

An Interview with Lucy Parsons on the Prospects for Anarchism in America

Lucy E. Parsons

1886

New York, October 21 [1886].— Mrs. Lucy Parsons, wife of the Chicago anarchist, who is one of the seven now under sentence of death for bomb throwing in the Haymarket riots in Chicago, has been stopping with friends in this city since Saturday night [Oct. 16, 1886]. Her abode has studiously been kept secret from reporters, and the most diligent search failed to discover her. After the meeting Sunday afternoon she withdrew to the seclusion of a house uptown. Yesterday she passed, in paying her respects to her anarchist friends, at the home of an East Side saloon-keeper, where the *Post-Dispatch* correspondent found her. Mrs. Parsons, who said she had not sought for newspaper notoriety since she came to New York, seated herself in an easy chair and chatted intelligently and earnestly about the cause she represented for a full hour. In reply to the reporter's inquiry as to the prospect of anarchy in this country and the world in general, the woman anarchist dropped her eyes for a moment in deep thought and said:

“This is the evolutionary stage of anarchism. The revolutionary period will be reached when the great middle classes are practically extinct. The great monopolies and corporations and syndicates, met with on every hand, are now rapidly extinguishing the middle classes, which we regard as the great bulwark between the monopoly and the great producing or working classes. There will come a time when there will be in this world only two classes, the possessing class and the non-possessing class, the middle classes having been forced into the wage class owing to the enormous capital now needed to remain in the field of production. These two classes will therefore find themselves arrayed against each other; a struggle in the revolutionary stage will come, and the order of things in the world will be changed by the people themselves.”

“Will the change come peaceably?”

“I think not, for all history shows that every attempt to wrest from the wealthy and powerful that which they have has been made by force. The vanguard of this struggling army will be found in America, because Americans will never submit to being forced to the conditions of the European masses. All the signs of the times show that the fight will begin here. Witness the strikes without number that have swept up and down this broad land like a great cyclone.

Millionaires are made here in one generation whereas it takes centuries in Europe, and that is a fact that proves that Americans will respond to the call quicker. the wage system in this country has now reached its full development. It no longer satisfies the needs and wants of the people; facts which are illustrated by the poverty and starvation to be met with in the midst of plenty."

"When this struggle comes and culminates in the sovereignty of the people, what sort of a state will follow under anarchism?"

"Well, first let us look at the derivation of anarchism. It means 'without rule.' We presuppose that the wage system has been abolished. There wage-slavery ends and anarchy begins, but you must not confuse this state with the revolutionary period, as people are in the habit of doing. We hold that the trade unions are the embryonic group of the ideal groups, including all industrial trades, such as the farmer, shoemaker, hatter, printer, painter, cigarmaker, and others who will maintain themselves apart and distinct from the whole. We ask for the decentralization of power from the central government into the groups or classes. The farmers will supply so much of the land products, the shoemakers so much in shoes, the hatter so many hats, and so on, all of them measuring the consumption by statistics which will be accurately compiled. Land will be in common, and there will be no rent, no interest, and no profit. Therefore, there will be no Jay Goulds, no Vanderbilts, no corporations, and no moneyed power. Drudgery, such as exists today, will be reduced to a minimum. The number of hours of labor will be reduced and people will have more time for pleasure and cultivation of the mind. We base all these results on natural reasons, believing that nature has implanted in every man, in common with all his fellows, certain instincts and certain capacities. If a man won't work, nature makes him starve. So in our State you must work or starve. But we claim that the sum of human happiness will be increased while the drudgery, poverty, and misery of the world today, all due to the powerful concentration of capital, will be done away with. It will be impossible for a man to accumulate Gould's wealth, because there would be no such thing as profit. There would be no overproduction, because only enough of any one article would be produced to meet the demand."

"How is this change to be brought about?"

"That comes in the revolutionary stage and will happen, as I said, when the final great struggle of the masses against the moneyed powers takes place. The money and wages now found in the possession of the wage class represents the bare necessities of life; nothing over when the bills from one week to another are paid. The rest goes to the profit-taking classes and that is why we call the system wage slavery."

"What criticism of the present form of government do you make?"

"All political government must necessarily become despotic, because all government tends to become centralized in the hands of the few, who breed corruption among themselves and in a very short time disconnect themselves from the body of the people. The American republic is a good illustration. Here we have a semblance of a republic, of a democracy, but it has fallen into the hands of a powerful few, who rule with a despotism absolutely impossible in Europe. I have but to refer you to the Carter Harrison¹ interview not long ago in the *[New York] World*, in which he remarked that the atrocities committed by the Haymarket Anarchists in Chicago would not

¹ **Carter H. Harrison, Sr.** (1825–1893), a distant cousin of former President William Henry Harrison, was the mayor of Chicago during the Haymarket affair. He left office in 1887 after completion of his fourth term to launch an unsuccessful campaign for election to Congress. Following his defeat he purchased the *Chicago Times* and in 1893 won election for a fifth term as mayor of Chicago, only to be assassinated shortly after taking office by a disgruntled seeker of a government job.

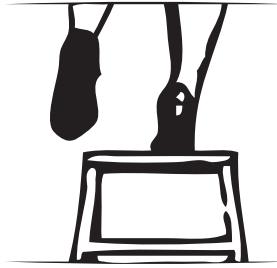
have been suffered in any monarchy in Europe, and would have overturned Victoria's throne. We see in this Government a huge machine turned against the will of the people by those who control it. We see in this Government a huge machine turned against the will of the people by those who control it. Congressmen and Senators buy their seats of office, and are not in sympathy with the people. We claim these things are made possible because of our economic condition; in other words, people must be economically free before they are in condition to even have a choice as to a political form of government."

"What have you to say of the Chicago troubles?"

"Regarding the sentence to death of the seven brave men, I must express my sense of its injustice. The evidence on trial did not show that they were guilty of bomb-throwing, but even if it did show the bomb was thrown by an anarchist, yet they were not violating any law of the Constitution, for that instrument expressly defines the free right of all men to meet in unmolested assemblage. Police interference was not warranted, yet even after the police did appear there was no unimpeachable witness who could swear that he saw the bomb thrown. The mad who did swear to the bomb-throwing was a bad chap, wrung in by the prosecution to aid their purposes. We produced a number of witnesses in the defense to prove that the man lied, and what is more, we have the best evidence in the world to show that the jury was bought for the price of \$100,000, and when the next hearing takes place we shall have some startling testimony. Already a strong public sympathy has been aroused in Chicago in favor of the doomed men. The case will come up in the Supreme Court in March [1887], and failing then to secure a new trial, we shall possibly be able to carry the case to the federal court."

Mrs. Parsons will remain in this city about three weeks, during which time she will lecture a number of times. She is under engagement to speak in Brooklyn, Newark, Orange, Jersey City, New Haven, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland.

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