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# Anarchism and the Perversion of the Russian Revolution

The Accounts of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman

Frank Jacob

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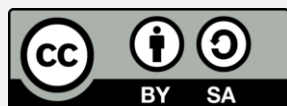
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## 6/ Anarchism and the Perversion of the Russian Revolution: The Accounts of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman \*

Frank JACOB

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Since she was one of the most important US anarchists, one might assume that Emma Goldman was in favor of the Bolsheviks. However, while she supported the basic idea of the Russian Revolution, she criticized the Bolsheviks for establishing a dictatorship based on terror and suppression of those, who criticized them. Having spent two years in Russia in the aftermath of the revolution, she tried to persuade people of the corruption of the revolutionary ideas by the leading Bolshevik faction members. From her exile in England and France she was writing countless letters to emphasize that the Bolsheviks were not representing the hope for world revolution and the freeing of the international workers, but that they would use and corrupt the revolutionary ideals to establish rule and remain in power. For the proposed paper her published writings about the revolution as well as the unpublished letters to US union leaders like Roger Baldwin will be closely analyzed to show how the anarchist left, represented by Emma Goldman, interpreted the revolution in Russia during the 1920s, i.e. the first decade after the events that shook the world. It will be explained how the hopes related to the events of 1917 were disappointed by the political realities and how the events impacted the life of Emma Goldman directly, who very often was opposed to lecture on that topic, since she feared to sacrifice the basic ideas of the Russian Revolution by shedding light on its perversion by the Bolshevik party leaders.

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### 1. Introduction

Emma Goldman (1869-1940) is likely among the most well-known Anarchists in history, and she is also a renowned advocate of feminism in the United States. As New York historian Oz Frankel remarked, she «has assumed a unique position in American politics and culture»<sup>1</sup>. While many aspects of Goldman's life deserve – and have received – more detailed studies<sup>2</sup>, the present

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\* I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, whose comments helped a lot to improve the present article.

<sup>1</sup> FRANKEL, Oz, «Whatever Happened to “Red Emma”? Emma Goldman, from Alien Rebel to American Icon», in *The Journal of American History*, 83, 3/1996, pp. 903-942, p. 903.

<sup>2</sup> For some examples see: CHALBERG, John, *Emma Goldman. American Individualist*, New York, Harper Collins,

article will closely examine her perception and judgement of the Russian Revolution in 1917 and its consequences, namely the Bolshevik rule in Russia. Like many other left intellectuals, Emma Goldman's empathetic and hopeful position towards the Bolshevik rule turned into anger and refusal after the October Revolution. She had the possibility to observe the post-revolutionary developments that led to a Bolshevik party regime, and Goldman tended to emphasize in her criticism that she had not only lived in Russia for two years (1920-21), but also the opportunity to discuss the issues with the Russian people, and not only party controlled interpreters, who would usually guide international guests; consequently, she personally witnessed the shocking contemporary political climate, especially the purges against Anarchists and the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921<sup>3</sup>. Once she escaped from Russia after two years, Goldman, as well as her companion Alexander Berkman (1870-1936), immediately began to criticize Bolshevism, seeking to unveil to the fellow anarchists and other left intellectuals outside Russia the Communist dictatorship's reign of terror and crime.

The present article will analyze the years between 1919 and 1925 to demonstrate how Berkman and Goldman changed their minds about the Bolsheviks. It will also underscore the problems that faced them when they demanded a critical stance against Bolshevism and simultaneously defended the idea of a future revolution. First, the Anarchists' situation after the Russian Revolution and during the Bolshevik rule will be summarized. After that, the development of Goldman and Berkman's opinions towards Bolshevism will be discussed by analyzing their publications, as well as Goldman's letters to colleagues and friends in which she described not only her experiences in Russia, but also her problems in dealing with pro-Bolshevik forces in England and the United States; as such, the cumulative image formed by all these ideas is one characterized by ambivalence. As a supporter of Bolshevism, Emma Goldman was deported from the United States in late 1919, being one of many victims of the Palmer Raids and the first American «Red Scare» after the First World War<sup>4</sup>. However, to reference the title of her later work, she was disillusioned in Russia's post-revolutionary state; while her and Berkman's re-evaluation of the realities in the aftermath of the October Revolution could be regarded as her own personal perspective, Goldman's case resembles that of many left-wing intellectuals whose hopes for a better world in the aftermath of the revolution were not fulfilled, but rather destroyed<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, what shall be discussed is a micro-perspective of an event that would

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1991; HAALAND, Bonnie, *Emma Goldman. Sexuality and the Impurity of the State*, New York Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> AVRICH, Paul, *Kronstadt, 1921*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1970; GETZLER, Israel, *Kronstadt, 1917-1921. The Fate of a Soviet Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> SHATZ, Marshall S., «Review: Wexler, 'Emma Goldman in Exile'», in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 83, 3-4/1993, pp. 458-460, p. 458.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Russian Revolution and its perception by international anarchism see: KELLERMANN, Philippe (hrsg. von), *Anarchismus und Russische Revolution*, Berlin, Dietz, 2017. For a broader

determine not only Goldman's future, but, in a macro-perspective, the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century – what Eric Hobsbawm would later call the «age of extremes»<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. The Anarchists and Bolshevism<sup>7</sup>

The Russian Revolutions in February and October 1917 stimulated the hopes of those who wanted a classless society and sought an end to worker and peasant exploitation at the hands of capitalist oligarchs. However, the Bolshevik rule would quickly show that the revolutions failed to remedy contemporary society's problems. When the Civil War in Russia began, the Anarchists faced a dilemma; they wanted to refuse Lenin's dictatorial rule, but if they did not support him, the enemies of the revolution could have been successful in suppressing the revolution and re-establishing the old order. In the end, the Anarchists, as Paul Avrich described it, «adopted a variety of positions, ranging from active resistance to the Bolsheviks through passive neutrality to eager collaboration»<sup>8</sup>. As a result, many Anarchists would take up arms for the regime and become invaluable defenders of the October Revolution and Bolshevik rule.

