

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



# Lucy Parsons: American Anarchist

Anarcho

Anarcho  
Lucy Parsons: American Anarchist  
March 26, 2013

Retrieved on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2021 from [anarchism.pageabode.com](http://anarchism.pageabode.com)  
This is a revised and expanded version of "Lucy Parsons:  
American Anarchist", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 60  
(Summer 2013)

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

March 26, 2013



# Contents

<i>Bakunin and Marx</i> . . . . .	6
<i>Anarchism and Syndicalism</i> . . . . .	10
<i>Emma Goldman</i> . . . . .	13
<i>Mother Earth and the class struggle</i> . . . . .	21
<i>On the Bolshevik Myth</i> . . . . .	28
<i>(Political) Socialists and (State) Communists</i> . .	33
<i>To Conclude</i> . . . . .	36

*Writings & Speeches, 1878–1937* (Charles H. Kerr, 2003). Allowing Parsons voice to be heard without commentary (although it does have a useful Introduction by Ahrens and a less useful Afterword by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz who repeats Ashbaugh's claims on Goldman's alleged "lifestyle" anarchism), it is a more reliable introduction to her life and ideas.

## To Conclude

This is a seriously flawed book. Lucy Parsons, for all her faults and mistakes, deserves better than this. Ashbaugh's understanding of anarchism is non-existent, yet she inflicted her ignorance onto the world. As well as showing a shocking ignorance of anarchism, Ashbaugh's account also results in denying Parsons of agency and she ends up repeating the all-too-common suggestion that she lived in her husband's shadow as well as adding that Parsons was unable to understand her own or her husband's ideas:

Lucy Parsons had claimed to be an "anarchist" when the title was pinned on her by the bourgeois press and her state socialist enemies. She believed her husband had died for anarchism, and she was prepared to defend and die for anarchism. Although her beliefs were syndicalist rather than anarchist, she tried to cling to the "anarchist" movement as it changed shape. (201)

As well as belittling Parson, this nonsense has consequences as her book has been used by many Leninists to paint a distinctly false picture of American anarchism and Emma Goldman's politics. Thus, a member of the ISO (Keith Rosenthal) used it as the basis of an article and pamphlet on Parsons which was little more than an attack on anarchism to try and draw activists away from it into Leninism (this plagiarised work embellished her numerous inaccuracies, including proclaiming Kropotkin a pacifist!). That this book is reprinted by a press associated with that sect and called Haymarket Books besmirches her and her husband twice fold.

So please do *not* buy this book. If you are interested in Lucy Parson then there is an excellent an anthology of her writings edited by Gale Ahrens called *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*:

A review of Carolyn Ashbaugh's *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* which debunks her claims that Lucy Parsons was not an anarchist. It also refutes her attempt to portray Emma Goldman as some sort of lifestyle anarchist, showing how she and Parsons shared a similar communist anarchist perspective. It appeared in *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 2 No. 1 (Spring 2022)

---

Lucy Parsons (c. 1853–1942) is worthy of a great biography. She took an active part in the American anarchist and labour movements from the 1870s to her death and should be better known to today's radicals. Anyone described by the Chicago Police Department as "more dangerous than a thousand rioters" is worthy of remembrance. So Carolyn Ashbaugh's biography *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* should be welcomed by anarchists – except that the book is so terrible.<sup>1</sup>

Ashbaugh's right to note that "Lucy Parsons was black, a woman, and working class – three reasons people are often excluded from history." (6) However, this would be more convincing if Ashbaugh could bring herself to believe Parsons when she proclaimed herself an anarchist! Simply put, this biography excludes Parsons own voice and instead states that while she may have called herself an anarchist for decades "in realty, she advocated a syndicalist theory of society" (174) and "her beliefs were syndicalist rather than anarchist." (201)

It gets worse. Not only was Parsons unable to understand her own politics, the Chicago Martyrs were equally confused about their own politics and we are informed that the "trade unionists of the International Working People's Association... had been more 'syndicalist' than 'anarchist.'" (181) Ashbaugh quotes two of the Martyrs last words invoking Anarchy (136)

---

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing: 1976; Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

yet wants the reader to believe that they died not knowing what it meant.

The reprinting of this deeply flawed work is not surprising. There seems to be a tendency within American Leninist circles these days to claim the Chicago Anarchists as Marxists. This is because for most Marxists “real” anarchists are individualists who do not believe in the class struggle. As Ashbaugh’s book will reinforce their incorrect ideas on anarchism it is useful to reiterate the basic ideas of revolutionary anarchism and show just how wrong it is on anarchism, syndicalism and Emma Goldman.

## ***Bakunin and Marx***

Ashbaugh is very sure that Parsons was not an anarchist but a syndicalist. So sure she repeatedly puts anarchist into quotes and argues that the Haymarket Martyrs “were labelled anarchists” because “it was easy to assume that divisions in the American movement would follow” the European split between “Marxian ‘socialists’ and Bakuninist ‘anarchists.’” (45) She rejects this because “Bakunin’s theories were orientated to ‘mass’ rather than to ‘class,’ and the Chicago revolutionaries were orientated to class and trade unions. By 1885 Lucy Parsons held a position which could be called syndicalist. She rejected the need for a state or political authority, but felt that ‘economic’ authority would fall under the jurisdiction of the trade unions.” (58)

The only flaw in this argument is that Michael Bakunin and the other revolutionary anarchists in the First International advocated syndicalist ideas. We can easily show this by quoting Bakunin from sources that were available to Ashbaugh when she was writing her book.

Thus we find Bakunin arguing that workers can only free themselves by “the establishing of complete solidarity with

did “scientific” political socialism get the millions of socialists in Europe? Frankly, could Europe be worse cursed than it is if there had never been a single speech delivered by a political socialist or a book written by one of them? Really, could it be worse?<sup>57</sup>

It is also important to stress that it is pure assumption for Ashbaugh to proclaim that “the I.W.W. and the Socialist Party never fully cooperated with each other, a fact which limited both.” (218) There is little basis for such assertions and much evidence against it – look at the history of Social Democracy and contrast it with that of syndicalism. Many radicals embraced the latter precisely because of the reformism and bureaucracy of the latter and its tame unions. In other words, Bakunin was proven right.

