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Letters to Berkman and Emmy Eckstein

Milly Witkop-Rocker

1935

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Berlin 20/8/31

Dearest Sasha,

How are you? How the prospects to remain? How is your health and that of Emmie?

I have had a letter from my sister Rose just now in which she tells me that she has collected thirty signatures of mps which will be sent to the French consulate: with your permission of course. She handed them to Paris.

She also says that whenever you desire to go to England, she will gladly and happily do her very best to get you a permit as long as the present government is in power. She has the necessary connections and will use them to the best of her abilities.

Think it over and let us know.

From us there isn't much to relate. The general situation is too bad for words, and is getting worse daily, it is a hell of a state.

My own health is better but far from good. Fermin is in the S. again, but quite fed up with it. He would come back if only

he could have the faintest hope of getting work, but where get it?

Rudolf is working hard, is pulled to pieces and don't get time to work at his book. Next week he has to go to Holland again for a few days, it is a rotten business. If only his book was finished.

This for the present, love to both of you from both of us and best wishes of success in your efforts

Milly

504 Grand St N.Y.C.

N.Y. 5/1935

Dearest Sasha,

Your letter of the 19th of Feb. just arrived, also your other two letters arrived, we did not answer them yet, for Rudolf is working hard to get the second part ready, and I don't feel well lately. You will hear from Rudolf as soon as he gets a minute's rest, meanwhile these short lines:

It will be very good of you Sashe dear to send one copy of the manuscript right to this address, it will save Goldman work and we will get it much sooner.

Rudolf will send you out three quarters of the second part next week, you shall not have to wait for him then.

Please get on with the preparations of the index, it is very good of you to do it, it will be a great help to Rudolf.

About the name of the translator we need not to bother yet. We shall consider the matter later on. It is very noble of you to insist that his name should not be yours.

We shall certainly wait until you can tell us how long it will take you to do the whole translation, that is understood.

We are happy to hear that you are getting on so fast with the revisions. It is very wonderful. We hope and trust that yours

keep the world in captivity for quite a long time after Hitler and Mussolini will vanish and be forgotten.

We shall therefore have to work, patiently and unceasingly, till people begin to see clear, and think and act for themselves:

This letter I started three days ago, have been constantly interrupted so I shall better close it now, else it may take many more days.

I have mentioned that we are going to make an effort to get a permanent visa, now we have found out that we shall need so many documents: which we cannot produce as you may realise that it took me two days already only to look up people and find out what there is to be done. But that is just a beginning of course. We may then have to drop the matter after all.

Fond love to you both from us all in hope that these lines will find you both in improved health and that we shall hear from you soon I am as ever devotedly yours,

Milly.

in the most elementary and simplest things these days, it is a miserable state of things.

From Emme we have not heard quite a long time. It is true that her a letter but she again owes one to Rudolf. In her last letter she bitterly complained about the coldness of the comrades, specially about the indifference of the Jewish comrades.

It hurts badly to her, what it became of people who were so active, so willing to do things, and made such sacrifices for the movement, some years ago. It must be terrible hard for the dear girl to work, under such circumstances, specially at her age. Yet I feel sure that she will succeed to gather around her a sufficient group of people, specially English-speaking, who will take the task upon them to create a movement. It will not be crowds to begin with, we have to learn to be modest, and never forget that we have more obstacles in our way to clear away than ever before.

Our worst enemy is not Fascism or even Hitlerism but the so called communism. It is not so terrible difficult to convince honest thinking people of the danger and the of other dictatorships but very different indeed to make people see any danger at all in the Russian despotism in Bolshevist dictatorship.

Communism became a fad also here and people are taking to it very much because it is getting more and more respectable and is going into fashion.

The petty middle class and the intellectuals are looking up to communism as their only salvation from their present plight and the workers most natural are hoping that all their troubles will be solved by communism.

I am not pessimistic in spite of all that, I am convinced that our time will and must come. Yet we must look facts in the face, and admit, whether we like it or not that, the dictatorship over the masses will not vanish with the vanishing of Hitler and Mussolini. The so called dictatorship of the "proletariat" will

and Emmie's health will keep in good condition and you will be able to work on.

But by no means you should work too hard, and thereby ruin your health. Your health is more important than any book in the world.

Well yes, you have the complete first part of the manuscript dear Sasha, Rudolf is working the second part you will have it all within two weeks says Rudolf, but he will send you the three parts which he has ready one of these days.

You are happy you write that we can stay here for a while, we don't even know if we can dear. We have no definitive answer from the authorities and are still hanging on. Needless to tell you how it feels.

Well dearest this in the hurry, you will hear more details from Rudolf.

You say that you have not heard from Goldman a long time, also we don't hear from him lately, and we don't know the reason, I hope there is nothing wrong.

