters their legal right to free speech. Joe O’Carroll, finally released from the hospital after being beaten by the police during the Unemployed demonstration in April, is now in charge of the groups sent to reinforce Berkman and the other Tarrytown protesters in their free speech fight.

Also on 31 May, Reverend Dr. W. Bustard, Rockefeller’s minister, makes clear which side he is on. In his sermon he attacks the methods of the labor leaders in Colorado and the striking workers in general saying, “These miners have brought with them to this country all the pent-up hatred and ignorance of foreign countries. Do you know that thirty-eight languages and dialects are spoken by these men in Colorado?” Socialists William English Walling and Upton Sinclair call on Morris Hillquit to resign from the Socialist Party’s Executive Committee. Sinclair argues that if the Socialist Party had stood behind the miners in Colorado the strike would have been won months ago. (By this time, the Socialist Party, after agreeing to ban direct action and sabotage and ousting William Haywood from the Executive Committee and the party, had distanced itself from directly aiding or taking part in strikes in an effort to gain more electoral victories.)

On 1 June Leonard Abbott and others from the Ferrer Center attempt to visit the arrested protesters at White Plains Jail, but they are refused permission. Abbott also tried to send them food, but is told that they are all on a hunger strike. The visitors were then threatened to leave immediately or face arrest by the sheriff for loitering. Abbott also tries to meet Tarrytown village president, Mr. Pierson, to gain permission to speak, but is again refused. Upon the second refusal, Abbott officially announces that a Free Speech Fight in Tarrytown has begun. Later that night there is a planning meeting with Abbott and Berkman at the Ferrer Center to determine strategy, and the next morning new recruits from Paterson gather at the Center to demonstrate in Tarrytown.

On 3 June, anarchist Rosemary Marie Yuster and other women hand out over 5,000 handbills in Tarrytown. The handbills announce, “A Demand for Free Speech” and “Free Speech Suppressed by Policeman’s Clubs.” The handbills, signed jointly



by the Free Speech League, the Anti-Militarist League and the Francisco Ferrer Association, call for a rally at the White Plains Jail where the protesters were being held. The rally is then held outside the Jail, where anarchist Louis Berger announces that she was held in jail incommunicado for ten days, and Berkman speaks out against Commissioner of Corrections Catherine B. Davis, before the Sheriff drove the protesters back to the train station and New York. Once back in New York Berkman addresses the new “recruits” from Paterson at the Ferrer Center. He asks that they go in force to the prisoners trial in Tarrytown and says that Caron and four others were on a hunger strike in jail. Meanwhile back in Tarrytown the villagers lay fresh tar around Fountain Square and gather 500 men to wait at the train station for incoming anarchist and IWW protesters.

On 8 June, the Free Speech League issues a new statement defending the right of free speech, while armed deputies are posted around the Rockefeller estate in Tarrytown. Upton Sinclair, George Hiram Mann an attorney for the “Live and Let Live League” and Theodore Schroeder and Leonard Abbott meet with the Tarrytown president and trustees. They have a three-hour discussion on free speech and the rights of the demonstrators, but cannot gain permission to demonstrate in Tarrytown. Those arrested on 30 May, including Edelson and Caron, are released on bail and about one hundred people greeted them as they arrived back in New York City, where a celebratory reception was held at the Ferrer Center.

Over the next few days the trustees of Tarrytown and the Free Speech League continue to try to establish a way for the protesters to speak, they offer to rent a hall for the protesters, but no hall owner will agree to allow it, finally Mrs. Charles J. Gould, a wealthy suffragette of Tarrytown agrees to allow Upton Sinclair the use of the open air theater on her estate, as long as the IWW and anarchists are not allowed to speak. But on 14 June, a riot occurs at a rally at Mrs. Gould’s theater between villagers and the demonstrators after anarchist Adolph Wolff disrupted the meeting to demand that anarchists and IWW agitators be allowed to take part. Mrs. Gould decides to hold no more meetings on her property until 21 June. At this meeting Sinclair speaks against Rockefeller, before handing over the floor to John Brown, an organizer and leader of the United Mine Workers of America, from Colorado. Workers from Rockefeller’s estate are invited to join the meeting and are seated by Mrs. Gould. After the meeting Sinclair sends a telegram to Rockefeller Jr. explaining that a resolution had been passed that all the mines should be seized because Rockefeller wasn’t fit to own them.

