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Detective Surveillance of Anarchists

Robert A. Pinkerton

November 1901

The police control of anarchists, while by no means a simple matter, may yet be accomplished. To make it effective, however, several fundamental conditions must be observed. The matter must be undertaken in a clean-cut, businesslike manner and the system kept absolutely free from the taint of political influence.

The great trouble with our National Government Detective Service to-day is that politics figure largely in the appointments, and this must result in a lack of efficiency and discipline wherever they take up investigations of plottings by anarchists.

It is perhaps too late to discuss the terrible calamity of President McKinley's assassination, but it points such a strong moral that the circumstances surrounding it ought not to be lost sight of. With a properly trained and disciplined force of protectors for the President on that day, I believe the tragedy might have been prevented. The first principle of Police guardianship, such as was entrusted to those guarding the President, is to watch the hands of all comers. This is a police

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axiom that is supposed to be drilled into the minds of all men who have to do this class of work. The hand is the machine and the only machine with which damage can be inflicted. Whether a man is to throw a bomb, or to use a knife, or to fire a pistol, whatever the means of assault, it must be carried out with the hand. Therefore, supervise and control the hands of people surrounding the person to be guarded, and you take a long step toward protecting that person from harm.

Where assassination is intended, it is impossible to guarantee absolute protection. A man may be "picked off" with a rifle at a less or greater distance, or he may be fired on from above while passing through the streets, or beneath a balcony, or a mine may be exploded under him, but against such an assault as was committed on President McKinley by the anarchist, Czolgosz, it is, I believe, possible to guard absolutely with careful, quick-witted men, fully instructed as to their duties, who, although there may be no apprehension of danger in the minds of the general public, are there at all times ever on the alert for just such an attack as that at Buffalo. It would seem that the guards in attendance upon the President that fateful day should have halted Czolgosz the very minute they noticed him in the line with a covered hand, especially a covered right hand. If the hand was really an injured one, no great commotion need have resulted from the act of halting him, but had a concealed weapon been disclosed, as it doubtless would have been at Buffalo, the disturbance arising from the assassin's being discovered would probably have saved the President's life. One minute's inspection would have revealed the assassin's intent and at least an effort would have been made to make him harmless.

The heads of our Government Secret Service, as a rule, have been men of standing and efficiency; their work heretofore has mainly been the suppression of counterfeiting and frauds against the Government. Appropriations have been too small for what was expected of them, and they have been greatly

of some harmless excrescence bordering here and there almost on a joke. In the comic papers the anarchist, with us, has been a constant source of innocent amusement. It required the awful lesson of President McKinley's assassination to arouse the people to the real dangers that lurk in the movement.

The Haymarket massacre in Chicago ought to have been a lesson to the whole nation. Unfortunately, it was looked upon as a purely local ebullition, something peculiar to Chicago and her cosmopolitan make-up. The lesson given by the hanging of the anarchists concerned in the Haymarket affair was largely nullified by the subsequent pardoning of the men who escaped from the gallows and were sent to prison. That act had a decided tendency to revive the spirits of the anarchists and to bring to our shores many of the dangerous fanatics who were driven out of Europe. It is doubtful if any one has a conception of the strength of the anarchistic movement in America. The evidences that come to the surface in places like Chicago and Paterson are taken as sporadic cases, whereas, an investigation would probably reveal the fact that every city in the country has a considerable number of "Reds" among its citizens. These people should all be marked and kept under constant surveillance and on the slightest excuse be made harmless.

Unlike any other evil that threatens in the open, anarchy is in a great measure irresponsible, and, therefore, only the most drastic and forehanded measures have any effect in keeping it under control. Such measures are possible only if we can arouse the public sentiment sufficiently to secure the organization of a perfect system of police control, a system that would never lose touch with the anarchists already established here, and that would pick up any foreigners that might come as soon as they reached any of our ports. Such a system, reinforced by the establishment of a colony in the Philippines on the lines suggested, would go far toward coping with the evil of anarchy that is at present afflicting us.

handicapped by being obliged to appoint their subordinates on political recommendations from men with but little or no experience to fit them for this important service.

There is no intention of, in any way, impugning the present Chief of the United States Secret Service, who, although not having been previously engaged in Police or Detective Service, has proven his capability for the position he holds, but the department of which he is the head has had but very little to do with anarchists, and, as at present organized, I do not believe it would be in a condition to handle this important problem. It would require a thorough reorganization, a large increase in the present force, no little legislation, and a large additional appropriation before much could be done toward controlling or eradicating the dangerous anarchists we have here now as well as those who are coming here in greater or less numbers at all times, and who, of late years, have seemed to do most of their plotting in this country.

If the Government is to take an active hand in the suppression of anarchism, I would advocate the forming of a special department for this purpose, whose whole attention could, at all times, be given to this very serious question.

