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Ross Winn
Editorial Comment
1903

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On November 15, 1902, Gennaro Rubino, an Italian anarchist, attempted to assassinate King Leopold II of Belgium. Rubino, who had been employed by the Italian secret service, was denounced by anarchists worldwide as an agent provocateur, despite his professed loyalty to the anarchist cause. This comment originally appeared in *Winn's Firebrand*, Vol. II No. 1, January 1903.

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There are two kinds of kings. Good kings and bad kings. All kings, when living and wielding the scepter of kingly power, are bad kings. The good kings are dead. There are but two good deeds a king can do for his subjects. One is to abdicate. The other is to die. Leopold II, of Belgium, has done neither. Therefore I shall catalog him with the bad kings. Leopold has been accused of nearly all the sins in the book, but against him there stands one actual crime. That crime is the crime of being king. All kings are criminals. Leopold has been taken to task for his private peccadilloes. But society declines to impeach him for his real crime against humanity. This is a part of that natural sequence in social order we term the fitness of things. It is the small wrongs that stir up indignant outcry. The big crimes triumph in successful security. A man wearing a crown and wielding a scepter may butcher twenty thousand men for his personal gain, and they call it glorious war. Another man stops short with one victim, and they call it murder. There is something wrong with the human conscience when it makes such discriminations.

Because of the fact of the world's ethical development being at a very low stage, Leopold is king of Belgium for no other

cause than that he happened to be Leopold. Among the savage and noble red men of America, the chief was selected because of his superior wisdom, or sagacity, or because he was more brave and daring than his fellows. There was some sense in that. But in our civilized communities the chief of the nation is usually more stupid than one half of his subjects, and is king merely because he was born of a king and a queen. Not even in a republic do the wisest and best rule. I will tell you why. A wise man will not rule—a good man cannot rule. “The man of virtuous soul commands not nor obeys.” The free man will not be ruled. He may submit with his hands, but his soul is in eternal revolt. And the soul of man is the man.

The other day, in Brussels, King Leopold was fired upon three times by a man named Genarro Rubini, an Italian, who professed himself an Anarchist. Immediately there was a great outcry from the official class and from the newspapers for the suppression of Anarchism. It was urged that, because an Anarchist had attempted a crime all Anarchists should be punished for it. Had Rubini proclaimed himself a Catholic, or a Presbyterian, there would have been no such outcry, no such demand for wholesale proscription. Why? Because the people who wanted all Anarchists proscribed on account of Rubini’s deed have no ill will towards Catholicism or Presbyterianism, but they do entertain such hostility towards Anarchism. When two men do the same thing, it is not the same thing, if one happens to call himself an Anarchist. The police and political officials and the newspapers urge that Rubini represented a conspiracy; that the entire Anarchist movement is a gigantic conspiracy against government; and, therefore, Rubini’s act, being directed against government, was in furtherance of the general Anarchist conspiracy: consequently all Anarchists were participants in Rubini’s crime. And with this puril pretext they seek to make palatable to the public conscience an infamous crusade against certain men and women on account of a certain political idea they hold, viz, the idea of Anarchy, which, as defined

by the Century Dictionary, is “a social theory which regards the union of order with the absence of all direct government of man by man as the political ideal.”

The facts relating to Rubini’s deed, insofar as made public by the newspaper reports, a source certainly not friendly to Anarchy, not only do not indicate an Anarchist conspiracy, but squint very directly towards a conspiracy of quite another kind. From the facts as given I shall not hesitate to assert two positive propositions, which I shall prove as far as circumstantial evidence can prove anything. 1. Rubini’s attack was not the result of an Anarchist conspiracy. 2. Rubini was a police spy, and fired his three shots in furtherance of a police conspiracy to bring odium upon the Anarchists and create public prejudice against them. The public should know that a conspiracy exists, the purpose of which is the suppression, by the concerted action of the world’s governments, of the Anarchist propaganda. And to forward this design, the instigators of it are prepared to plumb the depths of ever infamy, to scale the heights of every crime, and to span with their spider’s net the darkest chasms of black and damnable wrong.

No reptile that ever crawled in its loathsome den can equal in viciousness and venom the police spy. Hell, from the deepest depths of its damned depravity, could spew upon earth no counterpart to this miserable monster, this cowardly cur, this contemptible cayote, this embodiment of all that is abominable, called a police spy. And this Rubini was a police spy. He was the paid and pliant tool of the Italian police, sent by them to London and set to watch the Anarchists. He was to gain their confidence in order to betray it. He was to lie to them. He was instructed by his master, Brina, of the Italian police, to get into the confidence of the Anarchists, and to entice them into plots of assassination and violence. He was furnished with money by the Italian government with which to publish an Anarchist paper. He was to advocate assassination in that paper, that it might be used as evidence against the real Anarchists.

But he did not succeed. He made a mistake. Anarchists are not assassins. They suspected Rubini to be a fool. When they investigated they discovered him to be both fool and knave. As the compound fills the necessary requisites of a detective, they speedily found out his true character. Then his usefulness to his government vanished. His employer, Brina, held a conference with his tool. After this event, Rubini was given his fare to Brussels by the Italian consul, Rigetti. Rubini went, and fired three shots at the king with a revolver loaded, it is asserted, only with powder, and proclaimed himself an Anarchist. Such, briefly stated, are the facts of this affair, as related by the newspapers.

Rubini was one of a class of human reptiles maintained by the European governments to spy upon the movements of those denominated "the dangerous classes."

Rubini was acting under the direct prompting of Brina. And Brina was the confidential agent of the Italian government! So, you see, the Italian government hired a man to become an Anarchist, and provided him with funds with which to publish an Anarchist journal in London which was to advocate assassination and other deeds of violence, and thus afford the authorities an excuse for persecuting the real Anarchists.

Can you conceive of anything more basely infamous than this?

It is in keeping with the character of all governments. The political state is the sum of all villainy.

Mr. Brina's tool having been unmasked by the London Anarchists, Mr. Brina "packed up his grip and took a little trip," from Rome to London. A conference between Brina and Rubini was held. What passed between them is not known. But Rubini states that the Italian consul, Rigetti, secured for him a ticket to Brussels. What did Consul Rigetti, another representative of the Italian government, want Rubini to do in the Belgian capital? Does not Rubini's conduct there sufficiently answer the question? Rubini, foiled in the attempt to entrap

the London Anarchists into a conspiracy, carries out the police plot in another way by firing three harmless shots at Leopold. The purpose is served—not quite successfully, however. Rubini, at the last moment, loses either his nerve or his confidence in Brina, and allows enough of the feline to escape from the wallet to give the case away. And so the cunning police get another set-back in their attempt to destroy the Anarchists.

In every city where there are any considerable number of Anarchists, some one of the European governments have their spies. Are the officials so stupidly ignorant of the character of the Anarchist movement as to believe that Anarchists engage in conspiracies? Not at all. They are terrified by the very absence of organization among Anarchists; they cannot comprehend that they are dealing only with an IDEA. Let the spies spy. They find only IDEAS. The conspiracy that confronts government is the conspiracy of thought.