So, in conclusion, while some anarchists will be sympathetic to comments about “restoring the working class movement called anarchism to the dimensions of 1886” and how Parsons “complained that anarchism had moved too far from the working class” (226), it is not the case that anarchism is somehow fundamentally different from syndicalism: revolutionary anarchism has advocated syndicalism since Bakunin.

Moreover, if it is the case that “[w]hile the anarchist movement became more and more involved with women’s emancipation, sexual freedom, and individual liberties, Lucy Parsons became involved in the Social Democracy” (200) then this is a mark against her (and Social Democracy!) rather than anarchism. And if Parsons “was a member of this new party” (209) (the Socialist Party) then it was for a very short-time and she quickly returned to anarchist ideas on direct action and revolutionary unionism.

---

<sup>57</sup> “Just a few stray observations on ‘Political’ Socialism, War, and the State”, *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, 150–1.

selves expelled from the Socialist Party” and joining the Communist Parties “was the only route left open to them.” (247) However, Parsons did not join then (indeed, in 1930 she was still publicly proclaiming that “I am an anarchist: I have no apology to make to a single man, woman or child, because I am an anarchist, because anarchism carries the very germ of liberty in its womb”<sup>56</sup>). Why wait 20 years to join the Stalinist Communist Party during its Popular Front phase? That goes against the class struggle nature of Parsons’ politics which Ashbaugh is so keen to praise everywhere else in her book. And why do neo-Trotskyists like the ISO point to this apparent support for Stalinists as a good thing? It seems strange, for example, to applaud how syndicalist William Z Foster became a Leninist and yet remain silent on how he became a Stalinist.

As well as a blindness to the Soviet Regime, Ashbaugh has a rosy view of Social Democracy. She does not seem that keen to learn the lessons of history. Yes, the Socialist Party of America may have become “a mass organisation rather than a small socialist sect” (209) but it became reformist, expelling the likes of Big Bill Haywood as part of a “break” with the IWW. (229) Parsons was right to argue that workers had “to strike and remain in and take possession of the necessary property of production” (218) and to mock those who believed in political action favoured by Marx and his followers like the Socialist Party: “Do you think the capitalists will allow you to vote away their property? You may, but I do not believe it... It means a revolution...” (218) She was understandably dismissive of the apparent success of Social Democracy once the First World War broke out:

Could wars ever be carried on were it not for that institutionalized credulity which manifests in reliance upon “The State”? Our socialist friends often say: “We see Anarchism gets you nowhere.” Where

---

<sup>56</sup> “I’ll be Damned if I go Back to Work Under Those Conditions! A May Day Speech”, *Liberty, Equality & Solidarity*, 147.

their follow-workers in the shop, in their own defence and in the struggle against their common master” and then “the extension of this solidarity to all workers in the same trade and in the same locality in their joint struggle against the employers – that is, their formal entrance as active members into the section of their trade, a section affiliated with the International Workingmen’s Association.” Socialism “can be attained” only “through the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and power of the working masses of the cities and villages.” Like the later syndicalists, Bakunin argued that “unions create that conscious power without which no victory is possible” while “strikes are of enormous value; they create, organise, and form a workers’ army, an army which is bound to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and the State, and lay the ground for a new world.”<sup>2</sup>

Bakunin also advocated other key syndicalist ideas. Ashbaugh notes that “Lucy Parsons discussed the general strike” which was “the syndicalist germ of thought which she had had in the 1880’s” (218) yet she makes no mention of Bakunin’s arguments from the late 1860s that “a general strike” will produce “a great cataclysm, which will regenerate society.”<sup>3</sup> Ashbaugh likewise states that for the Chicago anarchists the “radical unions which opposed wage labor were to be the building blocks of the future social order” (45) yet fails to mention that Bakunin had argued that the “organisation of trade sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by the Chambers of Labour... bear in themselves the living germs of *the new social order*, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself.”<sup>4</sup> Compare this to Parsons’ position that

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), G.P. Maximov (ed.), 304–5, 300, 379, 384–5.

<sup>3</sup> *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, 383.

<sup>4</sup> quoted by Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 50.

“[w]e hold that the granges, trade-unions, Knights of Labor assemblies, etc., are the embryonic groups of the ideal anarchistic society.”<sup>5</sup>

This focus of economic struggle and union organisation was combined with a rejection of the “political action” urged by Marx, namely socialists standing in elections. Bakunin argued, rightly as history has shown, that the “inevitable result” of such a strategy “will be that workers’ deputies, transferred to a purely bourgeois environment, and into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois political ideas... will become middle class in their outlook, perhaps even more so than the bourgeois themselves.”<sup>6</sup>

If quoting Bakunin is not sufficient, perhaps a few words by Marx and Engels will help convince any Marxists still harbouring doubts about the facts of the matter. Marx attacked Bakunin for arguing that “working classes must not occupy itself with *politics*. They must only organise themselves by trades-unions” and would “supplant the place of all existing states” by the International.<sup>7</sup> Engels dismissed the general strike as “the lever employed by which the social revolution is started” in the “Bakuninist programme” while suggesting they admitted “this required a well-formed organisation of the working class.”<sup>8</sup> Thus Marx and Engels, if not many of his followers, recognised the key aspects of Bakunin’s anarchism – aspects which Ashbaugh seems to think of as syndicalist rather than anarchist.

This shows the weakness of Ashbaugh’s claim that “Albert Parsons made it clear that he considered the I.W.P.A a Marxist, not a Bakuninist organisation.” (58) We need only remem-

---

<sup>5</sup> “Lucy E. Parsons on Anarchy”, *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2003), Albert Parsons (Ed.), 110.

<sup>6</sup> *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, 216.

<sup>7</sup> Marx-Engels *Collected Works* 43: 490.

<sup>8</sup> Marx-Engels *Collected Works* 23: 584–5.