Some Anarchists even made impressive careers for themselves. One example would be Bill Shatov (originally Vladimir Sergeevich Shatov, 1887-1938), who lived in the United States between 1907 and 1917 and was active in the Industrial Workers of the World. Having fought in the Civil War on the Bolshevik side, he enjoyed professional success, eventually becoming Minister of Transport in the Far Eastern province of Chita. He was one of the Anarchists who met Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman after their arrival in Russia, attempting to persuade them that cooperation with the Bolshevik rulers was essential. Like Shatov, but perhaps not as successful, many other Anarchists accepted minor positions within the new systems, thereby supporting the rise of Bolshevism in the following years. The anti-Marxist Anarchist, Yuda Grossman-Roshchin (1883-1934), would also change his mind and later hail Lenin «as one of the great figures of the modern age»<sup>9</sup>.

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discussion of the hopes of left intellectuals related to the Russian events see: CAUTE, David, *The Fellow-Travellers. Intellectual Friends of Communism*, New Haven (CT), Yale University Press, 1988, pp. 215-237. For the perspectives of other Western visitors to post-revolutionary Russia see: FOX, Michael David, *Showcasing the Great Experiment. Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> HOBBSBAM, Eric, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London, Abacus, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> For a broader discussion of this topic see: JACOB, Frank, *Emma Goldman und die Russische Revolution*, in JACOB, Frank, ALTIERI, Riccardo (hrsg von), *Die Wahrnehmung der Russischen Revolutionen 1917. Zwischen utopischen Träumen und erschütterter Ablehnung*, Berlin, Metropol, 2018, Forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> AVRICH, Paul, «Russian Anarchists and the Civil War», in *The Russian Review*, 27, 3/1968, pp. 296-306, p. 296. The further discussion of the Anarchist positions follows Avrich's analysis.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 297.

However, not all Anarchists supported the Bolsheviks. The Briansk Federation of Anarchists considered the new rulers to be «'Social Vampires' in the Kremlin, who sucked the blood of the people»<sup>10</sup>. Actions against the Bolshevik government were also taken by these Anarchists, who, joined by other radicals, threw bombs at the Communist Party Committee's headquarters in Moscow. Others, like the Bakunin Partisans in Ekaterinoslav (Dnipropetrovsk), used violence against Bolsheviks and counter-revolutionaries alike. The Anarchists lacked charismatic leaders, especially since Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) died in February 1921. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks began to crush possible political enemies and critics after the Kronstadt rebellion a few months later. In September 1921, the Cheka (The All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage) began its crusade against Russian Anarchists, who were captured and executed without trial; this would outrage both Goldman and Berkman, who recognized that Bolshevism had taken over the revolution to establish a new dictatorship. The latter described the situation in melancholic words: «Terror and despotism have crushed the life born in October»<sup>11</sup>.

The conflict between Anarchists and Marxists went back to the dispute between Bakunin's and Marx's ideas in the First International. The former had warned of the possibility of a dictatorship that would use Marxist ideas to establish a dictatorial government during and after a process of centralization, the bureaucracy of which would steadily increase<sup>12</sup>. Alice Wexler wrongly explained Goldman's anti-Bolshevism as a reaction stimulated by her own depressive state of mind, which caused her to channel her anger about her deportation from the United States against the Bolshevik rule in Russia<sup>13</sup>. As such, Lenin's Russia might have become «a metaphor for Goldman's sense of betrayal and loss, a mirror of her own interior landscape of desolation»<sup>14</sup>. I strongly disagree with this perception of Goldman's anti-Bolshevism – to purport that her stance was merely an emotionally-charged expression of anger rather than an analytical discussion of Bolshevism would unreasonably devalue her political evaluation of Russia in the early 1920s. Marshall S. Shatz more accurately described the influence of her Americanness in her evaluation process: «Like many exiles, she seems to have become more American once she left America. Some of her criticism of Soviet practices, for example, bespeaks a typically American exasperation with inefficiency and red tape»<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, Goldman had access to a transatlantic network of left intellectuals, and she would discuss the situation in detail with many of its members. These

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 298.

<sup>11</sup> BERKMAN, Alexander, *The Bolshevik Myth*, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1925, p. 319.

<sup>12</sup> SHATZ, Marshall S., *op. cit.*, p. 459. For the Bakunin-Marx Schism see: ECKHARDT, Wolfgang, *The First Socialist Schism. Bakunin vs. Marx in the International Working Men's Association*, Oakland (CA), PM Press, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> WEXLER, Alice, *Emma Goldman in Exile. From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1989, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> SHATZ, Marshall S., *op. cit.*, p. 460.

letters, in combination with Goldman's writings since 1921, are an invaluable resource in explaining her position towards Bolshevism and the perversion of the Russian Revolutions after 1917.

### 3. Emma Goldman and Bolshevism

Like many other left intellectuals, Emma Goldman initially perceived the Russian Revolution as positive:

The hated Romanovs were at last hurled from their throne, the Tsar and his cohorts shorn of power. It was not the result of a political *coup d'état*; the great achievement was accomplished by the rebellion of the entire people. Only yesterday inarticulate, crushed, as they had been for centuries, under the heel of a ruthless absolutism, insulted and degraded, the Russian masses had risen to demand their heritage and to proclaim to the whole world that autocracy and tyranny were for ever at an end in their country. The glorious tidings were the first sign of life in the vast European cemetery of war and destruction. They inspired all liberty-loving people with new hope and enthusiasm, yet no one felt the spirit of the Revolution as did the natives of Russia scattered all over the globe. They saw their beloved *Matushka Rossiya* now extend to them the promise of manhood and aspiration<sup>16</sup>.

