

Conversations With Gavriolo Princip

Martin Pappenheim

1916

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Introduction

World War I had far deeper causes than the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. But, if the assassination had never happened, then a world war may have been delayed for years - or may have never happened at all. This makes it important to understand the politics of the assassins.

At least one, the 19 year old Nedjelko Cabrinovic, who threw a grenade on 28 June, had been both a Social Democrat and an anarcho-syndicalist. He had also helped lead printers' strikes. Gavrilo Princip, the other 19 year old who shot Franz Ferdinand dead, was also influenced by Kropotkin and Bakunin. And both men had read William Morris's *News From Nowhere*.

Tragically, like so many other 20th century revolutionaries, Cabrinovic and Princip's radicalism became misdirected into the poison of nationalism and militarism. They had hoped to help trigger a revolution. Instead they helped trigger World War I.

In 1916, Dr. Pappenheim, a future collaborator with Sigmund Freud, interviewed Princip in his cell in Terezin/Theresienstadt.

Prison, 19 II 1916

Here since 5 XII 1914. The whole time in solitary confinement. Three days ago, chains off. Father a peasant, but occupies himself with enterprises. Father a quiet man, does not drink. Father lives at Grahovo, Bosnia. No diseases in the family. School at Sarajevo 5 classes, then 3 classes at Belgrade without matura.

Always has been healthy. Knew nothing of serious injuries before the assassination. At that time injuries on the head and all over. At that time senseless. Scarlet fever. No bed-wetting. In the Gymnasium, sleepwalking. Walking about the room. Only during one year. Was waked up. In the third class. Never had attacks of unconsciousness.

Always "excellent student" up to the fifth class. Then fell in love. Began to have ideals. Left the school in Sarajevo in 1911. At that time nationalistic demonstrations were taking place against Tisza. Was in the first lines of the students. Was badly treated by the professors. **Read many anarchistic, socialistic, nationalistic pamphlets, belles letters and everything.** Bought books himself; did not speak about these things. Father not occupied with political matters. Was not much with other schoolboys, always alone. Was always quiet, sentimental child. Always earnest, with books, pictures, etc. Even as a child was not particularly religious.

Designates the year 1911 as critical. Went alone to Belgrade. Told nobody about it. Father and brother would not send any money. Promised to be a good student. Then they agreed with his remaining in Belgrade.

Father 54 years old, mother 45 years. Two other brothers, one 26, one 18 years. Six others died as small children before 10 years. Himself the fourth child. Of his brothers, one a student in the Real-schule and the other a merchant. Brothers quite ordinary men. The love for the girl did not vanish, but he never wrote her. Relates that he knew her in the fourth class; ideal love, never kissed; in this connection will reveal no more of himself. Study as a private student. Intercourse with nobody, solitary, always in libraries. Wanted to go into the Balkan War, but was found too weak. Was every year for some months as a brother's in the neighborhood of Sarajevo.

Only in May, 1914, took examinations for the eighth class. At the time of the assassination was injured on the head and back and all over. Took cyanide of potassium, but was weak and vomited.

It is very hard in solitary confinement, without books, with absolutely nothing to read and intercourse with nobody. Always accustomed to read, suffering most from not having anything to read. Sleeps usually only four hours in the night. Dreams a great deal. Beautiful dreams. About life, about love, not uneasy. **Thinks about everything, particularly about conditions in his country. He had heard something about the war. Had heard a tragic thing, that Serbia no longer exists. His life is in general painful, now that Serbia does not exist. It goes hard with my people. The World War would not have failed to come, independent of it. Was a man of ideals wanted to revenge the people. The motives - revenge and love. All the young men were in the same sort of revolutionary temper. Spoke of anarchistic pamphlets which incited to murder.**

Thinks differently today, thinks a social revolution is possible in all Europe, as things are changing. Will say no more in the presence of the guard. Is not badly treated. All behave properly toward him.

