Six years have passed since William McKinley met his doom at Buffalo and the return stroke of justice took the life of his slayer, Leon Czolgosz. The wild rage that stormed through the brains of the people, following that revolver shot, turning them into temporary madmen, incapable of seeing, hearing, or thinking correctly, has spent itself. Figures are beginning to appear in their true relative proportions, and there is some likelihood that sane words will be sanely listened to. Instead of the wild and savage threats, “Brand the Anarchists with hot iron,” “Boil in oil,” “Hang to the first lamp-post,” “Scourge and shackle,” “Deport to a desert island,” which were the stock phrases during the first few weeks following the tragedy, and were but the froth of the upheaved primitive barbarity of civilized men, torn loose and raging like an unreasoning beast, we now hear an occasional serious inquiry: “But what have the Anarchists to say about it? Was Czolgosz really an Anarchist? Did he say he was? And what has Anarchism to do with assassination altogether?”
To those who wish to know what the Anarchists have to say, these words are addressed. We have to say that not Anarchism, but the state of society which creates men of power and greed and the victims of power and greed, is responsible for the death of both McKinley and Czolgosz. Anarchism has this much to do with assassination, that as it teaches the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all, and in which the opportunities for complete development of mind and body shall be the heritage of all; as it teaches that the present unjust organization of the production and distribution of wealth must finally be completely destroyed, and replaced by a system which will insure to each the liberty to work, without first seeking a master to whom he must surrender a tithe of his product, which will guarantee his liberty of access to the sources and means of production; as it teaches that all this is possible without the exhaustion of body and mind which is hourly wrecking the brain and brawn of the nations in the present struggle of the workers to achieve a competence, it follows that Anarchism does create rebels. Out of the blindly submissive, it makes the discontented; out of the unconsciously dissatisfied, it makes the consciously dissatisfied. Every movement for the social betterment of the peoples, from time immemorial, has done the same. And since among the ranks of dissatisfied people are to be found all manner of temperaments and degrees of mental development—just as are found among the satisfied also—it follows that there are occasionally those who translate their dissatisfaction into a definite act of reprisal against the society which is crushing them and their fellows. Assassination of persons representing the ruling power is such an act of reprisal. There have been Christian assassins, Republican assassins, Socialist assassins, and Anarchist assassins; in no case was the act of assassination an expression of any of these religious or political creeds, but of temperamental reaction against the injustice created by the prevailing system of the time (excluding, of course, such acts as were merely the result of personal ambition or derangement). Moreover, Anarchism less than any of these can
have anything to do in determining a specific action, since, in the
course of its teaching, every Anarchist must act purely on his own
initiative and responsibility; there are no secret societies nor execu-
tive boards of any description among Anarchists. But that among a
mass of people who realize fully what a slaughter-house capitalism
has made of the world, how even little children are daily and hourly
crippled, starved, doomed to the slow death of poisoned air, to ru-
inued eyesight, wasted limbs, and polluted blood; how through the
sapping of the present generation’s strength the unborn are con-
demned to a rotten birthright, all that riches may be heaped where
they are not needed; who realize that all this is as unnecessary and
stupid as it is wicked and revolting; that among these there should
be some who rise up and strike back, whether wisely or unwisely,
effectively or ineffectively, is no matter for wonder; the wonder is
there are not more. The hells of capitalism create the desperate; the
desperate act,—desperately!

And in so far as Anarchism seeks to arouse the consciousness
of oppression, the desire for a better society, and a sense of the
necessity for unceasing warfare against capitalism and the State,
the authors of all this unrecognized but Nemesis-bearing crime, in
so far it is responsible and does not shirk its responsibility: “For it
is impossible but that offences come; but woe unto them through
whom they come.”

Many offences had come through the acts of William McKinley.
Upon his hand was the “damned spot” of official murder, the blood
of the Filipinos, whom he, in pursuance of the capitalist policy of
Imperialism, had sentenced to death. Upon his head falls the curse
of all the workers against whom, time and time again, he threw
the strength of his official power. Without doubt he was in private
life a good and kindly man; it is even probable he saw no wrong in
the terrible deeds he had commanded done. Perhaps he was able to
reconcile his Christian belief, “Do good to them that hate you,” with
the slaythors he ordered; perhaps he murdered the Filipinos “to do
them good”; the capitalist mind is capable of such contortions. But
whatever his private life, he was the representative of wealth and
greed and power; in accepting the position he accepted the rewards
and the dangers, just as a miner, who goes down in the mine for
$2.50 a day or less, accepts the danger of the firedamp. McKinley’s
rewards were greater and his risks less; moreover, he didn’t need
the job to keep bread in his mouth; but he, too, met an explosive
force—the force of a desperate man’s will. And he died; not as a
martyr, but as a gambler who had won a high stake and was struck
down by the man who had lost the game: for that is what capitalism
has made of human well-being— a gambler’s stake, no more.

Who was this man? No one knows. A child of the great dark-
ness, a spectre out of the abyss! Was he an Anarchist? We do not
know. None of the Anarchists knew him, save as a man with whom
some few of them had exchanged a few minutes’ conversation, in
which he said that he had been a Socialist, but was then dissatisfied
with the Socialist movement. The police said he was an Anarchist;
the police said he attributed his act to the influence of a lecture of
Emma Goldman. But the police have lied before, and, like the cel-
èbrated Orchard, they need “corroborative evidence.” All that we
really know of Czolgosz is his revolver shot and his dying words:
“I killed the President because he was the enemy of the people, the
good, working people.” All between is blank. What he really said,
if he said anything, remains in the secret papers of the Buffalo Po-
lice Department and the Auburn prison. If we are to judge inferen-
tially, considering his absolutely indifferent behavior at his “trial,”
he never said anything at all. He was utterly at their mercy, and
had they been able to twist or torture any word of his into a “con-
spiracy,” they would have done it. Hence it is most probable he said
nothing.

Was he a normal or an abnormal being? In full possession
of his senses, or of a disturbed or weak mentality? Again we do not
know. All manner of fables arose immediately after his act as to his
boyhood’s career; people knew him in his childhood as evil, stupid,
cruel; even some knew him who had heard him talk about assassi-
nating the President years before; other legends contradicted these;
all were equally unreliable. His indifference at the “trial” may have
been that of a strong man enduring a farce, or of a clouded and
nonrealizing mind. His last words were the words of a naive and
devoted soul, a soul quite young, quite unselfish, and quite forlorn.
If martyrdom is insisted upon, which was the martyr, the man who
had had the good of life, who was past middle years, who had re-
ceived reward and distinction to satiety, who had ordered others
killed without once jeopardizing his own life, and to whom death
came more easily than to millions who die of long want and slow
tortures of disease, or this young strong soul which struck its own
blow and paid with its own life, so capable of the utterest devotion,
so embittered and ruined in its youth, so hopeless, so wasted, so
cast out of the heart of pity, so altogether alone in its last agony?
This was the greater tragedy—a tragedy bound to be repeated over
and over, until “the good working people” (in truth they are not
so good) learn that the earth is theirs and the fullness thereof, and
that there is no need for any one to enslave himself to another. This
Anarchism teaches, and this the future will realize, though many
martyrdoms lie between.