### **The Last Straw**

The following day, 22 June, a group of about forty protesters tried to speak on neutral ground close to Tarrytown, but connected with the Croton Aqueduct and

owned by the city of New York. A crowd of over a thousand villagers violently attacks them. Becky Edelsohn and others are hit with stones and clods of dirt, rotten eggs are thrown at Berkman and when Caron tried to speak he was hit in the mouth with a large stone; unable to stop the bleeding, he continued to speak with the blood pouring from his mouth. The protesters' banners reading "One Fight in Mexico and Colorado. The Slaves are Rising Against Rockefeller and His Kind," were ripped apart by angry villagers and fell under a barrage of stones thrown at the protesters. Village police were present during the riot, but refused to interfere. As the protesters tried to reach the train station back to New York, they were again beaten by the mob of villagers. When the Aqueduct police finally arrived, instead of protecting the prisoners, they clubbed the men as they tried to get on to the train. As Paul Avrich noted, "to Caron, Berkman, and their associates, this was the last straw. Never again would they attempt to demonstrate peacefully in Tarrytown. Denied the right of free speech, they began to contemplate other methods."<sup>1</sup>

On 3 July a late night meeting took place at the Ferrer Center. Berkman, Edelsohn, Caron, Charles Plunkett, Louise Berger, Michael Murphy, Harry Wilkes, Adolf Aufricht, Maurice Rudome, Frank Mandese, Louise Pastorella, and Joseph Secunda, all of who took part in the Tarrytown protests were present. They meet to discuss reprisal for the violence of the police and the villagers after the 22 June demonstration. The next day, a bomb, intended either for Rockefeller's home or business, explodes prematurely in the Lexington Avenue apartment of Arthur Caron, Carl Hanson, Charles Berg, Louise Berger and Marie Chavez. Louise Berger, who had left the building just a short while earlier escapes unharmed, but the other four are killed in the explosion. That same day Frank Mandese was arrested outside Rockefeller's estate in Tarrytown.

### **The Aftermath**

On 11 July over 5,000 people are present for the mass memorial meeting called by the Anti-Militarist League for Berg, Hanson and Caron. Over 800 policemen monitor the meeting, while Berkman, Abbott, Edelsohn, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, David Sullivan and Charles Plunkett all speak on behalf of their dead comrades. Later, on 18 July Berkman tells the *New York Times* that the Lexington Avenue explosion is the most meaningful anarchist event since Haymarket. He also reports that Edelsohn, whose appeal for her April arrest was not reversed, will again declare a hunger strike at her sentencing.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1980): 196.

On the 20th, just as Berkman had predicted, Edelsohn was sentenced to either a bond of \$300 to keep the peace for ninety days or ninety days in prison. Edelsohn refused the bond and declared a hunger strike. She is sent to the workhouse at Blackwell's Island to carry out her hunger strike. Berkman, Abbott, Plunkett, Rose Yuster and Louise Berger follow Edelsohn to the prison and then later meet at the Ferrer Center to discuss her case. Berkman and M. Eleanor Fitzgerald send out funeral notices, warning that Edelsohn may stave to death. Edelsohn's hunger strike employed the strategies of the suffragettes in England, yet on 22 July representatives of the American suffrage movement announce that they would neither support Edelsohn, nor offer her their sympathy because her case was not in the hands of a man charged with dealing unjustly with her. (Edelsohn's case was under the care of Catherine B. Davis, the first woman to be appointed to the high level position of Commissioner of Corrections. Many feminists considered Davis a hero because of her support for women's rights.) Edelsohn carries on her hunger strike for 30 days, though Commissioner Davis refuses to let Edelsohn have visitors and prison authorities give out false information that Edelsohn is eating.