Admits attempt at suicide a month ago. Wanted to hang himself with the towel. It would be stupid to have a hope. Has a wound on the breast and on the arm... A life like mine, that's impossible. At that time, about 12 o'clock, he could not eat, was in bad spirits, and on a sudden came the idea to hang himself. If he had opportunity he would do it. Thinks of his parents and all, but hears nothing of them. Confesses longing. That must exist in everybody.

Prison Hospital 12 V 1916

He recognizes me immediately and shows pleasure at seeing me. Since 7 IV here in hospital. Always nervous. Is hungry, does not get enough to eat. Loneliness. Gets no air and sun here; in the fortress took walks. Has no longer any hope for his life. There is nothing for him to hope for. Life is lost. In former days was a student, had ideals. Everything that was bound up with his ideals is all destroyed. My Serbian people. Hopes that something may turn for the better, but is skeptical. **The ideal of the young people was the unity of the South Slav peoples, Serbs and Croats, Slovenes, but not under Austria. In a kind of state, republic or something of the sort. Thought that if Austria were thrown into difficulties then a revolution would come. But for such a revolution one must prepare the ground, work up feeling. Nothing happened. By assassination this spirit might be prepared. There already had been attempts at assassination before. The perpetrators were like heroes to our young people. He had no thought of becoming a hero. He wanted merely to die for his idea. Before the assassination he had read an article of Kropotkin about what we can do in case of a world-wide social revolution. Studied, talked about it. Was convinced it was possible...**

For two months has heard nothing more of events. But it all is indifferent to him, on account of his illness and the misfortune of his people. Has sacrificed his life for the people. **Could not believe that such a World War could break out as a result of an act like his. They did indeed think that such a World War might break out, but not at that moment.**

On being requested to write something on the social revolution, he writes on a sheet of paper the following, saying that for two years he has not had a pen in hand. Translates:

“On a certain occasion we spoke among comrades on a question which Kropotkin had put in *Welfare for All* - What will the anarchists do in case of a social revolution? We all took this more for a phrase of an old revolutionist than that he had seriously thought such a revolution possible at this time. But we nevertheless all debated over this revolution and nearly all admitted that such a revolution was possible, but according to our conviction that previously in all Europe there must be created between peoples...”

Broke off here, feeling ill. My thoughts are already - I am very nervous.

...Cannot believe that the World War was a consequence of the assassination; cannot feel himself responsible for the catastrophe; therefore, cannot say if it was a service. But fears he did it in vain. Thought that Serbia and Montenegro should help in case of a revolution of the national States in Austria.

Our old generation was mostly conservative, but in the people as a whole existed the wish for national liberation. The older generation was of a different opinion from the younger as to how to bring it about. In the year '78 many Serb leaders and generals prayed for liberation from the Turks. The older generation wanted to secure liberty from Austria in a legal way; we do not believe in such a liberty.

It naturally goes hard with our co-nationals in Austria. Also does not believe it goes well with the Czechs and Poles. Has heard and read that the Slav peoples in Austria are badly off. Are persecuted. In Bosnia high treason trials and *Iznimne mjere* - exceptional law. That often existed in Bosnia. In Bosnia too few schools. In Serbia more, ten times more. In Belgrade six Gymnasias, in all Bosnia four. One million, nine hundred thousand people of all faiths.

The time before he wrote ten lines and one word. Now after this talk he continues writing again. Stops often and reflects. Complains himself that it is difficult for him. Ceases writing again after fifteen lines. Again translates:

“... there must be created a relation where all differences equalize..., are equalized, between European peoples. But we as nationalists, although we had read socialistic and anarchistic writings, did not occupy ourselves much with this question, thinking that each of us had another duty - a national duty.”...

18 V 1916

Wound worse, discharging very freely. Looking miserable. Suicide by any sure means is impossible. “Wait to the end.” Resigned, but not really very sad.

...Sometimes in a philosophical mood, sometimes poetical, sometimes quite prosaic. Thinks about the human soul. What is the essential in human life, instinct or will, or spirit - what moves man?

Many who have spoken with him think he is a child, think that he was inspired by others, only because he cannot express himself sufficiently, is not in general gifted as a talker. Always a reader and always alone, not often engaging in debates.

