



FROM THE BAG

This madness will not stop, and this bloody nightmare of hell will not cease until the workers of Germany, of France, of Russia and of England will wake up out of their drunken sleep; will clasp each other's hands in brotherhood and will drown the bestial chorus of war agitators and the hoarse cry of capitalist hyenas with the mighty cry of labor, "Proletarians of all countries, unite!"

Rosa Luxemburg

The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy
(The "Junius" Pamphlet) 128 (1919)

pictured: Rosa Luxemburg.



THE PRICE OF INTOLERANCE

Graham Wallas

Usually, for each issue of the *Green Bag*, we limit ourselves to just one dip into the bottomless well of old works worthy of new looks. But when this essay came to our attention, it seemed too full of thought-provoking, timely timelessness not to share promptly. (We were committed to *The Dog Andrew*, see pages 197-211, so we spread it over two issues to make room for this.) It first appeared in the January 1920 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Yes, there are a few archaisms. And yes, it's unlikely anyone will agree with every single one of the author's observations and arguments. But we know that our readers will be both (a) able to cope with the former, and (b) comfortable – indeed, happy – dealing with the latter. All of the footnotes, illustrations, and captions were added by us.

– *The Editors*

I AM AN ENGLISHMAN who has visited America at intervals during the last twenty-two years. I have a very real affection for America, and an interest in her social and political development, which has become more intense now that the war has left her the undisputed financial and industrial leader of the world. But in November, 1919, after some months' stay, I find myself surprised and troubled by a fact as to the existence of which all my American friends agree, and which may, I believe, indicate a serious danger both for America and for the world.

On earlier visits I had noticed that, in spite of a wide-spread habit of personal good-nature, majorities in America are apt to deal rather summarily with minorities. But this time it seems that the whole tradition of

Graham Wallas was, at the time he wrote this article, a political scientist at the University of London.

political toleration has been broken: that freedom of speech and writing and meeting has become an open question: and that many important newspapers and politicians, supported by a large body of public opinion, approach that question with a presumption against freedom.

The Chicago *Evening Post* said the other day, "Just now, in popular parlance, a Bolshevik is anybody, from a dynamiter to the man who wears a straw hat in September. In more enlightened circles, Bolshevism includes paternalism, socialism, syndicalism, and anarchism, or any other questionable *ism*."¹ The words "radical" and "red" are being used in an equally loose and general way.

I am told that, at the New York picture-theatres, no portrait is more heartily applauded than that of Judge Gary.² At a recent meeting of the Iron and Steel Institute, Judge Gary referred to "Bolshevism" as "a disease," and said, "There is only one way to treat this disease, and that is, to stamp it out." Judge Gary went on to explain that he relied on "reasonable laws wisely administered," and that it is only the "slinking, desperate, murderous Bolsheviki" whom "the Secret Service Department should detect and expose, and the iron hand of justice should punish as they deserve."³ But the picture audiences seem to applaud him as the man who is determined to stamp out Bolshevism in the larger sense of the Chicago *Evening Post*.

Judge Gary's popularity reminds me, indeed, of a picture in *Punch* in 1903, when certain respectable English Nonconformists were refusing to pay taxes for denominational religious instruction. Charles Keene then made an admirable sketch of a Hyde Park politician glorifying Mr. Joseph Chamberlain as, the man "who is going to have all these conscientious objectors vaccinated."⁴

¹ We regret to report that for these lines we could not find a source any more ancient than Wallas's own use of them. Of course, our resources, internal as well as external, are limited, and superior cite-checkers might well be more successful.

² Elbert H. Gary – known as "Judge" from his days as a judge in DuPage County, Illinois – was, at the time this article was published, chairman of U.S. Steel and one of the most prominent industrialists in the world. Stephen H. Cutcliffe, *Gary, Elbert Henry*, AMERICAN NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY ONLINE (Feb. 2000), www.anb.org/articles/10/10-00617.html.

³ *Judge Gary on the Industrial Conference – His Stand Endorsed by the Steel Men*, THE COMMERCIAL & FINANCIAL CHRONICLE, Oct. 25, 1919, at 1574 (the passages quoted by Wallas are slightly different in this version).

⁴ Alas, we could not find a pre-Wallas source for this line either. Wallas's memory may

