

*Smedley Letters  
Germany*

# NOWHERE AT HOME

*Letters from Exile of  
Emma Goldman and  
Alexander Berkman*

EDITED BY  
Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon

SCHOCKEN BOOKS • NEW YORK

## EG TO AB, September 10, 1925, LONDON

Dearest,

There is certainly a community of moods and feelings between us.\* I too have been terribly depressed since Fitzie's departure and I have not been able to get back to work. It is always bad to break in on work when one is in the midst of it. . . .

What you say in regard to the deeper cause of our tragedies is correct, if only we knew what this complicated, baffling, elusive thing human nature is. I confess the older I get, the less I know about it. Of course the price we modern women and men too pay for our own development and growth is very great and painful, but one must go ahead or remain in the dull state of the cow. For it is not only the modern woman, but all civilized people who pay a certain price for their awakening. Another thing is that even the ordinary woman is not sure that she will have her children, her man, her home in her old age. Nothing is certain in our time, or perhaps never was at any time, for those who must struggle for their existence. In what way, then, is the ordinary woman better off than we are? I rather think she is worse off. For while the modern woman, if more exacting and has greater and deeper needs, so too she has considerable richness out of her finer sensibilities and deeper understanding. There is nothing without a price and we must be ready to pay it. Fact is, we have no choice. There is a terrific urge toward freedom, toward the struggle for higher ideals which no one can resist. What then is to be done?

In the case of women like Fitzie the situation is aggravated by their inability to do independent work which would fill their lives. Of course, no work fills one's life, one needs love and comradeship at all times. But while some of us can forget themselves a little in the work we are doing, or want to do, Fitzie and others like her find little comfort in the work they are doing—especially when they see nothing really worthwhile come out of their efforts. In our case the misery has been increased by the collapse of our faith through Russia. I can honestly say that I never felt the terrible loneliness and such defeat while I was in America and still fervently believed in the social revolution, which I no longer do. And that at bottom is also the case with you dearest. Perhaps with all sensitive, earnest people. Look at Angélica [Balabanov]. She wrote me a card en tour that she is crossing Europe with heavy head and heart. I am sure she never before was conscious of heaviness, for she is the type who lived almost entirely for her ideal. Or such women as Babushka [Catherine Breshkovskaya]. But all their hopes and ideals have been shattered and not having personal interests they must be wretched and in despair. It is worse with those of us who

\* Unfortunately we have been unable to locate AB's side of this particular exchange.

have versatile natures, those who love beauty, art, music, those who need companionship. Ah, well, it is as it is. . . .

Tonight is the opening of [Eugene O'Neill's] *Emperor Jones*. I wish you could go with me. I am taking a little English woman who is helping with the course of lectures here. I was terribly excited about tonight, but I feel so depressed today. Harry Ballantine dashed in last night; he will also be at the theater and so will the Healeys; I suppose many Americans will. I'd love to have you here, my own precious chum. Yes, dearest, we must meet in Paris, I am awfully hungry for the sight of you and for your companionship. I'd feel in a better mood to work, if I could have a little time with you. I am arranging to be free from the 20th of December to the end of January. I simply must manage to get away from here and meet you somewhere. I embrace you tenderly,

E

## AGNES SMEDLEY TO EG, Sunday, BERLIN

My dear Emma,

Now I shall at last reply to your long letter of April 23rd. I am better. But were I to follow my real feelings, my letter would be a document unfit for human eyes.

Your life appears to me to be filled with many interesting things—activity and then more activity. Why you are not content I do not know. I don't believe you are a person who could be content, even if you had the world by the tail and were twisting it to suit yourself. Still you would say that you were doing nothing and were failing in your work! Objectively you do enough and more than enough. But you seem to be like me, content only when you have so much to do that you can do nothing. That is subjective discontent. . . .

And yet, why can I not find the person in whom I feel perfect rest and contentment—complete understanding? People are interesting, Emma, but I never find the person with whom I feel spiritually intimate. . . .

You may laugh. You are a person who mingles with people easily—you and Chatto. Clap! And they are drawn to you like flies to a fly-paper. And they serve you and worship you. Perhaps it does not matter to you, if they are far from you spiritually. You take what there is to be had and *schluss* [that's the end of it]. You are wise and sane. But I am lonely and insane. I have found but two people in life to whom I stand as intimately (spiritually speaking) as human beings can ever stand to each other, and one was Bakar. But it is in the nature of things that he should have been the very person who *should* have stood on the other side of the gulf. . . .