The two other copies send to him as usual, for he actually handles the matter.

With much love and best wishes from us both also from Fern to both of you, devotedly yours

Milly

Please forgive the terrible scribble, it is abominable to write as bad as that.

N.Y. 4/1935

Dearest Sasha,

Your letter and the manuscript arrived safely. R. is not at home, will return Monday the 5th and will answer you in detail, presumably.

He was in Chicago and had a talk with Goldman. They agreed that the book should be published next fall, and in one

volume. They find that it will be best not to divide the book. He will write you all about it. You are right the biographical sketches it is not necessary, also R. agrees to that.

Love and best wishes to you both from Fermin and myself
Milly
N.Y. 30/1935

My dearest Sasha,

Your letter of the 15th of March and the 10 chapters of the manuscript arrived. We know and trust that you are in possession of Rudolf's registered letters and the revised manuscript which was also sent registered by now.

All what you send in the future address to our place, it is the best and quickest way. I would also send these lines registered, since it seems to be best for you, but I cannot do it, as it is Sunday today.

Rudolf is working on the last few chapters, he hopes to get through with them by the end of the next week, it is quite certain that you will not have to wait for him.

As soon as he is finished with this work he will go out for a short trip, only as far as Chicago, as the time for lecturing will soon expire, on account of the warm weather. You probably know by now from Emma that we have got another 6 months stay. The winter season was spoiled for us any way, for while waiting for the extension Rudolf could not go out on a trip of course.

However we have to take things as they come, since we are not the masters over our own fate.

Yes dear Sasha I really think that you have done the revision quickly, considering the circumstances under which you poor dears are working lately. It breaks my heart to hear how terrible hard you have to struggle for your bare existence, it is cruel! The worst of it is that we are all so helpless. What good

and we would be very thankful if either of you would tell us the real state of your health dear fellow.

I am terrible (sic) ashamed of myself dearest mine, that I did not answer you till now and I do not dare to excuse myself at all. I assure you though dear friends that in our hearts and minds we were with you all the time, and I am sure that you know it.

Rudolf came home from his tour absolutely exhausted. He has overdone it this time, no doubt, but could not help it. However, it tolls on him badly, and to the very day he has not quite recuperated. The worst of it is that he take a real rest, but is banned to work an(?)

Also my health is not very excellent but I too have to do my share, we just have to.

The worst of it is this beastly business about our stay or go. We have another 6 months stay, and each time it gets more difficult to obtain one. We feel so sick of it that if only we knew where to go, we would not bother any more. But as it is we only have to try again and again and that wears one out mentally.

We have therefore decided to go to C.O. (?) for a short trip. Rudolf is invited to lecture and while we will be there we shall make an attempt to get an emigrants visa.

We doubt very much it will succeed, but we shall try anyway, as we have nothing to lose.

Angelica Balabanoff paid us a visit last week, and brought us personal greetings from Emma. The poor soul changed a lot since I have seen her in Berlin last: she looks so old! But not only physical (sic) she has changed, she seems to be so pessimistic and depressed.

Her lectures are not very successful we are told, and if not for the Italians it would be worse still. She is envying Emma that she can be active in England, just the country where she would love to be. And Emma enrages her that she is in the states: that how it is, nobody can have ones choice, even not

Rudolf is in Los Angeles now, and will remain there about 4 weeks altogether. Then he will be about a week or ten days in San Francisco and will return to N.Y. for we shall find out what we are to do, whether they are going to grant us another extension or not.

His tour is a great moral success, but also financially better than we have expected. As a matter of fact, we have expected very little.

The most important thing for me is that he should come back in good health and spirit everything else is of minor importance. From his short tour last year he came back quite a wreck. I have sent your letters to Rudolf and if he has any time at all I am sure that you will hear from him.

Fermin and myself are here in this beautiful little place Tawanda, at my sister's. She has a wonderful family, all real good people and most splendid personalities. There is no better place I can think of to spend Christmas. Rudolf would give anything to be with us. They all wished to be remembered to you.

Much love to you both, hearty greetings and best wishes for a healthy and happy new year from Fermin and myself. Ever yours affectionate,

Milly

N.Y. March 26

Dearest Sasha and Emmy,

How are you? We know of your operation Sasha dear. We have been told of it by our friends. Dan...(?) told us that he has seen you in the hospital and assured us that you looked very lovely, and were in good spirit. That was very good news. But soon afterwards our friends told us that the operation was not successful and that you may need another one. Is it true? I hope not. We are feeling very unhappy about this last news,

is it to dear friends if one feels with you and sympathise with you heart and soul? One cannot get fed on that. It is a cursed state of things. Just the best people in this rotten world have to suffer most, suffer constantly: indeed it is but time that the whole thing is smashed to pieces!