Cabrinovic and Grabez were with him in Serbia. The three had resolved to carry out the assassination. It was his idea. Thought first of an attempt on Potiorek. Had come from Belgrade to Sarajevo, to his brother's. Was always in company of Ilic, who has since died; was his best

friend. Resolved that one of them should make an attempt on Potiorek. That was in October or November, 1913. He was in the hospital. Ilic was a little lightheaded, spoke of pan-Slavist ideas, said they should first create an organization. In all Bosnia and Croatia. Then, when all was ready, they should make the attempt. Therefore the plan was given up. Wanted first to study further himself, at Belgrade in a library. Thought he was not yet ripe and independent enough to be able to think about it.

Went in February to Belgrade. Heard in March that the Heir Apparent comes to Sarajevo. Thought it would be a chance. Spoke with Cabrinovic on this matter, who was of the same opinion. Cabrinovic said he ought to leave the attempt to him. But he was a type-setter, not of sufficient intelligence. Thought he was not sufficiently nationalist because previously an anarchist and socialist. Said they would both do it.

...Read much in Sarajevo. In Sarajevo used to dream every night he was a political murderer, struggling with gendarmes and policemen. Read much about the Russian revolution, about the fightings. This idea had taken hold of him. Admits that the earlier constraints had vanished...

Knows Grabez from boyhood, was also with him at Belgrade. Knew that he had similar thoughts. In March Grabez takes examination in the eighth class and returns to Sarajevo to prepare for matura. Said to him to tell Ilic. This one agreed. But he had no energy. Reading had - he confessed - made him quite slack. Ilic was under his influence, though he was five years older and already a teacher. Wrote he himself would also take part. Said he should procure five or six weapons. In cipher writing.

Grabez came back again to Belgrade a fortnight later, resolved on participation. First Princip told him to save himself for another occasion. But then when he came back to Belgrade, he said he would participate. Major Tankosic knew at the last moment, when they were already mentally ready.

Ciganovic, a Bosnian Serb, was there as deserter. Princip told him about it because he had bombs, he was komitadji. When he was ready to go back to Sarajevo he told him who it was that the attempt was to be made against. Ciganovic promised him also to procure revolvers from Tankosic, who was chief of komitadjis. Then got the revolvers. Went then, at the end of May, the 26th of May, to Sarajevo.

In the following month he was still able to read and study quietly. Had a nice library, because always was buying books. Books for me signify life. Therefore now so hard without books.

Thought that as a result of repeated attempts at assassination there could be built up an organization such as Ilic desired, and that then there would be general revolution among the people. Now comprehends that a revolution, especially in the military state of Austria, is of no use. What he now thinks the right thing he would not say. Has no desire to speak on the matter. It makes him unquiet to speak about it. When he thinks by himself, then everything is clear, but when he speaks with anybody, then he becomes uncertain.

If he had something to read for only 2-3 days, he could then think more clearly and express himself better. Does not speak to anybody for a month. Then when I come he wants to speak about ideas, about dominating thoughts. He considered that if he prepared the atmosphere the idea of revolution and liberation would spread first among men of intelligence and then later in the masses. Thought that thereby attention of the intelligentsia would be directed upon it. As for instance Mazzini did in Italy at the time of the Italian liberation. Thought that the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro should be united.

5 VI

When permission comes, arm is to be amputated. His usual resigned disposition.

Conclusion

There is no need to carry me to another prison. My life is already ebbing away. I suggest that you nail me to a cross and burn me alive. My flaming body will be a torch to light my people on their path to freedom.

Even when I was still at Sarajevo I had decided on an attentat. I often went at night to Zerajitch's grave. I managed to stay there all night and thought over our affairs and our wretched condition, and then I made up my mind.

In trying to insinuate that someone else has instigated the assassination, one strays from the truth. The idea arose in our own minds, and we ourselves executed it. We have loved the people. I have nothing to say in my defense.

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Notes of interviews between psychoanalyst Dr Martin Pappenheim and Gavrilo Princip, one of the assassins of Franz Ferdinand while he was imprisoned, with an introduction on the political background of the conspirators.

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