I am not writing at all. My drama has been locked up in the drawer of my desk. My articles likewise. The article on Käthe Kollwitz exists only in

my imagination and will perhaps continue to do so. My mind is simply incapable of writing, and I, in order to drag on living, have taken to teaching. I hate it. But my mind is so deeply disturbed at all times, so unspeakably unhappy, that it is absolutely impossible for me to write. I cannot tell you the depths into which I have sunk mentally. I simply cannot rise out of it. I haven't enough hope and desire in me to write a line. I just exist, hoping that maybe something will happen on the morrow which will give me back the illusion that life is worthwhile and that writing is worthwhile. In the meantime I drag on from day to day, a rag—nothing but a rag.

Chatto will be better eventually. He is now in Saxony. He is in the city a few days during the week only and the rest of the time is collecting advertisements for his magazine and in order to make money. He is under treatment only twice a week, and that is too little. He is looking very tired and old. My heart is filled with pity. I could erase that look and give him back much strength, if I would return and live with him, or even tell him that I intend to do so. But I cannot. Often I think that he is of far more value than I am; everybody knows that—all of you anarchists and revolutionaries, all of the Indians, everybody who knows us both. But I still cannot force myself back. Sometimes I am on the verge of doing it. He is so deeply miserable and worn down much of the time. Still I know that if I return to him, I shall kill myself within a month. And I often wonder if I shall not do it eventually anyway, even if I do not return. My mind concerns itself with such things when I lie awake for hours at night. Yet it seems so useless for his life to be wasted all for the sake of a woman. It is only that, for I cannot give him the help he needs half as much as another woman could. He is laboring under illusion, only. I tell you I am in a mess, mentally. I know what you say—go away—as you have said. That is the intelligent viewpoint. I am not dealing with a man who regards me intelligently, but only emotionally. Had he had an intelligent view, he would have left me three years ago, when I wanted to go. Life does not exist only by intelligence. During the summer I shall be in Denmark and in Czechoslovakia and I hope that in this manner the chains will be broken, for he will know that I am still in Europe, and yet he will be separated from me and will be forced to find new friends and associates—and I hope other women. . . .

You ask about Bakar's brother. He is in very fine health now, and I have no more trouble. You are right about mothering boys. This was hardly such a case. You mention Arthur [Swenson] in that connection. And you are wrong in thinking that I misunderstood anything at all. I did not and I do not. I took it for granted that you were caring for a young man, just as your house was always a roosting place for all sorts of birds of passage. Nothing else ever entered my mind and it was Stella, who, in Bad Liebenstein, told me I was naive, and insisted upon saying that your relationship to Arthur was of another sort. Even then I let it drop. It did not matter to me and

even so I did not see anything one way or the other to talk about. And, with all due respect for your love of Stella, I did not always pay special attention to Stella's opinions. . . . But now that you mention it, I can only say that this mother love which lies in us women is a hell of a thing to deal with, and I suppose it causes more sting than anything else. I suppose there is no pain to equal that of an older woman for a younger man. I think that even if I knew a woman who was an enemy of mine, I would still try and spare her that pain. For it leaves scars which never quite heal.

Of course, all this has nothing to do with Bakar's brother here. I brought it up merely because you mention it. There was nothing of that kind between us. I do everything I can for the boy, and it is true that he became rather dependent upon me emotionally. But then I tried to put him on his feet, and when he refused to stand, I put him under psychoanalytic treatment like my own. And within one week he was on his own feet, resuming his regular work and turning his attention to his landlady's daughter! The next lady in sight! And now I think it is his doctor—who is a young woman—to whom his heart belongs! And in six months it will be someone else! He is in the age where he will do such things until his sex life is regulated. It wasn't me as me. It was me because I was a woman and mended his clothes and helped him when he needed it. What really broke me in the whole thing was Chatto's attitude toward me and the situation. He acted as if I were a criminal. He merely used it as a club over my head, and when I put the boy under treatment, he was bitter and hostile against me. He had nothing to suggest himself to meet the situation. He only accused me of all sorts of things. And now that the boy is again on his feet and hasn't even the interest to see me often, still Chatto is angry because I was right and proved to him that I was right.

Men are damned fools. I mean, *husbands* are damned fools. I'll never have one again, so help me God. Never again will I put my life under the influence of any man who lives. And if I ever love one, I'll see to it that a good safe distance is kept between us. I have been hurt quite enough for not only one life, but for a thousand. It reminds me of that ancient Chinese couplet:

Man reaches scarce a hundred; yet his tears  
Would fill a lifetime of a thousand years.