## ***(Political) Socialists and (State) Communists***

Talking of the Communists, Ashbaugh claims that Parsons “join[ed] the Communist Party in 1939.” (261) Yet there is good reason to question this claim. Significantly, as Gale Ahrens notes, the Communist Party did not announce her membership in its press nor did its obituary make the claim that she had been a member, nor did the memoirs of various Party leaders.<sup>52</sup> Sam Dolgoff recalled that he had “met Lucy Parsons” when she attended an anarchist talk and that she “later became a Communist sympathiser, leading her name to their affairs, petitions, and causes” in the early 1970s.<sup>53</sup> However, in the 1980s, he quotes her stating “[a]lthough I am not a Communist Party member, I do work with them because they are more practical” before adding that “[a]ccording to Carolyn Ashbaugh’s biography of Lucy Parsons, she became an outspoken member of the Communist Party”.<sup>54</sup> So in spite of being an activist at the time, Dolgoff was not aware Parsons’ had joined the Communist Party and only mentioned it *after* Ashbaugh’s book made the claim. This surely confirms Ahrens’ analysis. As such, it is hard not to conclude that there is a reason why Ashbaugh’s comment had no supporting public evidence, namely that there is none and Parsons did *not* join the Communist Party at any time.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Ashbaugh did not ponder the illogical nature of her assertion. She notes that left-wingers in 1919 “found them-

---

<sup>52</sup> “Introduction”, *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 422.

<sup>54</sup> *Fragments: A Memoir* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986), 41–2.

<sup>55</sup> For what it is worth, the *New York Times* reported the death of a “noted anarchist” on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942, while the same date saw the *Chicago Daily Tribune* write of the death of an “anarchist whose life has been one long battle against the established order of society.”

hands of the industrial masses” as the “industrial power of the masses, expressed through their libertarian associations – Anarcho-syndicalism – is alone able to organise successfully the economic life and carry on production.”<sup>48</sup>

Suffice to say, it is Goldman and Berkman who were proved right by history not Parsons. The real question is why Parsons sided with the Bolsheviks? Sadly, Ashbaugh does not present much explanation for this (presumably because she thought Parsons was self-evidently right). Yet Parsons was not alone in this blindness. Even as late as 1925, Guy Aldred – for example – was attacking Emma Goldman and *Freedom* over their critiques of Bolshevik Russia as he simply refused to believe their accounts.<sup>49</sup> Aldred, unlike Parsons, saw the error of his position and eventually acknowledged the evidence that the regime was a state-capitalist party dictatorship. While it may be understandable that Parsons would not want to appear to be siding with capitalist reaction as regards Bolshevik Russia – and Goldman expressed similar misgivings<sup>50</sup> – ultimately, not recognising and exposing the mistakes of the regime would mean repeating them in any future revolution with the same disastrous outcomes. Goldman was right when she stated in 1938 that “the Communist Party in and out of Russia has done so much harm to the labor and revolutionary movement in the world that it may well take a hundred years to undo.”<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> *My Disillusionment in Russia*, 253.

<sup>49</sup> Mark A. S. Shipway, *Antiparliamentary Communism: The Movement for Workers' Councils in Britain, 1917–45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 112–3.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: an intimate life* (London: Virago, 1984), 258–261.

<sup>51</sup> *Nowhere at home: letters from exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon (eds.), (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 269–270.

ber that quoting can be selective and that Parsons was a self-proclaimed anarchist whose book on anarchism (*Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis*) included the writings of such well known libertarians as Peter Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus, Dyer Lum and C.L. James. Moreover, Ashbaugh’s summation that “Chicago leaders, as early as 1883, were syndicalists” because “they had given up political work for work in the unions which they believed would provide the social organisation of the future” (45) refutes her own claims as these positions on “political action” and unions are identical to Bakunin’s:

Toilers count no longer on anyone but yourselves. Do not demoralise and paralyse your growing strength by being duped into alliances with bourgeois Radicalism... Abstain from all participation in bourgeois Radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The bases of this organization... are the workshops and the federation of workshops... instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation, not only national, but international... when the hour of revolution sounds, you will proclaim the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society, anarchy, that is to say the true, frank people’s revolution.<sup>9</sup>

As such, there were good reasons for the Chicago anarchists to take that name, for their Marxist opponents to use it to describe them and for Lucy Parsons to call herself one for decades. So while Ashbaugh states that the I.W.W. “offered what Lucy Parsons wanted: a militant working class organisation which fought at the economic level with strikes and direct action rather than engaging in political campaigns”

---

<sup>9</sup> quoted by K.J. Kenafick, *Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx* (Melbourne: 1948), 120–1.

(218) Parsons' comrade Max Baginski was correct to point out that it was Bakunin's "militant spirit that breathes now in the best expressions of the Syndicalist and I.W.W. movements" and these were "a strong world wide revival of the ideas for which Bakunin laboured throughout his life."<sup>10</sup>

## ***Anarchism and Syndicalism***

So claims that Lucy Parsons' "response was syndicalist" when she argued that "a trades union and the Knights of Labor are practical illustrations of the feasibility of Anarchism" (173) simply show an ignorance of anarchist theory. Parsons was simply expressing the basic ideas of revolutionary anarchism. This can be seen when Peter Kropotkin expressed the exact same idea at a commemoration meeting for the Chicago anarchists:

No one can underrate the importance of this labour movement for the coming revolution. It will be those agglomerations of wealth producers which will have to reorganise production on new social bases. They will have to organise the life of the nation and the use which it will make of the hitherto accumulated riches and means of production. They – the labourers, grouped together – not the politicians.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Kropotkin shared the same "vision of a future society" as Parsons and so Ashbaugh was wrong to suggest that

---

<sup>10</sup> "Michael Bakunin (1814–1914)", *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), Peter Glassgold (ed.), 71.

<sup>11</sup> "Commemoration of the Chicago Martyrs", *Freedom*, December 1892; *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2014), Iain McKay (ed.), 344.

Clearly it is a travesty to proclaim that "[m]any 'anarchists' who had been orientated to the class struggle came into Communist Party circles. Those with individualistic and libertarian views like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, who became disillusioned with Soviet Russia, did not." (250) Goldman and Berkman opposed Soviet Russia precisely *because* they were "orientated to the class struggle" and sided with the Russian workers and peasants against their new rulers. Moreover, many anarcho-syndicalists ("anarchists" like Carlo Tresca, Rudolf Rocker and Armando Borghi) saw through (to use Berkman's title) *The Bolshevik Myth*. This applied to IWW members as well, as admitted by a former activist turned Leninist and then Trotskyist:

the Bolshevik victory was hailed with enthusiasm by the members of the IWW. In their first reaction, it is safe to say, they saw in it the completion and vindication of their own endeavors. But this first impulse was not followed through.