Now about the chief items of your letter dear: Rudolf agrees with your suggestion how the index should be.

The same thing refers to Kant refers to Hegel: the "dialectical method", his "conception of the state" etc.

The same way you will treat all the rest of the persons mentioned. Rudolf's book is a scientific work to an extent, isn't it?

It was suggested that short biographies should be given of the people mentioned but I am trying to convince Rudolf that it is not necessary: that is my opinion. What do you think of it?

Well my dearest ones keep well both of you and let us hope that better times will come, for us all.

With fondest love and best wishes from us three to both of you. Yours as ever

Molly

N.Y. 21/9 35

Dearest Sasha,

Your letter of July 30th and the copy of the one to Joe Goldman of August the 5th Rudolf received, we are both ever so happy that the matter is closed now, and that you have settled down to some creative work of your own: best of luck dear boy!

You will be glad to hear Sasha dear that also Rudolf has started to work, at last: he actually begun to write his memoirs, while we were in Tawanda at my sister's place. You hardly re-

alise what it means to me dearest. Rudolf felt so bad before we went to Tawanda, that I was quite worried.

Never before he was in such a state of spirit and how happy I am to see him in his present state. He is so absorbed by his work that I cannot get him away from the desk. A new spirit came over him, living through once more every phase of his youth. He has only done two chapters by now, but you can tell already that it is going to be a very interesting work, and I hope a valuable document.

Our old friend Nettlau will be very happy when he will get to know that Rudolf has at last taken up this work. He begged him ever so long that he should write his memoirs, assuring him the importance of it.

Another bit of 'good news' I have for you: we have got another extension, for six more months. The authorities were more decent this time, letting us know about it three weeks before the expiration of our extension. That way we have a better chance to make use of the time. Rudolf will undertake a tour, and meantime meet the people who are interested in the publication of his book, may be that something will turn out of it.

Why do you make special reference to the fact that you have made the proposition long before Emma to repay the money, if need be, Sasha dear? Indeed you have. It was a mistake of Rudolf not to mention it in his letter. That's all. But would it not be wise old friend to drop the subject entirely? Since the problem is solved to everyone's satisfaction.

I hope that you will forgive Rudolf for not writing you know old pal, he is working so intensively as I have mentioned already that he cannot tear himself away, it will not keep on in the same speed of course. He shall have to stop soon to attend to some of the correspondence which has accumulated, then you will hear from him of course. Meantime, take these lines as a substitute.

times keep on telling to each other that their Empire consists of a flower-pot.

Yes dear friend, we have lived up to a most remarkable state of instability. I am afraid that we have put too much stress upon the wonderful part the masses play in history. When we thoroughly investigate the fact we must come to the conclusion that we have idealised them above their deserts.

The mass is a tremendous giant with a very loyal brain and without initiative Sasha. Give that giant the possibility to stuff his stomach, no matter with what, and a roof over his head, and just leave him in peace and he will not bother at all. Yes he can also under given circumstances be lashed into doing things, but no matter what you can use him for good, you can for evil. You can have him for Czarism, for Bolshivism, for Hitlerism and for Fascism.

That's why war is inevitable Sasha. He will be ordered to fight his "enemy" and he will fight that fool.

Yes, he also makes revolutions, if he is driven to it, but just make and leave it to the others to rip the fruit. You may think that I am pessimistic dear friend, but I am not, I just see things as they are, and by realising the bitter reality, I assure myself how much there is to do in order to turn that lazy giant to an active individual, a thinking giant, instead of being always a means to an end, to all those who are determined to use that dynamic of force. I am convinced that we will succeed in our efforts one day, but there is a tremendous task indeed in front of us. We are the only group of people who keep on telling the lazy giant that he has to begin to think for himself using his brain or he will never achieve anything worthwhile, and therefore we have so few to follow us.

All the other parties or schools make it easy for him, by telling him: you just follow us and we the thinking part of humanity will do all there is to be done to bring you all the happiness you desire. They all try to make it easy for him but we.

you “for your own safety”. That’s all. They do it very gracefully, without any fuss at all. Anyway we must do something against such pest at least as long as there is any chance at all.

Max and Milly Baginsky were at our place before Rudolf left. He doesn’t look quite as bad, but the poor soul is shrinking to nothing. You have never seen such dried up human being I am sure. Mentally, they feel very miserable, just pitiful.

Love to you both from Firmin and your devoted old friend
Molly

Tawanda 24/12 35

Dearest Sasha and Emmie,

You hardly realise how delighted I was with your letter. Indeed Sasha, you deserve a lot more than Rudolf said in his article. I can safely say it, for I know that you are not one of those who can easily get spoiled. You, Malatesta and also our dear Rudolf belong to those who are never to get spoiled, which is the finest part about you.