The anarchists are something like the old "Mollie Maguires" of Pennsylvania. They have their outer and inner circles. The "Mollie Maguires," who were a band of cut-throats and murderers, were recruited from among the members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians; in fact, they were really an inner circle of that Order. To be a "Mollie Maguire," a man had to be in the first place an Irishman; in the second place a Roman Catholic (at least in name, although if discovered he had no standing with the Church); and in the third place, a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. These conditions were thoroughly well known, and brought odium both to the Hibernians and the Church; yet none of our citizens hated "Mollie Maguirism" and all that it represented and did more in the effort to suppress the evil or fought it more fiercely than the great body of good

Catholics and the vast majority of members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Nevertheless, these two bodies constituted outer circles and safe recruiting grounds which made possible the great strength of the "Mollie Maguires." Under the cloak of protection of religion and of fealty to the fraternal order, it was possible to select those deemed desirable members of the inner circle, to observe them closely, to study their peculiarities, to learn their characters at close range and under the best conditions, and all this without exposing the secrets or manoeuvres of the inner circle.

When it came to breaking up the "Mollie Maguires," all sorts of measures and plans were resorted to by the men who undertook the task, but it was not until the Church recognized its inability to suppress these bands of murderers by excommunication or by any other means at its command, that they finally gave their consent to the work being done in other ways. It was only then that success was even remotely possible.

Instead of operating under ordinarily accepted detective methods, it was recognized that a man was needed who was an Irishman and a Roman Catholic, and that he would have to become a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in the coal region. It required something more than mere pecuniary reward to secure the right sort of person for this task. The man had to feel that he was serving his church, his race and his country; otherwise, it would be impossible to get any one to undertake a work which invited death by assassination. Such a man, was found in James McParland, connected with our service, who, once he consented to undertake the work, could be relied upon implicitly.

With the anarchists, a diligent and systematic search will not fail to bring to the surface those similarly qualified, who can join groups wherever formed. There would, of course, be lacking the strong religious sentiment and loyalty to the church that actuated the man who risked his life to weed out the "Mollie Maguires"; nevertheless, it will be possible to secure the de-

that comes into question, we may well permit the authorities to stretch a point for its repression. The activity of the New York police has had the effect of keeping the anarchists in that city bottled up during the past ten years; so that, while we have had the spectacle of "Eeds" shouting in Chicago and most of the other big cities, they have sung very small indeed in the metropolis. This, to my mind, is a strong argument for the application of radical measures in their treatment. The principals are never the ones to go forward and do the deeds which they advocate; yet, as in the Czolgosz case, the real guilt lies with those who preach the doctrine of murder and violence and treason against the government much more truly than with the half-witted instruments who are instigated to do the work. Under a proper system of espionage, carefully controlled, it would be easily possible to get at these leaders, many of whom are men and women of brain power decidedly above the average. The picture of the anarchist drawn by most people, a bearded, drunken, lazy creature, is not at all in line with the facts. Many of the most advanced men in the movement do not drink at all, and know so well how to keep their mouths shut that only the initiated know of their connection with anarchy. Men of the Most stripe, and women of the Goldman type, it is comparatively easy to control. They make no secret of their beliefs and restrain their tongues only in so far as they deem it necessary to keep out of the clutches of the law. It is the quiet, cultivated element behind the loudmouthed tribe that furnishes the sinews of war and that remains entirely beyond the cognizance of the police system as now constituted. To get at them requires clever work and a great deal of patience.

Not the least dangerous thing about this anarchistic movement that seems to be spreading steadily is the fact that so little concerning it is really known to the outside world. Even the European governments seem to have been unable, with all their machinery, to get at the bottom of it. As for America, the people here seem to have regarded it as very much in the nature

experiment that would be at once so healthful for this country as such a settlement, and so instructive to the anarchists themselves and the world at large as to how their opportunities for individualism and freedom from government restraint would work out. It may be that there is no warrant under our present system of law and government for the establishment of such a colony; but, in the present mood of the public mind towards anarchy, it seems to me that it would not be difficult to induce Congress to permit an experiment such as I have suggested. There we could send our Goldmans and our Mosts and our Parsons, and all the other ranters who are constantly striving to tear down what has been so laboriously built up, and who, in doing so, are raising up a constantly growing army of danger-breeding converts. In time of war the government does not hesitate to protect itself by adopting all sorts of measures. Why not, then, adopt a measure such as this in the face of a condition that is more dangerous in some respects than open warfare, because of the insidiousness of its character and the uncertainty of knowing just where to look for danger. In Europe anarchy has been accepted as a real and tangible menace to government. Here we are still carried away by the fetish of free speech and unrestricted discussion to such an extent that we give absolute liberty to a class of people who are a danger to our institutions and a disgrace to our nation.