Those who had been imprisoned or exiled to Siberia were now allowed to return, and at the time, their dreams of a classless and non-exploitative society seemed plausible. The revolutionaries returned «from dungeons and banishment»<sup>17</sup>, willing to help the masses with creating a new and better future for all.

There were also exiles who, in contrast to Goldman, immediately returned to Russia after the successful revolution, which had transformed into «the Land of Promise»<sup>18</sup>. Many Anarchists had decided to leave the United States, and Goldman supported their mission by lecturing about and advertising for their cause since 1917. However, she herself wanted to remain in the U.S. There, she also met Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) during a farewell meeting for those who wanted to go back to Russia to support the revolutionaries. She later described Trotsky and his lecture in her autobiography:

After several rather dull speakers Trotsky was introduced. A man of medium height, with haggard cheeks, reddish hair, and straggling red beard stepped briskly forward. His speech, first in Russian and then in German, was powerful and electrifying. I did not agree with his political attitude; he was a Menshevik (Social Democrat), and as such far removed from us (the Anarchists, F.J.). But his analysis of the causes of the war was brilliant, his denunciation of the ineffective Provisional Government in Russia scathing, and his presentation of the conditions

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<sup>16</sup> GOLDMAN, Emma, *Living My Life*, New York, Knopf, 1931, Ch. 45, URL: < <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/emma-goldman-living-my-life> > [accessed 8 July 2017].

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.



that led up to the Revolution illuminating. He closed his two hours' talk with an eloquent tribute to the working masses of his native land. The audience was roused to a high pitch of enthusiasm, and Sasha (Alexander Berkman, F.J.) and I heartily joined in the ovation given the speaker. We fully shared his profound faith in the future of Russia<sup>19</sup>.

Due to the experience, Goldman and Berkman identified with Trotsky's positions more so than with those of the Anarchist Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin emphasized the dilemma of the Anarchists in the aftermath of the February Revolution, which has been discussed above in some detail, and Goldman commented on this dilemma: «The war was producing strange bedfellows, and we wondered whether we should still feel near to Trotsky when in the course of time we should reach Russia, for we had only postponed, not given up, our return there»<sup>20</sup>.

Regardless of the political dilemma, «it was Russia to shed the first ray of hope upon an otherwise hopeless world»<sup>21</sup>, and it was this hope that had to be saved from the attacks of counter-revolutionaries from both within and abroad. Still in the U.S., Goldman tried to counter press reports that described the October Revolution as a German plot executed by the Kaiser's agents, namely Lenin and Trotsky. She was eager to uncover «fantastic inventions about Bolshevik Russia»<sup>22</sup>, which is why she defended Lenin and his followers in her publications, such as *Mother Earth*. It was her deportation from the United States in the aftermath of the Palmer Raids that would change her perception of the Bolsheviks. Like Alexander Berkman, who accompanied Goldman to Russia, she would experience shock and antagonism alike concerning the cruelties of Bolshevik rule.

Alongside more than 200 people, Berkman and Goldman were deported after their attempts to fight this decision had failed<sup>23</sup>. Berkman described his sentiments upon realizing the whereabouts of his deportation:

Russia! I was going to the country that had swept Tsardom off the map, I was to behold the land of the Social Revolution! Could there be greater joy to one who in his very childhood had been a rebel against tyranny, whose youth's unformed dreams had visioned human brotherhood and happiness, whose entire life was devoted to the Social Revolution<sup>24</sup>!

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, Ch. 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> BERKMAN, Alexander, *The Russian Tragedy. A Review and An Outlook*, N. P., The Anarchist Library, 1922, p. 6, URL: <[https://ia800808.us.archive.org/27/items/al\\_Alexander\\_Berkman\\_The\\_Russian\\_Tragedy\\_A\\_Review\\_and\\_An\\_Outlook\\_a4/Alexander\\_Berkman\\_The\\_Russian\\_Tragedy\\_A\\_Review\\_and\\_An\\_Outlook\\_a4.pdf](https://ia800808.us.archive.org/27/items/al_Alexander_Berkman_The_Russian_Tragedy_A_Review_and_An_Outlook_a4/Alexander_Berkman_The_Russian_Tragedy_A_Review_and_An_Outlook_a4.pdf)> [accessed 8 July 2017].

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

When Berkman eventually arrived there on 19 January, 1920, the experience was seemingly spiritual for him: «A feeling of solemnity, of awe, almost overwhelmed me»<sup>25</sup>. However, regardless of his initial perception of Russia as a utopian dream, Berkman swiftly concluded that the nation «seemed to reflect the Revolution as a frightful perversion. It was an appalling caricature of the new life, the world's hope»<sup>26</sup>. The unrealistic expectations of the arriving anarchists had also been a consequence of the lack of solid information about the recent developments in Russia. Like many others, Berkman and Goldman possessed an image of Russia that could hardly match the realities.