Some of the leading Wobblies, including Haywood himself, tried to learn the lessons of the war and the Russian Revolution and to adjust their thinking to them. But the big majority, after several years of wavering, went the other way.<sup>47</sup>

In short, if Parsons "analysed society in terms of class struggle" (256) then she should have done so with regards the Bolshevik regime and, like Goldman and Berkman, have recognised that there was a new ruling class in Russia, the party and state bureaucracies and, like them, supported the strikes, protests and uprisings of the workers against their new masters. Like Goldman she should have also argued that in "the economic field" social transformation "must be in the

---

<sup>47</sup> James P. Cannon, *The IWW: The Great Anticipation* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1956), 33.

when they possess it. For these and other reasons, I, after careful study, and not through sentiment, turned from a sincere, earnest, political Socialist to the non-political phase of Socialism – Anarchism – because in its philosophy I believe I can find the proper conditions for the fullest development of the individual units in society, which can never be the case under government restrictions.<sup>45</sup>

Goldman and Berkman were actually in Russia and saw that there was neither freedom nor democracy for the working class, that it was a party dictatorship (as happily admitted by such leading Bolsheviks as Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev) and drew the obvious conclusions. As Goldman summarised:

There is another objection to my criticism on the part of the Communists. Russia is on strike, they say, and it is unethical for a revolutionist to side against the workers when they are striking against their masters. That is pure demagoguery practised by the Bolsheviks to silence criticism.

It is not true that the Russian people are on strike. On the contrary, the truth of the matter is that the Russian people have been *locked out* and that the Bolshevik State – even as the bourgeois industrial master – uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out. In the case of the Bolsheviks this tyranny is masked by a world-stirring slogan: thus they have succeeded in blinding the masses. Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> “The Principles of Anarchism”, *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, 29–30.

<sup>46</sup> *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), xlix.

Parsons “chose to call this system ‘no government,’ but in reality, she advocated a syndicalist theory of society. She advocated workers’ ownership and control over the means of production and distribution through their unions.” (174) As if anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin did not! Similarly, they opposed, like Parsons, those who “advocated state control of the means of production and distribution” and “working through the electoral process to achieve state power.” (174) As well as the same goal, Kropotkin shared the same means as Parsons and Bakunin. While Caroline Cahm’s excellent *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886* is the best work on Kropotkin’s ideas on the labour movement, the Russian revolutionary ably summarised his position thusly in 1910:

the anarchists... do not seek to constitute, and invite the working men not to constitute, political parties in the parliaments. Accordingly, since the foundation of the International Working Men’s Association in 1864–1866, they have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation.<sup>12</sup>

Unsurprisingly Kropotkin expressed his support for the Chicago anarchists’ activities many times: “Were not our Chicago Comrades right in despising politics, and saying the struggle against robbery must be carried on in the workshop and the street, by deeds not words?”<sup>13</sup> Years later, he wrote in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of “the execution of five Chicago anarchists in 1887” and considered “Spies, Parsons and their followers in the United States” as advocates of

---

<sup>12</sup> “Anarchism”, *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (New York: Dover Press, 2002), Roger N. Baldwin (ed.), 287.

<sup>13</sup> “The Chicago Anniversary”, *Freedom*, December 1891.

“anarchist-communist ideas.”<sup>14</sup> Given that the focus of the conflict between Bakunin and Marx in the First International was precisely on “political action” by parties versus economic struggle by unions, it is clear that Parsons, like the other Chicago Anarchists, rejected the ideas of the latter in favour of those of the former.

Significantly, when Lucy Parsons visited London in 1888 she did not visit Engels but Kropotkin (Engels never wrote more than a few words, publicly or privately, about the Haymarket events which should give those seeking to turn the Martyrs into Marxists pause for thought). Kropotkin also spoke at a meeting organised by anarchists in her honour, talking of how the Martyrs “had joined the Anarchist movement, they gave themselves to it, not by halves, but entirely, body and heart together” and how they had died “loudly proclaiming their Anarchist principles before the judges.”<sup>15</sup> How did Ashbaugh describe this event? Showing her complete ignorance of Kropotkin’s ideas, she writes of how Parsons “shared the platform” with “the world famous geographer and gentle anarchist theoretician of non-violence”! (160) Similarly, she proudly recounted how Parsons was asked to write on the IWW and the American union movement for “the French paper *Les Temps Nouveau*” (221) yet somehow failed to mention this was France’s leading communist-anarchist journal and intimately associated with Kropotkin.

Yet more evidence on Parsons being an anarchist can be seen when Ashbaugh quotes the manifesto issued at the I.W.P.A.’s Pittsburgh Congress of 1883 which urged the “[d]estruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e. by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action,” a “free society based upon co-operative organisation of production” with “all public affairs” regulated “by free

---

<sup>14</sup> “Anarchism”, *Anarchism*, 295, 297.

<sup>15</sup> “Before the Storm”, *Freedom*, December 1888.

of discontent, or the party machine might be smashed and the party thereby lose control.

When I came to realize the faults, failings, shortcomings, aspirations and ambitions of fallible man, I concluded that it would not be the safest nor best policy for society, as a whole, to entrust the management of all its affairs, with all their manifold deviations and ramifications in the hands of finite man, to be managed by the party which happened to come into power, and therefore was the majority party, nor did it then, nor does it now make one particle of difference to me what a party, out of power may promise; it does not tend to allay my fears of a party, when entrenched and securely seated in power might do to crush opposition, and silence the voice of the minority, and thus retard the onward step of progress.

My mind is appalled at the thought of a political party having control of all the details that go to make up the sum total of our lives. Think of it for an instant, that the party in power shall have all authority to dictate the kind of books that shall be used in our schools and universities, government officials editing, printing, and circulating our literature, histories, magazines and press, to say nothing of the thousand and one activities of life that a people engage in, in a civilized society.