On 28 July all of those arrested in Tarrytown, with the exception of Edelsohn who is already in prison, go on trial. The defendants are found guilty and are sentenced to two to three months in the New York Penitentiary. Edelsohn who is brought to the trial as a witness stated, "My life will pay the penalty of my protest against the raw injustice of your proceedings." Dave Sullivan, who was later discovered to be a police spy, was sentenced to only one month. Italian anarchist Frank Mandese refused a lawyer and declared, "I do not believe in the law... I don't expect any justice in this town. The whole place had been bought up by John D. Rockefeller. No man has a right to try me. I have committed no crime except to raise my voice against the murders procured by Rockefeller in Colorado."

Edelsohn continues her hunger strike for 30 days before being released on 20 August after M. Eleanor Fitzgerald paid the \$300 bond. Fitzgerald tells the press that she paid the bond because Edelsohn was starving to death and Commissioner Davis was not going to release her. She stated that she was not sure yet that Edelsohn would even recover her health. Fitzgerald also said that Edelsohn did not know, nor did she ask to be released. After Edelsohn's release, she wrote a report about her hunger strike and then mostly disappeared from the public spotlight. However, Italian anarchists, still angry at the violence of the police, set off at least three bombs in New York City, one on the anniversary of Francisco Ferrer's execution and one on the 11th of November.

Edelsohn finally faced trial for her Tarrytown arrest on 29 October. She conducted her own defense and was acquitted after only twenty minutes. In her closing statement she said: "The Constitution gives me the right of free speech and

whether you acquit me or convict me I shall come back here and harass John D. Rockefeller.”

On 10 December 1914, the United Mine Workers formally acknowledged defeat of their strike in Colorado.

### **Further Reading.**

The chronological narrative of the events that took place in New York in 1914 comes from the *New York Times*, *The New York Tribune*, and the *New York Globe and Advertiser*, as well as *Mother Earth* and the *New York Call*.

All direct quotes come from the *New York Times* unless other wise noted. For more about the Unemployed demonstrations, the anarchist response to the Ludlow Massacre, the Tarrytown Free Speech Fight and Edelsohn’s hunger strike see:

Avrich. Paul. *The Modern School Movement. Anarchism and Education in the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

————— *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1995

Drinnon. Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon. eds. *Nowhere of Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.

Glassgold. Peter. ed. *Anarchy: An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*. Washington. D.C.: Counterpoint. 2001.

## Rebecca Edelsohn's Speech at the Memorial of Caron, Berg and Hanson

(*Mother Earth*. July 1914)

Comrades, Friends and Sympathizers: We gather here to-day in memory of our dead Comrades Arthur Caron, Charles Berg and Carl Hanson. This is not a day for either mourning or rejoicing; it is a day for deep thinking. As the previous speakers have said, we do not know what was the actual cause of the death of our comrades. But this we do know: whatever the cause of their death, whether they died at the hands of the enemy or because of the premature explosion of a bomb, they died in the interest of the working class. Therefore they are our comrades, no matter what the cause of their death.

It is a day for deep thinking, because we want to know why, in either case, our comrades should have had to die so young. If they were killed by the enemy, why were *they* picked out by the enemy? If they died because of a premature explosion, what was it that forced them to give their lives in exchange for getting a few more liberties for the rest of humanity? And I want to know why it is that in the twentieth century men, sensitive men and women, can be so goaded on by oppression that they are forced to retaliate with violence.

What is there in our system, what is there in our social cancer, that forces men to endanger their lives, even give up their lives in the first bloom of youth? If it was a premature explosion, then it is not our comrades that we must be ashamed of: it is society at large that should be ashamed, society that forces the best men and women to forfeit their lives in order to gain a few more liberties.

Comrade Leonard Abbott has given a brief history of the life of one of the three that died, Arthur Caron. The other two, although they were silent workers in the cause of their class, were nevertheless just as important as the speakers and the agitators. They did their share quietly, and they were just as willing to sacrifice their lives.