The value of a restrictive system applied to anarchy is observable in the conditions that prevail in New York City. There the police have always carried on a relentless warfare against the "Reds." They have even gone to the length of "illegally suppressing their meetings." On one occasion, I remember, when a lot of anarchistic sentiments were being shouted from a speaker's stand in Union Square, the police, without warrant, descended upon the meeting and broke it up. This was reprehensible from the standpoint of the stickler for social and political rights; but there are certain conditions that cannot be dealt with from the ordinary point of view, and anarchy is one of them, Where

sired persons. The great majority of anarchists in this country and abroad are a sufficiently harmless body of men and women. They have what they consider advanced ideas on government, or lack of government, but are unalterably opposed to all forms of murder and violence. They realize that such an event as the assassination of President McKinley or of the King of Italy does more harm to their propaganda than anything else that can happen. Therefore, they are violently opposed to the perpetration of these deeds, and those who inspire them. From among this class of anarchists, there doubtless could be secured the material needed for the control and supervision of the "Reds," as the members of the violent branch of anarchists are popularly denominated. New members could join, in time, the most dangerous groups, who would have no feeling of sympathy with them. There is no such organization among anarchists as there is among the "Mollie Maguires," nothing so secret and efficient, and oath-bound and virulent. But there is yet sufficient organization, to assure us that plots are bred and that a dangerous propaganda is systematically promulgated.

I do not believe that the man Czolgosz carried out a plot, or that he had any accomplices; in my opinion, he was simply an impressionable creature who was carried off his mental balance by the teachings of the rabid anarchists of the Goldman, Lucy Parsons, Most school. The assassination of King Humbert was, on the other hand, undoubtedly the result of a carefully hatched plot emanating from the "Reds" who have groups throughout this country. But while these two assassinations were brought about by different methods, they might have been prevented by proper police control in the first instance. Competent emissaries in the camps of the "Reds" would have been informed of the plot against the King of Italy, and Bresci and the whole nest of murderers could have been nabbed before they had a chance to carry out their design. In the case of Czolgosz, he could have been kept free from the influences that made him a murderer if the police powers of the country

had had sufficient information and sufficient initiative to act. A man on the inside could have landed information years ago that would have put Goldman, and the other preachers of anarchy who inspired Czolgosz, within the hands of the law. These people are constantly talking violence and the overthrow of government. Of late years, since one or two of them, like Most and Goldman, have had a dose of prison for their firebrand utterances, they have been more careful as to the things they say in public; but, in private, there is no doubt that their fulminations are more violent than ever. A service such as I have indicated should be established to keep the authorities in complete touch with these private utterances, which travel as fast and breed as much damage in the end as speeches made in public. As for open fulminations, these should be placed entirely under the ban, and the police should be given practically unlimited powers to deal with the men and women concerned. It should be impossible to have such a spectacle as is at times seen in Chicago, where women of the stripe of Lucy Parsons, since the execution of her anarchistic husband, and Emma Goldman have openly preached violence and murder. Kindly or half-way measures are thrown away entirely upon the "Reds." They understand only one argument, and that is the argument of brute force. It is all very well to safeguard the rights of free speech and of free press; but sentimentalism in this direction should not be permitted to carry so far as to allow the open, or secret, advocacy of the overthrow of all government. Only a systematic campaign against this sort of thing can avert a serious condition, for these anarchists are becoming more and more numerous, and those of the violent school are growing steadily bolder. They do not appreciate indulgence. This was shown plainly enough in the case of the assassination of Mayor Harrison, of Chicago. Harrison was the great advocate of free speech and absolute license for the disorderly element of which the "Reds" form a part. He was perpetually preaching about their rights of

assemblage and free speech. His reward was assassination, not by an avowed anarchist, but by a man who had such a total disregard for law and order as the anarchists are constantly pointing to as the desirable condition.

In a broader sense, we have had an illustration of the evils that grow out of the indulgence granted to anarchists here, and the lack of a system of control. The nations of Europe have practically combined to force these people to the wall. Instead of joining with them in the effort, we have given the anarchists an asylum here, with the result that they plotted the murder of the King of Italy under our protection, and are permitted to promulgate the doctrines that brought about the murder of our own President. Now that we have these lessons, it is to be hoped that we will change our tactics; that we will deal with these people vigorously, as we should, and that we will co-operate with the foreign governments for the extinction of anarchy and anarchists, and that we will have a comprehensive system of our own.

At the very beginning, there ought to be a law passed to permit the deportation of every man and woman who preaches the overthrow of government and the principles of anarchy. Instead of having any squeamish scruples, we should attack the evil in a rough-handed, common-sense way. I would advocate the establishment of an anarchist colony, a place where every person who wants anarchy can have it. Let the government set aside one of the islands of the Philippines, equip it thoroughly with appliances for tilling the soil, erect comfortable houses, and provide other necessary conveniences, even to the extent of expensive comforts; then to this place let us send everybody who wants anarchy; put them all on one island, and let them work it out among themselves. Have no restrictions at all; let them govern themselves, or refrain from governing themselves, as they see fit, Leave them severely alone on their island, taking care only that they remain there by establishing a system of patrol boats around it. I know of no other single