To my mind, the struggle for liberty is too great and the few steps we have gained have been won at too great a sacrifice, for the great mass of the people of this 20<sup>th</sup> century to consent to turn over to any political party the management of our social and industrial affairs. For all who are at all familiar with history know that men will abuse power

ment. Looking at their works it is clear that they shared the same politics as Parsons – communist-anarchism.

## ***On the Bolshevik Myth***

Class analysis is also at the heart of another issue upon which Parsons and Goldman took radically differing positions, namely the Russian Revolution. Ashbaugh notes how Parsons “took a hard Communist Party line against Goldman’s and Berkman’s perceptions of Soviet Russia” (255) and ignored the persecution of anarchists and the destruction of the Kronstadt revolt. She presents a wonderfully self-contradictory discussion of Parsons’ position on the Soviet regime, that she thought the “workers had seized power in Russia” (255) before asserting that she “did not ask whether there was freedom or workers’ democracy under the new regime.” (255–6) That raises the question of how the workers could have “seized power” without there being any “freedom or workers’ democracy”? Indeed, the Bolshevik regime confirmed Parsons’ own warnings of the perils associated with a socialist State:

I learned by close study that it made no difference what fair promises a political party, out of power, might make to the people in order to secure their confidence, when once securely established in control of the affairs of society that they were after all but human with all the human attributes of the politician. Among these are: First, to remain in power at all hazards; if not individually, then those holding essentially the same views as the administration must be kept in control. Second, in order to keep in power, it is necessary to build up a powerful machine; one strong enough to crush all opposition and silence all vigorous murmurs

contracts between autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federalistic basis.” (44) While much of this is shared by anarchists and Marxists, the last reflects the ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin and not Marx. As Bakunin stressed, a “truly popular organisation begins... from below” and so “federalism becomes a political institution of Socialism, the free and spontaneous organisation of popular life.” Thus anarchism “is federalistic in character.”<sup>16</sup> If in doubt, here is Emma Goldman arguing that anarchy is “a society based on voluntary co-operation of productive groups, communities and societies loosely federated together, eventually developing into a free communism, actuated by a solidarity of interests.”<sup>17</sup>

So we are left with one of two positions: either Lucy Parsons, the Chicago Martyrs and Peter Kropotkin were wrong about anarchism or Ashbaugh is. The evidence (and plain common sense) is clear that it is Ashbaugh who is wrong rather than world famous anarchists like Lucy Parsons or Peter Kropotkin.

## ***Emma Goldman***

Thus it is uncontroversial to note that the Chicago Martyrs were also syndicalists. This is because, being revolutionary anarchists, they like Bakunin and Kropotkin advocated revolutionary unionism as a strategy to create an anarchist (libertarian socialist) society. This can be seen by Goldman noting that “in this country five men had to pay with their lives because they advocated Syndicalist methods as the most effective in the struggle of labor against capital.”<sup>18</sup> Where Ashbaugh goes wrong is her assumption that anarchism and syndicalism are

---

<sup>16</sup> *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, 273–4, 272.

<sup>17</sup> “What I Believe”, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Alix Kates Shulman (ed.), 50.

<sup>18</sup> “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice”, *Red Emma Speaks*, 87.

mutually exclusive rather than the latter being a longstanding strategy of the former.

It must be noted that Ashbaugh's attempts to bolster her case by stating that "Lucy did not separate 'anarchist' from socialist thinkers" (58) falls for much the same reason. Familiarity with anarchist thinkers would show that "Kropotkin, Bakunin, Proudhon" (58) all considered themselves socialists along with the "Chicago 'anarchists'" – perhaps we can add *them* to the long list of "alleged 'anarchists' [who] also called themselves 'socialists'"? (157) Emma Goldman, likewise, argued along the same lines:

While it is true that I am an Anarchist. I am also a Socialist. All Anarchists are Socialists, but not all Socialists are Anarchists. Anarchism is the higher form of Socialism. All Socialists who think and grow will be forced to the Anarchist conclusion. Anarchism is the inevitable goal of Socialism. We Anarchists believe in the socialisation of wealth and of land and of the means of production. But the doing away with capitalism is not a cure-all, and the substitution of the Socialistic state only means greater concentration and increase of governmental power. We believe in the revolution. The founders of Socialism believed in it. Karl Marx believed in it. All thinking Socialists of today believe in it. The political Socialists are only trimmers and they are no different from other politicians. In their mad effort to get offices they deny their birthright for a mess of pottage and sacrifice their true principles and real convictions on the polluted altar of politics.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> "Anarchists Socialists" *The Agitator*, 1 April 1911. This interview also appeared in "Anarchism and Socialism Defined", *Herald of Revolt*, April 1911.

and rabid revolutionists who were ardent workers twenty years ago are now very respectable... That, however, should not discourage the true propagandist from working among the disinherited, but it should teach him the vital lesson that spiritual hunger and unrest are often the most lasting incentives.<sup>44</sup>

There is a strange quality to the kind of diatribe Ashbaugh's work expressed and has inspired, namely that anarchists are portrayed as being unable to hold more than one idea in their heads at any one time, combined with similar monolithic approach to tactics. Thus anarchists are class struggle orientated (like Parsons, thus really "syndicalists" and so good because they are nearly Marxists) or they are culture orientated (like Goldman, thus "individualists" and express "anarchism"). In reality, anarchists are like everyone else, being able to hold multiple ideas and advocate multiple tactics. This means that Goldman advocated syndicalism along with personal transformation, recognising the importance of individual liberation along with having a class analysis of society and social change.

These positions are *not* mutually exclusive, in other words. Class struggle politics do not need to exclude a concern over other – non-economic – issues, nor exclude a desire to expand individual freedom in the here-and-now. It is only the impoverished politics of Leninism which thinks it must – at least in their polemics against anarchism, for elsewhere they are able to take a more balanced perspective and can even be found attacking syndicalism for an alleged exclusive concern of shopfloor activity and an ignoring of wider social issues.

In short, it is untenable to suggest, as Ashbaugh does, that Goldman and Berkman were at the forefront of removing the class struggle focus of anarchism within the American move-

---

<sup>44</sup> "A Rejoinder," *Mother Earth*, December 1910.

The men and women who first take up the banner of a new, liberating idea generally emanate from the so-called respectable classes...