The kept press talks about the violence committed by our comrades. But consider: every day that the capitalist system is in existence, it is perpetuated by violence; and that is the only way that it manages to hold its own. They talk of violence! What about the massacre in Ludlow? What about the Triangle fire? What about the thousands and thousands of victims in the factories who are daily crippled and maimed or killed in explosions in the subway, railways and mines? Talk about violence! What about the thousands of boys who are enlisted in the armies, sent to murder or be murdered before they realize the significance of joining the army? Talk about violence! Where are the Rockefellers, who are guilty of the slaughters committed in Ludlow? Why doesn't the prostitute press talk about *their* violence? Because they are kept by just these Rockefellers and the rest of the rotten fellows that

uphold this capitalist system. Oh, don't let us hear any more twaddle about violence. All the violence that has been committed by the labor movement since the dawn of history wouldn't equal one day of violence committed by the capitalist class to keep itself in power.

Another thing. I want to say that it's about time the working class came out frankly and openly and said, "Yes, we believe in violence. We will use violence whenever it is necessary to use it. We are not afraid of what your kept press says; and when we are murdered and cannonaded, when you train your machine guns on us we will retaliate with dynamite." And I hope that the day is not distant when the working class will say, "We are not afraid of using violence. Every hour that we work in the factory we are kept there by violence, because we are forced to live under your rotten capitalist system." I know that a great many near-radicals and pink-tea revolutionists, whenever they hear the word violence or dynamite, somehow manage to have their white corpuscles get the better of their red corpuscles. But the real revolutionist are not afraid of the word violence, nor even of the word dynamite, because, as Albert Parsons so appropriately said in his famous speech before the court, "Dynamite is the great equalizer of all men; and all the authorities and everyone else are helpless and powerless against the power of dynamite."

I hope that past occasions when acts of violence were committed, will not be duplicated this time. I hope that every workingman will feel proud that Arthur Caron and Charles Berg and Carl Hanson were workingmen and their fellow-brothers, and they will acknowledge them and from the very housetops proclaim, "They are our comrades and we are proud of them," In conclusion I repeat: Don't be afraid of violence, when the violence is on the side of the laboring class. The only thing is: use it when you have the power and when you have enough of it.

## **One Woman's Fight**

*(Woman Rebel, August 1914)*

Becky's fight on Blackwell's Island in resisting a punishment she objects to, is only a forerunner of the fight which every rebel woman in America will soon be called upon to enter.

There are eight millions of women working in this Country to-day. These women are the toilers of the earth, they have been kept in toil and poverty because of a master class, and they are learning to know it.

They will arise. They will rebel. They will resist their punishment. They will fight side by side with the men-workers for their class liberty. They will come in conflict with women rulers like Katherine B. Davis.

Becky has started something and will establish a precedent which all rebel women in America will live up to, must live up to or Becky's sufferings and struggles will be in vain.

The following letters give a vivid glimpse of New York's infamous institution of "correction" and the conditions resulting from the exploitation there of the victims of "law and order." Written by Rebecca Edelson during her hunger strike against an unjust sentence, they were sent out sub rosa and are a striking comment on the much advertised "efficiency" of Commissioner of Correction Katherine B. Davis.

July 31, 1914

Dear,

Just a line. Nothing new about myself. This is about the workhouse. L.\* was caught and she refused to be searched so she was put in the dungeon with handcuffs. But in the meantime the thing was passed along, so its all right. There was a riot in jail to-day, — two of the Doctors resigned and the prisoners are raising hell. They want Dr. Katz out. The dungeons and the padded cells are all full and the prisoners all expect to be locked in cells to-day. The food is rotten and the prisoners are half starved. They have to steal a piece of bread. That is all in the reform administration. The place is overrun with lice and bedbugs. The prisoners are forced to use the blankets of the preceding prisoners. When I get out I am certainly going to give Lady Kitty a run for her money. The other two Doctors resigned because of the reports that Dr. Katz gave out about me, and also he is responsible for Dr. Baxter being railroaded to jail. The prisoners don't want him because he is a "stool." He was taken off my case.

