
The Chicago Anarchists

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The trial of the Chicago anarchists created throughout the country the most profound attention. Chicago, more than New York or any other great American city, had been for a number of years the converging center for a set of restless and reckless spirits, under various names — “Anarchists,” “Socialists,” etc. — and their immunity from arrest or interference of any kind had emboldened them in the use of language in their papers, and public harangues, which indicated a disregard for law and order, and America, with her boasted liberty, free schools, manhood suffrage, freedom of speech, and freedom of press, became as odious in the eyes of anarchists as Russia, Turkey, or any other despot-cursed country under heaven.

These anarchists saw nothing, or little, in American institutions worthy of favorable consideration, saturated with ideas born of European methods of government, they assumed that every wrong perpetrated by individuals or corporations against the rights and interests of workingmen was fundamental, rather than superficial; that is to say that such wrongs are inherent in the principles upon which the government was founded, rather than innovations, at war with its spirit, and hence they sought to inculcate by speech and press, opposition to institutions, which, by their liberality, permitted them to openly and defiantly antagonize them.

It is by no means surprising that men holding such views of government should attract to themselves an exceedingly dangerous element, men whose passions, the outgrowth of ignorance, make them mad and blind, and who, with or without provocation, resort to murderous methods to accomplish their own, and the ruin of their associates.

It must be remembered, in this connection, that **Free Speech** and **Free Press** are the twin glories of the American government. Strike them down, throttle them, murder them in court or on the battle

field, and no matter by what captivating name the government is known, it is a despotism nevertheless, as odious and as infamous as was ever known on the earth, since the devil, serpent, or Satan transformed Eden into a thorn-bearing wilderness.

But free speech and a free press do not mean unlicensed devilishness, and on very many occasions the courts have been required to draw the line between license and licentiousness. Such cases, however, in this country, have related to the rights of individuals, communities, states, and the federal government, have seldom been involved, and never, we think, in time of peace.

The Chicago trial of the anarchists forms an exception, though in that trial there was a blending of charges of actual felony with the menace of social safety, and the condemnation to death is the first instance in the criminal records of the country when a jury adjudged that free speech could be carried to such excess as to make the death penalty a requirement, and justifiable by the laws of the land.

Judge Gary, in his sentence condemning the anarchists to be hung, said: *"It is nowhere asserted or claimed that these prisoners threw the bomb, but that their doctrines, ideas, opinions, and teachings prepared the way and led to the throwing of the bomb."*

We have italicized the extraordinary words of Judge Gary, because, since the prisoners did not throw the bomb which did the killing, they are to be hung for the expression of opinions which led to the murder. These prisoners did inveigh against the government, against the laws, against the policy and practice of corporations and monopolists, and the loose and often shameful administration of the laws. They saw, or thought they saw, monstrous wrongs which enslaved some while they enriched others. They saw rich criminals go unwhipped of justice, because they could, by the use of money or social influence, transform courts into tribunals, in which technicalities had the consideration and force of letter and spirit of the law, and under cover of which they escaped the penalties due their crimes, while the poor wretch, without money or friends, was made to suffer.

The righteous denunciations of such things has not been confined to Chicago anarchists, the stump, the rostrum, the forum, and the press, has ceaselessly arraigned legislatures, congresses, and political parties as being parties to such flagitious practices as being venal and corrupt to the core. The press, and men of high repute, have declared that cities, where the people's representatives meet to enact laws are

little less than Sodoms, and that the institutions of the country were in peril of being overthrown by corruption in high places.

Anarchists, whether foreigners or native born, have had ten thousand texts, glowing with denunciations of parties and the government, of “doctrines, ideas, opinions, and teachings” well calculated to breed anarchists, but whoever thought of arresting the authors of such opinions, ideas and teachings, of trying them and condemning them to be imprisoned or hung, because of their insane and incendiary literings”

The language of Judge Gary, in sentencing the Chicago anarchists, is startling. It rings like an alarm bell. He said it was “nowhere asserted or claimed” that the anarchists “threw the bombs.” They were not on trial for killing. They had committed no murderous act, but had proclaimed “doctrines, ideas, opinions and teachings” which “prepared the way and led to the throwing of the bombs,” and for this exercise of free speech, carried to dangerous courts, they are condemned as worthy of death.

With such a decision, unrevoked, what is the situation? What is the status of free men? What are the privileges of the press? A moment’s reflection leaves the mind overwhelmed in confusion.

The verdict of the Chicago jury and the language of Judge Gary effectually obliterates the line separating language and overt acts; that is to say, a word is equal to a blow or a bomb, not a word in itself felonious, but a word, an “opinion,” an “idea,” a doctrine,” a “teaching,” which prepares “the way” for the overt act.

There have been strikes which were the direct outgrowth of “doctrines, ideas, opinions and teachings,” and in numerous instances these strikes have resulted in various grades of felony. The Chicago verdict and the language of Judge Gary does not distinguish between the men who committed the felony and those who harangued the people against chronic and flagrant wrongs. On the contrary, for the first time in American jurisprudence the astounding declaration is made that a difference does not exist. “It is nowhere claimed,” said Judge Gary, “that these prisoners threw the bomb.” It was not claimed, it was not asserted, it was not proven, that they threw the bomb, but that they had expressed doctrines, opinions, and ideas which led to the throwing of the bomb. Let this verdict stand, let it become the practice of the courts, let it have popular approval, let it go unrevoked, and free speech is as dead in America as it is in Russia, and a free press becomes a haggard aggravating misnomer, as treach-

erous as a mirage or an *ignia fatuas* — dead sea fruit— which tempts but to deceive, and once endorsed, the pillars of our boasted temple of liberty disappear as if by a decree of Jehovah.

In this age it will not do to hang men for their doctrines, ideas, opinions, and teachings, however dangerous they may be or may appear to be, and a moment's reflection will, we think, convince rational men that the proposition is impregnable against attack, no matter from what quarter it may come.

We are by no means opposed to laws which punish men for the abuse of free speech. We are not in favor of mobs, mob rule or mob law. We are unalterably opposed to the teachings of anarchists — the bomb, the torch, the using of the weapons of assassins — but we would guard with ceaseless vigilance free speech and a free press, and could we speak with the tongue of an angel, we would not condemn a man to death for inveighing the wrongs which have crept into American methods of government. In other words, if there is no law for hanging men for holding opinions, ideas, doctrines, and for teachings, we would not hang them for such things; and if an attempt were made to enact such a law we would oppose it with all the power of mind we could command. With such a law upon the statute books, the world would begin a retrograde movement, and despotism worse than anarchy, would be reinstated.

If anarchists threaten the peace of society, we would restrain them, if they commit murder we would hang them. But the bare mention that teaching certain doctrines, or holding to certain opinions of government, we care not how monstrous, are worthy of the death penalty, if it does not thrill the American mind with alarm, then it must be confessed that the American mind has reached a point on the road to despotism far more alarming than any of the insane harangues made by the Chicago cranks.

Nothing was ever gained in the way of suppressing ideas and opinions by hanging or burning men for ideas and opinions. Ideas and opinions escape the death penalty, the halter, the faggot, and the wheel.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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