Far be it from me to belittle the poor, the ignorant, the disinherited. Certainly they are the greatest force, if only they could be awakened from their lethargy. But I maintain that to limit one's activities to them is not only a mistake, but also contrary to the spirit of Anarchism. Unlike other social theories, Anarchism builds not on classes, but on men and women. I may be mistaken, but I have always been of the opinion that Anarchism calls to battle all libertarian elements as against authority.

That to limit oneself to propaganda exclusively among the oppressed does not always bring desired results, is borne out by more than one historical proof. Our Chicago comrades propagated only among the workers; in fact, cheerfully gave their lives for the oppressed. Where were the latter during the eighteen terrible months of the judicial farce? Were not the Chicago Anarchists shamefully betrayed by the very organization which Parsons and Spies helped to build up – the Knights of Labor? And has not the spirit of that time drifted into conservative channels, as represented by the American Federation of Labor? The majority of its members, I am sure, would hesitate not a moment to relegate Voltairine or myself to the fate of our martyred comrades.

... The economic factor is, I am sure, very vital. Possibly that accounts for the fact that a great many radicals lose their ideals the moment they succeed economically. Voltairine surely knows as well as I that hundreds of Anarchists, Socialists,

It should be noted that Goldman is repeating the comments of Haymarket Martyr Adolph Fischer who stated that “every anarchist is a socialist, but every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the Chicago Anarchists' respect for Marx's analysis of capitalism hardly automatically excludes them from anarchism – if it did then Bakunin would join them given his praise for Marx's *Capital* and other contributions to socialist thought.

Similar comments can be made against the book's claims on Emma Goldman. It is clear that Ashbaugh assumes that the reader is not familiar with her ideas and works, otherwise how do you explain the continued distortions inflicted upon her? She proclaims that “Goldman became interested in the freedom of the individual” while “Parsons remained committed to the freedom of the working class from capitalism” (200) and “believed that women would be emancipated when wage slavery in the factories, fields, and mines of capitalism had ended.” (202) Their differences “were the result of different backgrounds and social milieus”. (203)

Yet reading Goldman shows that she placed her feminism within a class context and recognised the need to end capitalism to ensure genuine liberty and equality. This can be seen when she argued for “a complete transvaluation of all accepted values – especially the moral ones – coupled with the abolition of industrial slavery.”<sup>21</sup> Thus women's suffrage was of no use “to the mass of women without property, the thousands of wage workers, who live from hand to mouth.”<sup>22</sup> She rightly asked:

As to the great mass of working girls and women,  
how much independence is gained if the narrow-

---

<sup>20</sup> *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* (New York: Monad Press, 1977), Philip S. Foner (ed.), 81.

<sup>21</sup> “The Traffic in Women”, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 194.

<sup>22</sup> “Woman Suffrage”, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 201.

ness and lack of freedom of the home is exchanged for the narrowness and lack of freedom of the factory, sweat-shop, department store, or office?<sup>23</sup>

So much for Goldman's feminism becoming "separate from its working class origins" and taking on "an abstract character of freedom for women in all things, in all times, and in all places"! (202) In reality, Goldman's critique of the contemporary "women's question" was rooted in its lack of understanding of the "social question" and so was "absolutely detached from the economic needs of the people" and was usually "not only indifferent but antagonistic to labor".<sup>24</sup> It limited itself to political equality (votes for women) and ignored how having the vote had not liberated working men:

The poor, stupid, free American citizen! Free to starve, free to tramp the highways of this great country, he enjoys universal suffrage, and, by that right, he has forged chains about his limbs. The reward that he receives is stringent labor laws prohibiting the right of boycott, of picketing, in fact, of everything, except the right to be robbed of the fruits of his labor.<sup>25</sup>

Having votes for woman would not change the fact that "women wage-earners" would simply "have the equal right with men to be exploited, to be robbed, to go on strike; aye, to starve even."<sup>26</sup> Likewise, her advocacy of birth control reflected not only the importance of women to control their own bodies but also how large families benefited capitalism

---

<sup>23</sup> "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation", *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 216.

<sup>24</sup> "Woman Suffrage", 207.

<sup>25</sup> "Woman Suffrage", 198.

<sup>26</sup> "Marriage and Love", *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 232.

This does not mean, of course, that social hierarchies can be ended without ending capitalism and the state. As can be seen, Goldman was well aware of the limitations of women's liberation within capitalism – being free to become a wage slave is not much of a step-up from being a slave to a husband. Similarly, all having the chance to be a boss may be a form of equality but it is a limited one. True social equality means no bosses.

As such, there is a kernel of truth in Parsons' position – a kernel which Goldman shared. However, Parsons' conclusions were flawed but this does not justify how Ashbaugh distorts Goldman's ideas and the wider anarchist movement's position. Taking the former, such an account expresses nothing less than an unwillingness to learn about Goldman's ideas and life. As she recounts in *Living My Life*, Goldman was a worker and she took part in strikes and when she became a full-time anarchist activist, she continued to support strikes along with writing on and lecturing – in, amongst other places, union halls – about the class struggle and syndicalism. She simply rejected an *exclusive* focus on labour agitation as she indicated in reply to Voltairine de Cleyre:

I agree with our Comrade that our work should be among "the poor, the ignorant, the brutal, the disinherited men and women." I for one have worked with them and among them for twenty-one years... my friend knows the masses mainly from theory. I know them from years of contact in and out of the factory. Just because of that knowledge I do not believe that our work should be only with them. And that for the following reasons:

The pioneers of every new thought rarely come from the ranks of the workers. Possibly because the economic whip gives the latter little opportunity to easily grasp a truth...

The success of the meeting was unfortunately weakened by Lucy Parsons who, instead of condemning the unjustified, vile arrest of the three comrades in Portland and the ever increasing censorship by Comstock and associates, took a stand against the editor of the *Firebrand*, H. Addis, because he tolerated articles about free love in the columns of the *Firebrand*. Apart from the fact that anarchism not only teaches freedom in economic and political areas, but also in social and sexual life, L. Parsons has the least cause to object to treatises on free love and in addition at a time when it is important to liberate comrades from the claws of the moral zealots. I spoke after Parsons and had a hard time changing the unpleasant mood that her remarks elicited, and I also succeeded in gaining the sympathy and the material support of the people present for the Portland trio.<sup>43</sup>

Simply put, if it is a case that “Lucy did not share Emma’s ideological position on sexual freedom, and she had never considered women’s emancipation as important as class struggle” (255) then Goldman was right – the struggle against patriarchy is as important as the struggle against capitalism and the state. This applies to other forms of social oppression like racism and homophobia as well. We are well aware that a theoretical commitment to social equality by socialist organisations need not be reflected in practice while arguing that everything will be fine after the revolution will ensure that social hierarchies like sexism, racism and homophobia will *never* be addressed.