Can't write much—feel very weak. Be patient. I was informed they cannot forcibly feed me. They will have to let me go. I am still in solitary and deprived of privileges. My arm is tired.

B.

\* L. -a girl prisoner who served as intermediary for the subrosa route.

July 31, 1914—Afternoon.

Expect Doctor any minute. Very weak. Expect collapse any time. They will be forced to either forcibly feed me or let me go. By the time this letter reaches you, you can start raising hell. I think they will let me go, because if they intended to forcibly feed me, they would have done so before now. They are waiting until the very last and that won't be long. Don't worry, dear, even if the worst comes to the worst, I can only die once. And it will make tremendous propaganda. I know if that should happen

several people will be hard hit, but when one thinks of the hundreds of deaths that the Russian Revolutionists died, before they were even strangled, this is a child's play compared with it, if it must be, it must, and I am prepared even for that. I am very calm about it and it troubles me very little. Somehow death never held very much terror for me. If it comes, all right. I want you to know, though, that I think much of you and often, and if I should pass up, know that you were in my thoughts until the last dear, tried, true, beloved Comrade and friend. Love to everyone and be cheerful.

B.

Next morning.—This will go in a little while. Can't write much. Pulse very weak. Doctors much alarmed. Expect speedy action within next few days. Love.

### **Hunger Striking in America**

*(Mother Earth, September 1914, p. 232-236)*

Since my release I have learned that there has been considerable dissension among the radical elements about the efficacy, as a protest, of hunger-striking in general and about the advisability of my hunger-striking in particular.

Personally I feel absolutely justified in the course I pursued; first, because I, as an Anarchist, preferred to place the authorities in such a position that would force them to admit their impotence, rather than appeal to them for aid; secondly, to prove as far as possible that as soon as government is confronted with an unusual situation and determination, its machinery receives a jolt. It isn't important to me whether one considers the price too high for the propaganda accomplished. That must be left entirely to the individual who undertakes such a protest. I feel that it has been worth while. It has brought forcible to the attention of the people at large the fact that America has freedom of speech on paper only. It has also emphasized the fact that there is no choice between governments: that one is as tyrannical and brutal as the other; indeed that the democratic Republic of America is even worse than the others.

The hunger strike as a method of protest against just sentences, both for political prisoners and so-called common criminals, has been practiced in various countries. But it has been left to what is supposed to be the most liberal government to prove that it can be the most callous and savage. The other governments have either resorted to forcible feeding, afraid of the condemnation of thinking people both here and abroad. It also was too petty to rise to the situation and release me, because it feared the bellowing of the Pharisees.

One has only to compare the treatment of the English suffragettes with that accorded me. The suffragettes in Great Britain have never been allowed to



hunger-strike longer than ten days, after which forcible feeding was resorted to. Without sharing their aspirations, I yet admire the stand of the English suffragettes and heartily approve of their methods of warfare. Merely for the sake of comparison, I want to note that in the eyes of the smug law-abiding citizen they are guilty of crimes, while I was merely exercising the right of free speech so much boasted about by the law and order mob.

But free speech in America means that you may say only the things that are agreeable to the government. In no country in the world, save Russia, are so many people arrested as in America for exercising the right of voicing an opinion that is not popular with the inert majority.

To me the hunger strike was an interesting and instructive experiment. It brought me in contact with the type of women who are fighting for the vote and more laws. It also brought me in contact with the women who feel the impress of the laws already existing and suffer the injustice of them. And what a difference in the attitude of mind! The one sort, represented by Catherine B. Davis, Commissioner of Correction, found it necessary to stoop to lying in order to hold her miserable job of crushing the already broken spirits of the poor unfortunates in the workhouse. The other type is represented by the young prisoner, Lillie, who, to shield me, willingly went to the dungeon, remaining there handcuffed for four days until she fainted, rather than betray a fellow prisoner. From the first type, the good Lord deliver us. The second gave me inspiration to keep up the fight. Were all women of the first type, I should be ashamed of my sex. But, fortunately, there is a sprinkling of the other, and that makes life worth while.