Well, enough wailing. I should perhaps follow the advice of old Captain Shotover in Shaw's play, *Heartbreak House*, in which he exclaims with disgust when the millionaire is sniffing because a woman has broken his heart: "Silence! Let the heart break in silence!"

I disagree with you about love and sadism etc., but I won't write more today. This is enough to occupy your time for once. My love to you, dearest Emma,

Agnes

Goldman. These letters, along with many others, are presently in the possession of her cousin, Esther Brack, of Modesto, California. We ran off copies of those we now publish, along with the others, and presented the lot to the International Institute. Since they have now been added to the other papers in the Goldman-Berkman Archives, we have not bothered to indicate the separate provenance of the few that appear below. We do record here our appreciation to Ms. Brack and to librarian Zoia Horn, our good friend, for bringing these letters to our attention.

Finally, our debt to Mollie Steimer and Senya Flechine is special. Living presently in Cuernavaca, Mexico, they have patiently tolerated our long distance queries about Yiddish phrases, supplied photographs and directed us to others, and helped with the identification of individuals. Fellow exiles of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, they are still managing, somehow, to live their principles in strange lands with "nowhere to go." They have our admiration and thanks.

*Introduction*

*Autobiographical Fragment  
and Chronology*

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and no word of him. I have been waiting all this time to write with him this book which was to bring money to continue my school [of the dance]. They write me that they are without food or fuel in Moscow. Do you know where has disappeared this "Miracle"? Or I am beginning to think I should rechristen him *Will O' The Wisp*.

Dear Sasha, how I wish you could come here [from Berlin]. I have taken a studio by the sea and could always give you a divan where you could recline and I would dance for you. Can't you come? If there is trouble with [a] passport, it might be arranged. . . .

You see, I am always ready to believe in a new "Myth," since the bolshevik one didn't turn out.

Dearest Sasha, I kiss you a thousand times and wish with all my heart you could come here. We could walk by the sea or perhaps we could go out in a little boat and sail toward the rising sun. \* With all my love,

Isadora

### EG TO AB, May 28, 1925, LONDON

Dearest,

I ought not to write you today; I feel in a rotten mood. I could not close my eyes all night because of the damned contract [for *My Disillusionment in Russia*]. I don't understand what has become of it. Certainly if you sent it to me, I should have it. . . .

The contract is not the only thing that put me into a desperate mood, it is the impenetrable icy crust of the people in this country. Even the best of them paralyze me. They are so indifferent, so God damned self-centered, nothing touches them. It's like Professor [Samuel Eliot] Morison wrote me, "I have been trying to get English students to learn something of American history with the same result as you. If only one could make the English angry. The only man who could do it was Samuel Adams when he

\* Although Berkman's letters to Isadora Duncan have evidently not survived, we do know he joined her for that walk by the sea, if not for the sail in the little boat. After her bizarre death in an auto accident, he did no more than record the fact in his diary on September 16, 1927. But a few months later he was himself in Nice, after a bitter quarrel with Emmy Eckstein, and was moved to write out his reflections about the dead woman. In his entry of January 17, 1928, he noted that he had promised her three weeks' help with her book and she had taken an apartment on the Boardwalk where they were to work together. Yet auto trips to Monte Carlo and other diversions intervened, time passed and nothing was on paper, whereupon Berkman lost patience with her and "one afternoon I just left." Though she sent after him, he was sore and refused to return. Now it all seemed so long ago: "Can't even frequent the places I did then—too expensive for my means. And Isadora is gone, poor soul. She's better off now. It was time. But she was a big woman, a great and noble character, outside of her art." Depressed by his memories and the same Boardwalk sights, Berkman put down the other side of the romantic rising-sun imagery, the sad, lonely side: "The waves sullenly dash against the rocks . . . the stupidity and senselessness of it all came strong upon me as I sat there this afternoon. Even fleeting thoughts of [self-]destruction. Yes, loneliness is a bad thing."

threw tea in the Boston harbor. And then there was a revolution." Certainly nothing makes the English snob angry, or ruffles him except the destruction of property. We sent out our appeal; we got so far one pound; there is no interest in the political, or in anything else.