---

<sup>43</sup> “Letters from a Tour”, *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years: Volume 1: Made for America, 1890–1901* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003), Candace Falk (ed.), 311–2.

and militarism as well as being a hinderance for workers thinking of striking.<sup>27</sup>

As for the claim that there “was a major difference between Emma Goldman and Lucy Parsons on the basic question of class consciousness” (181) it is significant that Ashbaugh fails to explore Goldman’s advocacy of syndicalism. She is aware of it, mentioning (in passing) that Goldman’s lectures included “Syndicalism, the Strongest Weapon of the Working Class, a Discussion of Sabotage, Direct Action and the General Strike.”<sup>28</sup> (233) Her article for *Mother Earth* on Syndicalism<sup>29</sup> was reprinted as the pamphlet *Syndicalism: The Modern Menace to Capitalism*, with Goldman stating that in the First International “Bakunin and the Latin workers” forged ahead “along industrial and Syndicalist lines”, that syndicalism “is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism” and that “accounts for the presence of so many Anarchists in the Syndicalist movement. Like Anarchism, Syndicalism prepares the workers along direct economic lines, as conscious factors in the great struggles of to-day, as well as conscious factors in the task of reconstructing society.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> “The Social Aspects of Birth Control”, *Mother Earth*, April 1916 (included in *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*).

<sup>28</sup> Goldman lectured on the following labour-related subjects between 1904 and 1914: “The Struggle Between Capital and Labour”, “The General Strike”, “Trade Unionism”, “Direct Action as the Logical Tactics of Anarchism”, “The Relation of Anarchy and Trade Unionism”, “Trade Unionism’s Relation to Anarchy”, “The Relationship of Anarchism to Trades Unionism”, “Anarchism, the Moving Spirit in the Labor Struggle”, “Anarchy and its Relation to the Workingman”, “Syndicalism, the Hope of the Worker”, “Syndicalism in Theory and Practice”, “Syndicalism, the Modern Menace to Capitalism”, “Syndicalism, the Strongest Weapon of Labor”, “The Spirit of Anarchism in the Labor Struggle” (see volumes 2 and 3 of *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*).

<sup>29</sup> “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice”, *Mother Earth*, January and February 1913.

<sup>30</sup> “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice”, *Red Emma Speaks*, 89, 91, 90.

This was not the only place Goldman expressed syndicalist ideas, arguing in her introduction to anarchism that it “stands for direct action” and that “[t]rade unionism, the economic arena of the modern gladiator, owes its existence to direct action.” She noted approvingly how internationally “direct, revolutionary economic action has become so strong a force in the battle for industrial liberty as to make the world realise the tremendous importance of labour’s power. The General Strike [is] the supreme expression of the economic consciousness of the workers... Today every great strike, in order to win, must realise the importance of the solidaric general protest.”<sup>31</sup> She mocked the Marxists of the time who rejected the general strike:

True, a leading German Socialist not long ago declared the General Strike to be general nonsense; and when asked if the workers of the world should prevent the possible coalition of European powers against the Russian Revolution by the declaration of a General Strike, he scornfully ridiculed the suggestion. How foolish the “Sage of Berlin” must feel in face of the fact that the General Strike has since proved such a tremendous weapon in the hands of labor.<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, her report on the International Anarchist Congress of 1907 rightly noted that the “destructive, as well as the constructive, forces for a new life come from the working people. It, therefore, behooves us to keep in close contact with the latter. There was little diversity of opinion on this point. The various speakers merely considered whether syndicalism is to be looked upon as an aim or as a means.” Moreover, one

<sup>31</sup> “Anarchism: What it Really Stands For”, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 65–6.

<sup>32</sup> “The Spanish Uprising”, *Mother Earth*, August 1909.

must be the strike which will *stay in* the factory, not *go out*?”<sup>41</sup> This was recognised at the time, with leading British syndicalist Tom Mann stating that *Mother Earth* “voiced in clear terms the necessity for ‘working class solidarity,’ ‘direct action in all industrial affairs’ and ‘free association.’ I subscribe to each of these with heart and mind.” The journal was “labouring so thoroughly to popularise principles calculated, as I believe, to emancipate mankind, intellectually and economically.”<sup>42</sup>

So either Ashbaugh summarised the contents of *Mother Earth* without looking at journal and instead relying on her assumptions and prejudices or she did consult it and decided to misrepresent it. Neither option befits a serious historian.

At best it could be argued that by not being totally focused on unions and labour struggles *Mother Earth* made a mistake, but that would be wrong. Indeed, few Leninist newspapers today would be so narrowly focused (as can be seen by the ISO’s own journal). So if Parsons were “outraged that an anarchist paper would deal with such questions” like free love “for her advancing the working class revolution came first at any cost” (203) then this showed a weakness in her politics rather than a flaw in the rest of the American anarchist movement. Worse, Parsons’ position meant siding with the State as Goldman noted:

<sup>41</sup> “A Study of the General Strike in Philadelphia”, *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, Peter Glassgold (ed.), 311. It should be noted that de Cleyre is repeating Parsons’s words from the IWW’s founding Conference in 1905: “I wish to say that my conception of the future method of taking possession of this Earth is that of the general strike... My conception of the strike of the future is not to strike and go out and starve, but to strike and remain in and take possession of the necessary property of production.” (“Speeches at the Founding Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World”, *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity: Writings & Speeches, 1878–1937* [Charles H. Kerr, 2003], 82–3)

<sup>42</sup> “*Mother Earth* and Labour’s Revolt”, *Mother Earth*, March 1915. For more on Mann, see “Tom Mann and British Syndicalism”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 1 No. 3 (Autumn 2021).

recognition in the trades unions. This explains the occurrence of sympathetic strikes, in which men in related industries cease work in brotherly co-operation with their striking bothers – evidences of solidarity so terrifying to the capitalistic class.