My experience also served to throw some light on the character of "reform" administration and the role suffrage ladies may be expected to play in administering reformed "equal" justice.

The soft-hearted humanitarian, Catherine B. Davis, who shed copious tears over the maltreatment of the suffragette prisoners in England, has turned the workhouse at Blackwell's Island into a veritable hell. Never were conditions in that institution so wretched and miserable as since the present administration. The food is so rotten that dire hunger alone forces the prisoners to eat it. The cereals wormy, the bread half-baked and stale, the stench of the meat so nauseating, most prisoners barely touch the grub. I myself have seen the hospital ward sick prisoners served meat full of maggots. From this meat the soup is made, which is supposed to be the main sustenance of the invalids.

The reform administration is priding itself on the hygienic innovations in the prisons, physical examinations and new methods of preventing the spread of disease. What a farce! From thirty to forty prisoners are examined, their pedigrees taken and blood test made, all within a couple of hours. One can imagine the thoroughness of

such methods and benefits derived by the prisoners. But it serves the purpose of getting more appropriations and creating soft snaps for the friends of the administration.

Our sentimental ladies of both sexes who are horrified at conditions on the East Side, might well spend a little of their energy in cleaning up the pest-house known as the Workhouse. Five and six women are locked in a small stuffy cell from four o'clock in the afternoon until six the following morning, forced to respond to the call of nature in sight of each other, the contents of the single bucket often running over on the floor. What wonder that these "reformatory influences" soon crush whatever stamina and spirit the unfortunates may have when they first come to the workhouse. Beaten and worn, driven by hunger outside of prison, the place finally becomes their home, until in Potter's Field they find their last resting place.

As far as the hunger strike is concerned, I feel that although I did not gain my freedom through it, the experience was not in vain. If the radical elements at large had done their share as energetically as the handful of people who were actively interested in my fight, I'm sure that I would have won out.

Since if the latter, when they realized that the authorities intended to let me die, decided to furnish the bond. When the nurse came up, handed me my clothes and told me I was free, I could hardly believe it. But when I caught sight of our faithful Comrade, Eleanor Fitzgerald, waiting for me in the office, I confess I was not sorry to leave hell.

While I cannot say that I am entirely satisfied with the results, still I feel that all the propaganda that could possibly be gotten out of it, had already been accomplished. If the war had not broken out just at that time, I feel certain that the case would have continued to attract even wider public attention and that the authorities would have been forced to some decisive step. It was the numerous letters and telegrams of protest, as well as the several mass meetings in various parts of the country, that frightened Commissioner Davis into inducing the press to suppress all reference to the hunger strike. She then felt freer about depriving me of all mail and other means of communication with friends, hoping thus to break my spirit and terminate my strike. The Commissioner of Corruption persisted in assuring every inquirer that I was receiving great care, but when I came out the doctor who examined me, was surprised at my low condition. My blood pressure, two days after my release, registered only 65. In view of the fact that 50 is fatal, the reader may judge for himself what chances the Davis woman was taking on my life. The registry of blood pressure is the only safe test of one's vitality, but not once during the 31 days of my hunger strike was my blood pressure taken in prison.

I undertook the hunger strike as much as a matter of propaganda as of protest. I therefore do not feel that I had given in to the authorities in any way, because—with

the interest of the public centered on the war—authorities could have killed me without arousing too much public notice. While I know that my friends would not have remained silent, I feel that they adopted the only course that was left open to them. Now that I am out, I am glad that they did so; not so much because my life was saved, as I was fully prepared to go any length rather than give in, and many times death would have been easier and preferable to the suffering I was enduring. Yet I am glad for the sake of my comrades who would not have allowed my death to go unavenged.

My experience and the treatment I received at the hands of the authorities has convinced me more than ever that violent resistance to oppression and invasion is not only justifiable, but absolutely necessary at times. The powers that be are constantly breeding the spirit of violence by their tyranny and arbitrariness. They commit violence at the slightest pretext. Why should we then be respecters of the laws that they break at the least provocation!