I went to see Havelock Ellis today, fine old gentleman with a tremendously vivid mind, but as cold as a cucumber. The whole hour I sat in his house I felt as if something were clutching at my throat; I never met among any [other] people men and women so detached from human interest in their personal approach to people as I have met here. Ellis is one. Yet he is not that at all in his writings. In fact, he shows so much understanding and interest. But whether it is a reserve practiced for centuries, or hell knows what, the moment you come into contact with an Englishman you feel a cold breeze which holds you at a distance for miles. Or is it that I am so hungry for some human response or interest? Is it my fault? Oh, I don't know, I only know I feel rotten here not to have found one human being in eight months who cares a damn for anything outside of his own interests. I am not now thinking of the few comrades I have met in Norwich or Bristol, especially Bristol where the few really care for things outside of their own. But here in London there is positively not a soul. How is one to build up anything or feel inspired to do anything?

I also went to visit Edward Carpenter. He is of a different type, but so old in body, and even mind, he is eighty-two years old, he could not concentrate on anything for more than five minutes. There I found a situation which is interesting as a study, even if it is funny. Carpenter lives with a man whom he picked up from the gutter thirty-five years ago, Goe is his name. Everybody knows Goe. Well, the effect of Carpenter's relation to this Goe is identical to the relation of an old husband to a younger wife. Carpenter looks positively shabby in his clothes, but you should see Goe. He is dressed in the latest-fashion suit, with a fine shirt, ring on his finger, and full of his own importance. Poor Carpenter could not get a word in edgewise; Goe keeps up the conversation and keeps everybody and everything away from him. I was somewhat puzzled by Goe's talk at the station while we were waiting for Carpenter, who had gone to a nearby town to visit a niece of his. Goe told us of how many calls for money and other favors poor Ed has, and how poor Ed must be looked after. When I got to the house I realized what Goe was driving at; he evidently thought I came for something. Well, there is one thing to be said for Goe: he takes good care of Ed; the house is spotlessly clean and neat. There is another man outside of Goe, the cook. And, Edward treats Goe every bit as a man treats his younger wife. It really was funny.

But the main pathos, though screamingly comic, is the fact that the cook seems to be the lover of Goe, or at least the younger friend to compensate him for the old age of EC. Really dear, life is a circus if only one has enough sense of humor, which I do not have today.

Berkman

*The War:* America enters the War [April 1917]. Jingo Quakers and radicals. The No-War campaign and my fight against conscription. Exciting mass meetings. I break my leg and talk on crutches. Defying police and soldiers. The Revolution breaks out in Russia and I plan to go there. I am arrested for obstructing the draft [June 15, 1917]. In the Tombs. California demands my extradition in connection with the Mooney case. The Kronstadt (Russia) sailors threaten the life of the American Ambassador [David] Francis in case I am extradited to California. [Woodrow] Wilson sends a confidential messenger (Colonel [Edward M.] House) to the governor of New York. The governor refuses to extradite me. My trial for "conspiracy to obstruct the draft."

*The Atlanta Penitentiary:* Two years in the Georgia State [U.S.] prison [1917-19]. "Political worse than criminals." Conscientious objectors and Eugene V. Debs. Our chain-gang warden. I protest against an officer shooting a Negro convict in the back and killing him. Punished in the dungeon and solitary for the rest of my time. [Liberated, October 1, 1919.]

### *Emma Goldman Chronology*

Birth, Kovno (Kaunas in modern Lithuania), June 27, 1869. Girlhood and adolescence, Kovno, Popelan, Königsberg, and St. Petersburg, 1869-85. Migration to the United States, 1885. Factory worker, Rochester and New Haven, 1886-89. Marriage to Jacob Kersner, 1887. Divorce, 1888. Joined anarchists in New York City, August 15, 1889.

First speaking tour, 1890. Complicity in Berkman's attempt to kill Frick, 1892. Union Square speech and arrest for inciting to riot, August 1893. Prison on Blackwell's Island, 1893-August 1894. Nurse's training, Vienna, 1895-96. Official attempts to implicate her in the assassination of President McKinley, 1901. Midwife and nurse on the East Side, 1901-05. Publisher-editor of *Mother Earth*, 1906-17. Delegate to the Amsterdam Anarchist Congress, 1907. Chicago free-speech fight, 1908. New York free-speech fight, 1909. University of Wisconsin free-speech fight, 1910. Published her *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 1911.

San Diego free-speech fight, 1912-15. Wrote *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama*, 1914. Birth-control lectures, 1915-16. Arrest in New York for her lecture "on a medical question," February 1916. Fifteen days in the Queens County Jail, April-May 1916. Mooney defense, 1916. Organized the No-Conscription League, May 1917. Arrested with Berkman for "conspiracy to induce persons not to register," June 15, 1917. Trial, June 27-July 9, 1917. Missouri State Prison (Jefferson City), 1918. Celebrated her fiftieth birthday in her cell, June 27, 1919. Liberated, September 28, 1919.