Solidaric strikes do not represent the battle of an isolated union or trade with an individual capitalist or group of capitalists; they are the war of the proletariat class with its organized enemy, the capitalist regime. The solidaric strike is the prologue of the General Strike.

The modern worker has ceased to be the slave of the individual capitalist; to-day, the capitalist *class* is his master. However great his occasional victories on the economic field, he still remains a wage slave. It is, therefore, not sufficient for labor unions to strive to merely lessen the pressure of the capitalistic heel; progressive workingmen's organizations can have but one worthy object – to achieve their full economic stature by complete emancipation from wage slavery.

That is the true mission of trades unions. They bear the germs of a potential social revolution; aye, more – they are the factors that will fashion the system of production and distribution in the coming free society.<sup>40</sup>

To state that the success of *Mother Earth* “reflected the dissociation of anarchism from strictly class struggle movements” (225) is simply nonsense. How could it be when it printed articles like de Cleyre's which argued that “the weapon of the future will be the general strike” and is it not clear that “it

---

<sup>40</sup> “The First May and the General Strike,” *Mother Earth*, May 1907.

of her motions to the Conference concluded that the “germ of such an [anarchist] organization can be found in that form of trades unionism which has done away with centralization, bureaucracy and [hierarchical] discipline, and which favors independent and direct action on the part of its members.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, just like Parsons, Goldman argued that it was the “war of classes that we must concentrate upon” and those “who appreciate the urgent need of co-operating in great struggles... must organise the preparedness of the masses for the overthrow of both capitalism and the state” as this “alone leads to revolution at the bottom” which “alone leads to economic and social freedom, and does away with all wars, all crimes, and all injustice.”<sup>34</sup> She was well aware of the need for the “liberation of the human body from the domination of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government.” Wealth “means power; the power to subdue, to crush, to exploit, the power to enslave, to outrage, to degrade”.<sup>35</sup> Property was “not only a hindrance to human well-being, but an obstacle, a deadly barrier, to all progress” and meant that “man must sell his labour” and so “his inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master.” Anarchism, she stressed, was the “the only philosophy that can and will do away with this humiliating and degrading situation... There can be no freedom in the large sense of the word... so long as mercenary and commercial considerations play an important part in the determination of personal conduct.”<sup>36</sup>

So in terms of all the key issues – syndicalism, direct action, general strike, class struggle – Goldman and Parsons *were in agreement*. This can be seen from the awkward fact that Parsons sold “pamphlets by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berk-

---

<sup>33</sup> “The International Anarchist Congress”, *Mother Earth* October 1907.

<sup>34</sup> “Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter”, *Red Emma Speaks*, 355–6.

<sup>35</sup> “Anarchism: What it Really Stands For”, 62, 54.

<sup>36</sup> “What I Believe”, *Red Emma Speaks*, 50.

man, the majority of Kropotkin's works" (227) Likewise after economic crisis in 1907–08 and 1914–15, Parsons "now concentrated her work in unemployment organising" (232) as did Alexander Berkman.

Of course there are personal conflicts at work here which can distort the level of agreement between individuals and groups (see the conflicts between Leninist Parties, as an obvious example). Parsons and Goldman did not seem to get on so assuming, as Ashbaugh does, that the former is completely objective on the latter and her ideas is problematic, to say the least. If it is a case that Parsons "wanted to remain the unquestioned leader of the anarchist movement, but the leadership changed and with it the direction of the movement" (206) then her comments against Goldman should be questioned, not accepted at face value. This becomes petty in the extreme at time, as can be seen when Ashbaugh quotes Parsons' thoughts on Goldman's *Living My Life* as a flawed book "beginning and ending with Emma, Emma" (254) – as if an autobiography could be anything else.

So Ashbaugh's book is not a serious critique of Goldman's ideas by any means. Its attempts to contrast the "free love" individualistic anarchists with Parsons' no-nonsense syndicalism fails if you have even a basic awareness of Goldman's politics.<sup>37</sup> Luckily, Ashbaugh could rest easy as few Marxists know much about Goldman's ideas – as can be seen, for example, by *International Socialist Organisation* (ISO) member Lance Selfa's

---

<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that Kropotkin – who suggest that the paper *Free Society* "would do more if it would not waste so much space discussing sex" – is *not* presented as a class struggle anarchist by Leninists. Then again, he had the sense to agree when Goldman argued that "All right, dear comrade, when I have reached your age, the sex question may no longer be of importance to me. But it is now, and it is a tremendous factor for thousands, millions even, of young people." (*Living My Life* [New York: Dover Publications, 1970] I: 253).

error-ridden article "Emma Goldman: A life of controversy"<sup>38</sup> which also fails to mention her syndicalism.

## ***Mother Earth and the class struggle***

As such, claims that Parsons' paper the *Liberator's* "message was of strikes and industrial conflict, orientated to the class struggle" while *Mother Earth* "dealt with all facets of life and social revolution – sex, women's emancipation, literature, art, theatre" and found its "readership in the avant garde of the literary and artistic world" (221) is simply inaccurate. In reality, *Mother Earth* covered the class struggle in articles like Max Baginski's "Aim and Tactics of the Trade Union Movement" and Voltairine de Cleyre's "A Study of the General Strike in Philadelphia".<sup>39</sup> It also reprinted "The Basis of Trade Unionism" by leading French syndicalist Emile Pouget. *Mother Earth* unsurprisingly explicitly linked itself to the Chicago Anarchists and, for example, twenty years after their judicial murder argued as follows:

Bitter experience has gradually forced upon organized labor the realization that it is difficult, if not impossible, for isolated unions and trades to successfully wage war against organized capital; for capital is organized, into national as well as international bodies, co-operating in their exploitation and oppression of labor. To be successful, therefore, modern strikes must constantly assume ever larger proportions, involving the solidaric co-operation of all the branches of an affected industry – an idea gradually gaining

---

<sup>38</sup> *International Socialist Review*, no. 34, March-April 2004.

<sup>39</sup> For a selection of articles on "The Social War", see *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth*, Peter Glassgold (ed.).