Berkman resisted an immediate resignation to consider that the revolution had failed. However, he eventually accepted the cruel reality: «Against my will, against my hopes, against the holy fire of admiration and enthusiasm for Russia which burned within me, I was convinced – convinced that the Russian Revolution had been done to death»<sup>27</sup>. Berkman had no choice but to admit that «the Russian Revolution [had] failed – failed of its ultimate purpose»<sup>28</sup>. Regardless of this confession, the U.S. Anarchist considered it important to study the Russian Revolutions to learn everything about the revolutionary process and the dangers of perversion, which would invariably be part of every revolutionary movement. The lessons of the «great historic events of 1917»<sup>29</sup> were explained to be «most vital to the future progress and wellbeing of the world»<sup>30</sup>, especially since it seemed unlikely that another revolution would achieve what the events of 1917 did not – namely, a true revolution that could free the masses from every form of state domination. While the Russian Revolution was «the only Revolution which aimed, de facto, at social world revolution [and was] the only one which actually abolished the capitalist system on a country-wide scale, and fundamentally altered all social relationships existing till then»<sup>31</sup>, it failed to overcome the boundaries set by a government – in Russia's case, the Bolshevik one.

The problem was obvious: while Lenin and his followers had used Anarchist slogans (including terms like «direct action», «free soviets», etc.) during the events in October, «it was not their social philosophy that dictated this attitude»<sup>32</sup>. They had used these phrases to gain the support of the masses and to gain power within the revolutionary process. Naturally, as Marxists, the Bolsheviks would eventually demand centralization and control in the hands of their representatives, who also symbolized the new state and its government. The peace of Brest-

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

Litovsk, a treaty that allowed imperialist Germany to make peace with Russia at the expense of those who would be conquered and ruled by the government in Berlin, was seen as a fraud against the masses. Many Anarchists had demanded peace without any annexations, which was agreed upon by the masses themselves.<sup>33</sup> With the Bolsheviks in power, the fight against any and all voices of criticism began, and the Anarchists became victims of policies and «new Bolshevik tactics [that] encompassed systematic eradication of every sign of dissatisfaction, stifling all criticism and crushing independent opinion or effort»<sup>34</sup>. With the dissolution of labor unions, the Cheka's growing influence, and the state's monopolization of every aspect of life, «a bureaucratic machine [was] created that [was] appalling in its parasitism, inefficiency and corruption»<sup>35</sup>. What was thought to be a dictatorship in the name of workers and peasants was nothing more than a dictatorship run by a few Bolsheviks and Lenin, a group that «in its true essence conspiratory, [had] been controlling the fortunes of Russia and of the Revolution since the Brest-Litovsk peace»<sup>36</sup>. The dream of a free population, which, in Anarchist tradition, would decide their own fate, was replaced with «a powerfully centralised State, with the Communist Party in absolute control»<sup>37</sup>, in which any form of mass participation and influence was to be destroyed. For Berkman, it was «the great lesson of the Russian Revolution that every government, whatever its fine name and nice promises, is by its inherent nature, as a government, destructive of the very purposes of the social revolution»<sup>38</sup>. Berkman's thoughts and reflections had been discussed in detail, since most of them had likely been discussed with Goldman during their days in Russia. Her own writings and positions will now be taken into closer consideration.

Between 1920 and 1921, Emma Goldman had experienced some of the most dramatic events that would pervert the Russian Revolution, about which she wrote shortly afterwards in her published work, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (1923)<sup>39</sup>. The arrests of the Anarchists in the larger cities was especially shocking to her; alongside Berkman, she began to inquire about the Bolsheviks' attitudes towards Anarchism. Their questions reached Lenin in March 1920, two of which were of specific significance: «What is the present official attitude of the Soviet Government to the Anarchists?» and «What is to be the definite attitude of the Soviet Government toward the Anarchists?»<sup>40</sup>. However, the government's actions would answer these

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> GOLDMAN, Emma, *My Disillusionment in Russia*, New York, Doubleday, 1923, URL: <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/goldman/works/1920s/disillusionment/index.htm>> [accessed 15 July 2017].

<sup>40</sup> GOLDMAN, Emma, BERKMAN, Alexander to Lenin, circa March 1920, RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History),

inquiries. Goldman witnessed the Butyrka, a Romanov prison, «serving its old purpose—even holding some of the revolutionists incarcerated there before»<sup>41</sup>. The Anarchists could do no more than protest against such actions in a letter, which Goldman quotes in full:

The undersigned Anarcho-syndicalist organizations after having carefully considered the situation that has developed lately in connection with the persecution of Anarchists in Moscow, Petrograd, Kharkov, and other cities of Russia and the Ukraine, including the forcible suppression of Anarchist organizations, clubs, publications, etc., hereby express their decisive and energetic protest against this despotic crushing of not only every agitational and propagandistic activity, but even of all purely cultural work by Anarchist organizations<sup>42</sup>.

Lenin had declared the Anarchists as enemies of the Russian Revolution and as representatives of not only the counter-revolution, but the bourgeois elements of Russia's society<sup>43</sup>. They were treated without mercy, and the «conditions of their imprisonment [were] exceptionally vile and brutal»<sup>44</sup>. All efforts to counter the measures with publications or other forms of educational work were answered by the Bolsheviks with arrests, violence, and even executions – without trial, of course. For Goldman, it was obvious that these «unbearably autocratic tactics of the Government towards the Anarchists [were] unquestionably the result of the general policy of the Bolshevik State in the exclusive control of the Communist Party in regard to Anarchism, Syndicalism, and their adherents»<sup>45</sup>. Those who returned from exile to support the revolution found themselves in an environment as hostile and oppressive towards Anarchism as their previous countries of residence might have been.

Regardless of the reality of the situation, Berkman and Goldman did not immediately condemn the Bolsheviks. American historian Harold J. Goldberg emphasized that «although they developed some objections to the course of events, they had maintained their faith in the revolutionary possibilities under the Bolsheviks throughout the first year of their sojourn»<sup>46</sup>. Only after the Kronstadt Rebellion did the two U.S. Anarchists openly criticize the events in Russia, until the two became «implacable foes of the Bolsheviks»<sup>47</sup>. The idea that the Bolshevik government was a necessary evil that would help overcome the resistance against the Russian Revolutions and their

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<<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/goldman/images/eg30%20Goldman%20and%20Berkman%20Pose%20Questions%20to%20Lenin-large.jpg>> [accessed 03 February 2018].