I liked the article, and all who have read it liked it ever so much. The best part in it is the genuineness, the heartfelt spirit with which it was written, but nothing too good for you dear pal.

From Emma I have not heard since she is in England, but my sister Polly writes me that she is in miserable spirit, and that her lectures were not much of a success, at least not at all financially.

When my sister wrote me, E. was in London, I am very much afraid that if London was so bad we cannot expect much of the province. What may be the reason for it? I suppose many of the English people are so occupied and worried about their “Empire” being in danger that they have no interest for anything else in this world. The English workers, who in normal

I have spoken quite a lot about ourselves, now how are you? How is your health? Why don’t we hear from dear Emma? It is quite unusual that she should not write as long as that. I hope though that she is well, and that there is no special cause for her silence. We have heard from Rose Pesotta that Emma is intending to come back to C(hicago) for the winter, that would be splendid. We would certainly go over to see her this time, under all circumstances. The comrades will be delighted with her return, they need her there very much.

Much love to you from the three of us and best wishes for successful work.

Love to dear Emma also from us three and let her write soon.
Affectionate as ever yours,

Milly

PS Emma back from Nice: we have had a very little letter from her.

N.Y. 28/9 35

Dearest Sasha,

I have written you last week and you may be in possession of my letters by now.

The purpose of these lines is to ask you to be so kind and send the revised copy of the manuscript to the enclosed address. The German copy of course. You will do us a great favour if you could send it off as soon as you will get these lines.

Comrade S. is very anxious to publish the book in Spanish, he is of the opinion that it will be a very good work of propaganda against Fascism and the national pest which is also growing fast in Spain and the other Spanish speaking countries.

How are you dear fellow in health and otherwise? How goes it with the work? Why don’t we hear from our Emma? I hope that there is nothing the matter with the dear friend.

We have had a lovely letter from Stella this morning, she wants us to come to her for a week or so, we have decided to go there next week, and spend with the dear family a couple of days. It will be a wonderful thing to see the dear folks again, in their summer house.

A pathetic letter I have had from London the other day, my sister Polly telling me about the remarkable incident which happened to Shapiro and his mother.

Sanya has arranged with his mother, Nastya Shapiro, who is 73 and has not seen him over 12 years, to meet in Boulogne and spend a day together. One day the old lady and my sister went to meet Sanya but to their greatest disappointment the mother was not permitted to Boulogne, as she only had her "Identity Card" and no regular passport. Polly could pass of course, as she is "British". My sister describes what a pitiful situation it was, it is simply heart-breaking. The only thing they could do was that Polly stayed the day with Sonya and his girl and then went back at least with a personal message from the son to the mother. Isn't it a rotten world we live in?

N.Y. 9/11 35

Dearest Sasha,

Thank you very much for sending the manuscript to Spain. I should have answered you before, but I was so busy before Rudolf left that I could not manage, which I hope that you will forgive.

How do you and Emmie feel in health? Emma has told me in her letter that you look very fine Sasha dear, I hope that you also feel fine and Emmie the same.

My health is just like a barometer, it goes up and down, according to my worries. I try not to, I really do my very best not to worry, but I am not always successful.

My very worst worries are Rudolf's tours, they are killing us both. If only we could get along without lecture-tours we would both be happy. But alas, how should we exist?

I don't know how it was at your time here, now lecture tours are physical and mainly mental torture. Rudolf simply loathes it and he is the most miserable man in the world when he is on route. He never enjoyed speaking, but worst of all when he has to lecture in Yiddish or English.

The tour begun very miserably, his mood is simply terrible. He was happy at his work, he lived in it, got young once more, and it was a pleasure to see him at his desk. Now he had to put it aside and take up work which instead of being a pleasure is a physical and mental torture, so you can imagine how he must feel.

Yes, it must be terrible in Europe now. You speak about the League. Why, what can we expect from that quarters? As a matter of fact we never did. How can we expect anything worthwhile from a League, no matter what great phrases it may use, which is put together of people with quite different interests? It was never nothing more than a farce and it will never be otherwise: liars, thieves and rogues they are all. They all know it and therefore never trusted each other. The tragedy is that those who should know better and have a say in the matter after the lesson we could learn from the previous war, the workers, the socialists, they are ready to join their enemies as if it would be the most natural thing in the world to do.

German militarism they were going to do away with in the last war, fascism they are going to fight this time: and of course defend Soviet Russia.

And we poor souls are utterly helpless, this time more than ever before.

I read in a letter from S.F.(?) to Holms(?) that she is going to do her bit in England against war. Let us hope she will, but I am afraid not for very long. If it should actually come to a war the English authorities are making a very hard They intern