<sup>41</sup> GOLDMAN, *My Disillusionment in Russia*, New York, Doubleday Page & Co., 1923

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>46</sup> GOLDBERG, Harold J., «Goldman and Berkman View the Bolshevik Regime», in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 53, 131/1975, pp. 272-276, p. 272.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

ideals might have led to Goldman's positive perception of Lenin and his followers until 1920. For her, Russia was an ideal state in an otherwise dark world: «Faint in body, yet strong in spirit, Russia defies the world of greed and sham, and holds her own against the combined power of the international conspiracy of murder and robbery. Russia, the incarnation of a flaming ideal, the inspiration of the New Day»<sup>48</sup>. Although Berkman and Goldman had witnessed a tremendously hostile environment in Russia since the beginning of their stay, it took many months before they actively began criticizing the government. It could be that fear played an important role in their initial inaction, but there is also nothing in Goldman's voluminous correspondence before late 1921 that indicated any critical perspectives of the events<sup>49</sup>. To an unknown recipient, Goldman claimed that most people who visited Russia arrived «in the grip of the great delusion», which usually faded quickly and left them «heart broken»<sup>50</sup> when the visitors would turn their back towards the land of revolutionary utopia again.

However, as soon as Berkman and Goldman escaped from Russia, they began their fierce campaign against Bolshevism. It had taken them long to eventually take a stand against Bolshevism, and many letters between the two show that it was not an easy decision for Goldman to eventually take up the pen to write against Lenin and his followers, as the revolution per se should be protected at the same time<sup>51</sup>. In a letter from Sweden, published in *Freedom* in early 1922, they tried to expose the government's crimes against the Anarchists in post-revolutionary Russia. There, the letter said that «it is not at all necessary to *express* your dissension in word or act to become subject to arrest; the mere *holding* of opposing views makes you the legitimate prey of the *de facto* supreme power of the land, the Tcheka, that almighty Bolshevik Okhrana, whose will knows neither law nor responsibility»<sup>52</sup>. With the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, an organized and ruthless war against Anarchism began when Lenin accused Anarchists of representing the counter-revolution and the bourgeoisie; the first arrests were made the day following this statement<sup>53</sup>. The active and resistant Anarchists were charged with banditism, which made it impossible to escape police violence in the Russian metropolises. After this, Goldman called for Anarchist solidarity and direct action against the Bolshevik regime:

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<sup>48</sup> Goldman to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, January 10, 1920, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, cited in *ibidem*, p. 273.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 237-274.

<sup>50</sup> Goldman to ?, Moscow, 23 July, 1921, p. I, Yivo Institute of Jewish Research, New York, cited in *ibidem*, pp. 275-276.

<sup>51</sup> DRINNON, Richard, DRINNON, Anna Maria (eds.), *Nowhere at Home. Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, New York, Schocken Books, 1977, pp. 17-63.

<sup>52</sup> BERKMAN, Alexander, GOLDMAN, Emma, «Bolsheviks Shooting Anarchists», in *Freedom*, 36, 391, 1922, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

It is high time that the revolutionary Labour movement of the world took cognizance of the blood and murder regime practised by the Bolshevik Government upon all politically differently minded. And it is for the Anarchists and Anarcho Syndicalists, in particular, imperative to take immediate action toward putting a stop to such Asiatic barbarism, and to save, if still possible, our imprisoned Moscow comrades threatened with death<sup>54</sup>.

On 27 March, 1922, *The Washington Times* stated it was Goldman who claimed that the «Rule of Lenin and His Associates Killed Revolution in Russia»<sup>55</sup>. They elaborated on their coverage of Goldman's ideas: «Because of the fact that an arch-Anarchist, a woman who has devoted her life to attacking existing forms of government, turns upon the aegis of Lenin with such fury, *The Washington Times* thinks it worthwhile to print her views on Bolshevism»<sup>56</sup>. In the following article, Goldman expresses no doubts about the nature of the contemporary events in Russia: «The Russian revolution, as a radical social and economic change meant to overthrow capitalism and establish communism, must be declared a failure»<sup>57</sup>. In her view, the hopes and dreams that the revolution was supposed to fulfill were not only crushed by international interventions<sup>58</sup>, but predominantly by the Bolshevik government.

One of her important article series about the Russian crisis – titled *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*<sup>59</sup> and published in *New York World*, later published as a pamphlet – provided a full analysis of the events based on her experiences in Russia. She wanted to describe the events she witnessed in depth, although they might have been «misappropriated by the reactionaries, the enemies of the Russian Revolution, as well as excommunicated by its so-called friends, who persist in confusing the governing party of Russia with the Revolution»<sup>60</sup>. Initially, the Bolshevik regime was strengthened by the «four years' conspiracy of the imperialists against Russia»<sup>61</sup>, and these interventions forced the Russian masses to focus on defending the revolution. Meanwhile, Lenin and his followers used this internal lack of surveillance to pervert the movement's ideals, and the Russian people hoped to garner the government's support for the revolutions in 1917. Consequently, the Bolshevik-led Communist Party formed a centralized state to destroy the Soviets and eventually crush the revolution<sup>62</sup>. From an Anarchist point of view, it was proved that «the experience of Russia, more than any theories, has demonstrated that all government,

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> «Bolshevik Blunders Bared by Goldman», in *The Washington Times*, 27 March 1922, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> RICHARD, Carl J., *When the United States Invaded Russia. Woodrow Wilson's Siberian Disaster*, Lanham (MD), Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> GOLDMAN, Emma, *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, London, Freedom Press, 1922, University of Warwick Library Special Collections, JD 10.P6 PPC 1684.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

whatever its form or pretences, is a dead weight that paralyses the free spirit and activities of the masses»<sup>63</sup>. Goldman underscored that «for a brief period after the October Revolution the workers, peasants, soldiers, and sailors were indeed the masters of their revolutionary fate. But soon, the invisible iron hand began to manipulate the revolution, to separate it from the people, and to make it subservient to its own ends — the iron hand of the Communist State»<sup>64</sup>. The Bolsheviks never represented the will of the people; instead, they were «the Jesuit order in the Marxian Church»<sup>65</sup>, and eventually, «Communism, Socialism, equality, freedom — everything for which the Russian masses have endured such martyrdom — [had] become discredited and besmirched by their tactics, by their Jesuitic motto that the end justifies all means»<sup>66</sup>. The Bolshevik leaders' internal purges and pro-imperialist foreign policies, represented by the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, had divided the people and transformed the revolution's ideals into the crude realities of Lenin's post-revolutionary Russia.

Nevertheless, as Berkman had outlined before, «It was natural, of course, for the Russian Revolution to arouse bitterest antagonism, on the one hand, and most passionate defense, on the other»<sup>67</sup>. He also claimed that most reports from Russia were simply lies<sup>68</sup>. Emma Goldman also provided a detailed description of the euphoric visitors to Russia, whom she divided into three classes:

The first category consisted of earnest idealists to whom the Bolsheviks were the symbol of the Revolution. ... The second class were journalists, newspapermen, and some adventurers. They spent from two weeks to two months in Russia, usually in Petrograd or Moscow, as the guests of the Government and in charge of Bolshevik guides. Hardly any of them knew the language and they never got further than the surface of things. Yet many of them have presumed to write and lecture authoritatively about the Russian situation. ... The third category — the majority of the visitors, delegates, and members of various commissions — infested Russia to become the agents of the ruling Party. These people had every opportunity to see things as they were, to get close to the Russian people, and to learn from them the whole terrible truth. But they preferred to side with the Government, to listen to its interpretation of causes and effects<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> BERKMAN, Alexander, *The Russian Tragedy*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> GOLDMAN, Emma, *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Ch. 29, emphasis by the author.

Many visitors had been blinded by the Bolshevik leaders, who «[knew] how to set the stage to produce an impression»<sup>70</sup>.

#### 4. The Crusade Against Bolshevism

While Emma Goldman began to deconstruct the Bolshevik myth immediately after her return from Russia, it was not easy for the exiled American Anarchist to persuade the public about the reality of Russia:

Woe to those who dare to tear the mask from the lying face. In Russia they are put against the wall, exiled to slow death in famine districts, or banished from the country. In Europe and America such heretics are dragged through the mire and morally lynched. Everywhere the unscrupulous tools of the great disintegrator, the Third International, spread distrust and hatred in labour and radical ranks<sup>71</sup>.

After her years in Russia and a short stay in Germany, Goldman lived in the United Kingdom, where many socialists and other left intellectuals enthusiastically supported the Bolshevik regime as a defender of the 1917 revolutions<sup>72</sup>. The Anarchist groups' support of the Bolsheviks particularly angered Goldman, who had seen what happened to the representatives of Russian Anarchism before. While several journals supported Bolshevism<sup>73</sup>, the American Anarchist tried to persuade the British radicals of the evils she had witnessed in person.

During a dinner speech in London on 12 November, 1924, Goldman emphasized the error in believing that the Bolshevik rulers would be defending the aims of the revolution for the sake of the people. She confessed that it took her «two years in Russia to find out [her] grievous mistake in believing that the ruling power was articulate of the Russian Revolution»<sup>74</sup>. Anarchism also lacked leading figures like Peter Kropotkin to fight against the terror in Russia: «Alas the Grand old man is no longer with us, and there seems to be no one else of his brain and heart, to do what he would most assuredly have done now as he did then, to speak and write against the terror going on in Russia under the new regime»<sup>75</sup>. Well aware of her status as a critic of Lenin's

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>72</sup> DURHAM, Martin, «British Revolutionaries and the Suppression of the Left in Lenin's Russia, 1918-1924», in *Journal of Contemporary History: Working-Class and Left-Wing Politics*, 20, 2/1985, pp. 203-219, p. 204.

<sup>73</sup> For some examples, see *Freedom*, March 1918, October 1918, April 1919 and *Spur*, July 1918, September 1918, February 1919.

<sup>74</sup> GOLDMAN, Emma, «Speech at Dinner in London», November 12, 1924, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Emma Goldman Papers, No. 284, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.



dictatorship, Goldman knew that she would «be burned in oil by the followers and friends of Moscow [...] [and] denounced as a counter revolutionist, in the employ of the Whites.» She continues: «[Nothing] can stop me from my determination to articulate the dumb misery and suffering of Russia's politicals»<sup>76</sup>. In an article titled «What I Saw in Russia» (c. 1925), she also described how Russia had been totally different from everything Goldman anticipated it would be after the revolution. The American Anarchist admitted that although she was «never a Bolshevik, [she] yet sincerely believed that the Bolsheviks were interpreting the ideals of the Russian people, as registered by them in the Great Russian Revolution»<sup>77</sup>. In a way, she distorted reality when she stated to have «preferred to go to Revolutionary Russia to help in the sublime effort of the people to make the Revolution a living factor in their lives», especially since being deported did not leave her with much of a choice. Her utopian dream disappeared very fast and became a «ghastly dream» that haunted Goldman's thoughts for the years to come.

«What I Saw in Russia» also sums up the nature of the post-revolutionary Bolshevik state that had perverted nearly every socio-political ideal in Russia. Goldman wanted to thwart the Anglo-Saxon image of the Bolsheviks by explaining what she had experienced during her two years in Russia:

I found a small political group ... – the Communist Party – in absolute control ... Labour conscripted, driven to work like chattel-slaves, arrested for the slightest infringement ... the peasants a helpless prey to punitive expeditions and forcible food collection ... the Soviets ... made subservient to the Communist State ... a sinister organisation, known as the «Cheka» (Secret service and executioners of Russia), suppressing thought ... the prisons and concentration camps overcrowded with men and women ... Russia in wreck and ruin, presided over by a bureaucratic State, incompetent and inefficient to reconstruct the country and to help the people realise their high hopes and their great ideals<sup>78</sup>.

Regardless of her clear wording, Goldman was unable to persuade her British audience. In a letter from 6 November 1924, she told Roger Baldwin (1884-1981), one of the founding members of the American Civil Liberties Union, of her misery: «The main obstacle will be the confusion and superstition prevalent in England about Russia. In that respect I think it is like America, where Radicals and Liberals alike have been mesmerised by the hypnotic spell of Moscow, or rather by the myth foisted upon the world by Moscow»<sup>79</sup>. Goldman was also antagonized for her critical

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>77</sup> GOLDMAN, Emma, «What I saw in Russia», International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Emma Goldman Papers, No. 284.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>79</sup> Emma Goldman to Roger Baldwin, London, November 6, 1924, Emma Goldman Papers, International

view, stating that «all those who refuse to face the facts of Russia are dealing with nothing else but attitudes. Their emotions have blinded them to such an extent, that they are utterly unable to listen to any critical analysis by people who speak, not from hearsay, but from actual experience and knowledge»<sup>80</sup>. In a letter to her «great love» Alexander Berkman on 22 December, 1924, she confessed that «it is mainly the realization of the terrible power of the Bolshevik lie which so depresses me»<sup>81</sup>. The left intellectuals in the United States – with whom Goldman regularly corresponded – were also ignorant of the reality in Russia, which might have frustrated the American Anarchist even more than her British colleagues did. One could argue, that it did not really matter what exactly happened in Russia, but what could happen there. The dominant idea was consequently a utopian dream, and, to stay in that image, the dreamers were not willing to wake up.

In the United States, conservative forces and their press organs did not regard the Russian Revolutions well. One can state without any exaggeration that the reports about post-revolutionary Russia had been one-sided, but the same could be said about the left-wing newspapers and journals, who sympathized with the revolutionaries and the ideals they represented. The historian Dimitri von Mohrenschildt (1902-2002) aptly described this situation when he said that «the demand for authentic information about revolutionary Russia was supplied by two groups of American-English eyewitnesses and observers; one, highly favorable to the Communist Revolution and the newly established regime; the other, uncompromisingly hostile»<sup>82</sup>. For the pro-Bolshevik observers in the U.S., Lenin «was by far the most popular and excited the greatest admiration»<sup>83</sup>, which is why reports like those written by Emma Goldman were often refused as anti-revolutionary stories by exiles who were against the Bolsheviks for ideological reasons. Due to the «misleading nature of the early pro-Bolshevik reports»<sup>84</sup>, whose authors Goldman had so vividly described, it was simply not an easy task to find sympathizers of a different point of view on Bolshevism and Lenin's dictatorial rule. Furthermore, labor leaders like «Big Bill» Haywood drew the most attracting pictures about life in post-revolutionary Russia, stimulating the utopian dreams related to Bolshevik rule<sup>85</sup>.

Goldman emphasized these misconceptions in her letters to Roger Baldwin, which were sent from Berlin on 3 June, 1924: «[I] know the hypnotism was unavoidable, I was under its spell for many months myself, I can therefore understand everybody who is still in the trance. As I have

Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, (EGP-IISH), No. 52, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>81</sup> Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, London, December 22, 1924, (EGP-IISH), No. 23, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> MOHRENSCHILDT, Dimitri von, «The Early American Observers of the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921», in *The Russian Review*, 3, 1/1943, pp. 64-74, p. 65.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 74.

<sup>85</sup> Berkman vehemently criticized such activities. See: BERKMAN, Alexander, *The Russian Tragedy*, cit., p. 6.

repeatedly pointed out, Bolshevism is as truly the great superstition holding the world under its sway, as Christianity was and still is»<sup>86</sup>. In case of the U.S., she thought it was unbearable that there existed the «myth [that] Bolshevism, Leninism and the Russian Revolution are identical. It is this myth that prevents people from seeing that Bolshevism has crushed the Revolution and is now crushing the best there is in Russia»<sup>87</sup>. Goldman believed that the power should have remained in the hands of the soldiers' and workers' councils, where it could have been step by step transformed into a true democracy, in an anarchist form of course, due to which socialism would have provided a totally equal society for all. Lenin's rule, in contrast, was based on the establishment of a state and characterized by terror and violence, but the left intellectuals in the United States seemed uninterested in this truth; instead, they hailed to utopian misconceptions. Baldwin, however, was not fully persuaded. He only agreed on two points regarding Russia's internal policies:

- 1) That the persecution of opponents is not only wholly unnecessary but destructive of revolutionary progress, not only because it kills off those whose contributions are most needed, but because it imposes the temper of tyranny on the ruling classes;
- 2) That the centralization of power in the hands of a bureaucratic government is having the same effect of killing off those spontaneous experimental growths toward communal production and distribution which alone seem to me an enduring basis of economic stability in which the individual can find his widest freedom<sup>88</sup>.

Because the left was ideologically supposed to defend what all conservative forces attacked, Baldwin had previously warned Goldman to avoid openly criticizing Bolshevik rule in post-revolutionary Russia. However, Goldman made it clear that she «fail[ed] to see [...] how one can discuss the condition of the politicals without discussing the very institution which made political terror inevitable»<sup>89</sup>.

Furthermore, on several occasions — like in a letter to Mrs. J.D. Campbell on 30 January, 1925 — Goldman emphasized her feelings: «While I am opposed to Bolshevism and fight it with all my abilities, I am yet in deep sympathy with the Russian Revolution and the Russian people; it is because I feel that there is an abyss between the Revolution and Bolshevism that I have taken my stand against the latter»<sup>90</sup>. It was, however, hard to defend the one while attacking the other, especially since many foreign observers associated the revolutions with Bolshevism. Those who

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<sup>86</sup> Letter to Roger Baldwin, Berlin, June 3, 1924, Emma Goldman Papers, New York Public Library, ZL-386, Reel 1 (EGP-NYPL), p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>88</sup> Roger Baldwin to Emma Goldman, New York, November 24, 1924, EGP-NYPL, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Emma Goldman to Roger Baldwin, London, January 5, 1925, EGP-NYPL, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Emma Goldman to Mrs. J.D. Campbell, St. Johns Wood, London, January 30, 1925, EGP-NYPL, p. 3.

pointed out that the Bolsheviks seemed to be the only political force capable of «run[ning] the show» received Goldman's answer, like Bertrand Russell did on 9 February, 1925: «[...] with all the political factions having been destroyed and with all the foremost men and women of the various political groups in prisons and concentration camps, it is most difficult to say who is or who is not in a position to replace Bolshevism»<sup>91</sup>. Nevertheless, Goldman changed her mind about the roots of Bolshevik terror. While she had accentuated the role of foreign interventionists in the past, a letter to Baldwin on 20 April, 1925 drew a tremendously different picture:

I insist that the terror used by the Bolshevik Government has not been imposed upon them by outside circumstances but is inherent in the Dictatorship. It is that which compelled Lenin and the rest to eliminate every one who could or would not bow to the Dictatorship. I do not deny that counter-revolution from within and intervention from without may not in a measure have been a contributory factor. But they also helped to strengthen the arm of the Dictatorship because they furnished it with ever so many excuses for the terror employed. But over and above that is the idea of the Dictatorship, the obsession that the transformation period must be directed by an iron hand which at the exclusion of all other methods will impose itself upon the whole country<sup>92</sup>.

She repeatedly asserted Bolshevism as an ideology that would rule modern Russia, just as the church ruled during the medieval ages before: «There is no difference [...] between the old belief of Divine rights of the King whom God hath put on the throne, and the Divine rights of the Bolsheviks whom Marx hath put on the throne and the Tcheka continued to keep there.»<sup>93</sup> According to Goldman, Baldwin's belief that Bolshevism was a dictatorship in the name of workers and peasants was naive and «really childish»<sup>94</sup>. In 1925, the Bolshevik dictatorship – «like all governments» – ruled «in the interest of a privileged class and that class [was] the Communist Party,» having the «ultimate aim» to establish «State Capitalism» in order to make profits<sup>95</sup>.

Consequently, it was Bolshevik rule in post-revolutionary Russia that perverted the ideals of the Russian Revolutions and established a new exploitative government. In contrast to Russia's past leaders, they purported to assume a left-wing Marxist ideology. However, in reality, they exploited the interests of workers and peasants as others before them had done.

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<sup>91</sup> Emma Goldman to Bertrand Russell, London, February 9, 1925, EGP-NYPL, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Emma Goldman to Roger Baldwin, Norwich, April 20, 1925, EGP-NYPL, pp. 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.

## 5. Conclusion

An analysis of Emma Goldman's perception of the Russian Revolutions and their aftermath, the establishment of Bolshevik rule, and Lenin's dictatorship fixates on a micro-perspective of the contemporary political circumstances. However, the shift in her views – from being supportive and hopeful about the prospective utopia to being antagonistic towards Lenin's rule – is typical, even emblematic, of many members of the left intelligentsia in the Western world<sup>96</sup>. In addition, her correspondence offers insight into the discourse such intellectuals had in the early 1920s, a time when both British and American thinkers were more willing to trust reports about Bolshevism's supposedly glorious achievements than Goldman and Berkman's own experiences with the harsh and cruel realities of post-revolutionary Russia.

Regardless of her antagonism towards Bolshevik rule, Goldman made it clear that she still believed in the ideals that the Russian Revolutions were initially undertaken to achieve, and, in contrast to many other left intellectuals, who believed that Russia had been, due to its political and social backwardness, the wrong place for the world revolution to begin, she also did not doubt the future potential of the Russian people to achieve a true social change. As a concept, her separation of the revolution from Bolshevism, as it was, however, shared by many other anarchists and social democrats across Europe alike<sup>97</sup>, contributed to modern-day apolitical discourse about revolution. However, the relationship between the events of 1917 and the rise of dictatorial rule in Russia would not only determine the state's history throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it would be largely responsible for the Western world's generally negative disposition towards every revolutionary movement since<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the Great Depression in the United States would cause another turn towards the Soviet Union by left intellectuals in the Western world. For a detailed discussion see: CLARK, Katherine, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome. Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2011; STERN, Ludmilla, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920-40. From Red Square to the Left Bank*, London - New York, Routledge, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> NARDEEN, Bruno, *Socialist Europe and Revolutionary Russia. Perception and Prejudice 1848-1923*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 445-514.

<sup>98</sup> In Latin America and Asia, the appraisal of revolutionary concepts developed differently.

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