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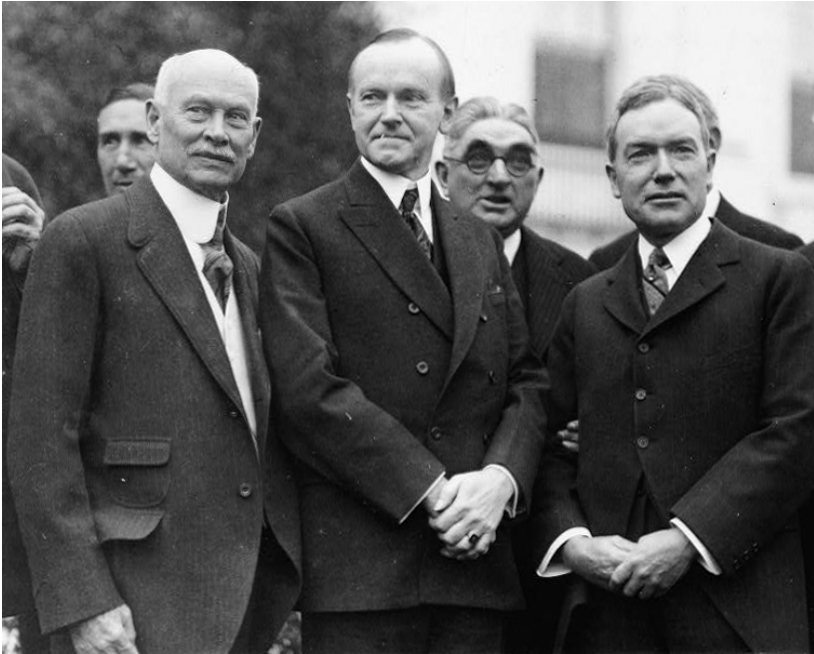
This temper is especially dangerous, when, as at present, men are disputing about new problems which cannot be solved by any existing political or economic expedient, and which require the patient invention of new expedients. In America, as throughout the whole world, the extended use of mechanical energy has transformed human relationships. National isolation has been abolished, and we are only beginning to invent means of international coöperation. Within each nation the size of the industrial unit constantly increases, and the chance of a workman setting up a business of his own constantly becomes less. The idea of breaking up the larger industrial units, as advocated in 1912 by Mr. Wilson's *New Freedom*,⁵ has been silently dropped, and no new idea for dealing with the situation can claim any general acceptance.

Therefore, behind the mutual suspicion of employers and workmen, lies an unsolved and extraordinarily complex problem. No one, except Judge Gary and Mr. W.Z. Foster,⁶ seems quite whole-hearted in defending either the existing system, or state-control, or trade-union control, or any definite combination of, or substitute for, the three principles. Everyone acknowledges that we require efficiency in production, a fair distribution of the product, and a reasonable degree of self-determination in the producer; but no one knows how we are to obtain what we require. This admitted ignorance of the right path in industrial organization is accompanied by certain profound intellectual changes, which have undermined the authority of religion and custom. And the rapidly increasing concentration of European and American populations in noisy streets and noisier factories, has made popular political discussion, except among tired men meeting after working hours in expensive halls, almost impossible.

have slipped here. Charles Keene drew his last *Punch* cartoon in 1890. He died in 1891, 12 years before he is supposed to have made the admirable sketch to which Wallas refers. See JOHN HOLT SCHOOLING, *A PEEP INTO "PUNCH"* 220 (1900).

⁵ This is a reference to President Woodrow Wilson's approach to competition regulation. See WOODROW WILSON, *THE NEW FREEDOM: A CALL FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF THE GENEROUS ENERGIES OF A PEOPLE* (1918).

⁶ William Z. Foster was a prominent figure in the organized labor movement. He led a massive but unsuccessful steelworkers' strike in 1919. He was also a supporter of the Bolshevik-led revolution in Russia. Maurice Isserman, *Foster, William Z.*, *AMERICAN NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY ONLINE* (Feb. 2000), www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00239.html.

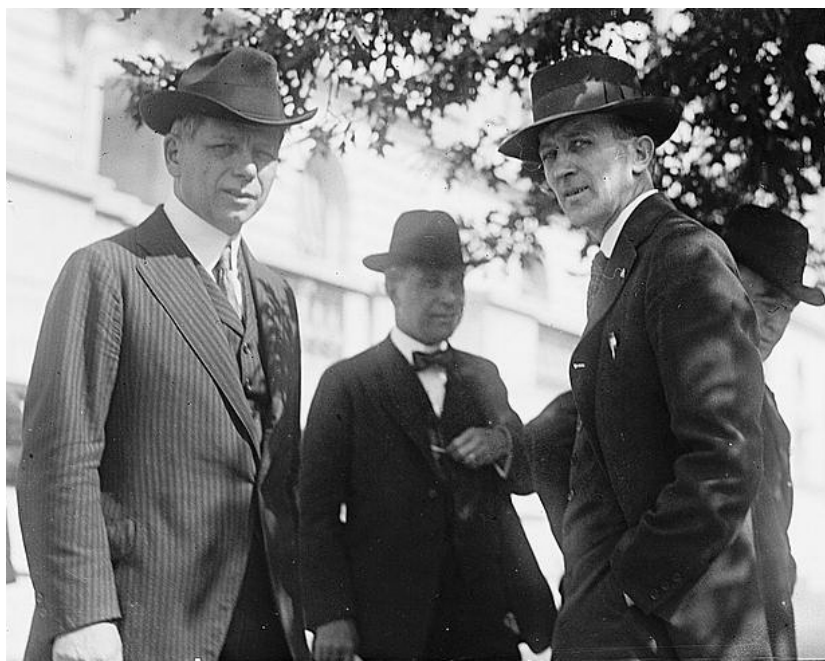


Left to right: Elbert H. Gary, Calvin Coolidge, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1925).

When one realizes this, the stale old arguments for free speech and free thought seem to acquire a new and urgent significance.

What men need now, all over the world, and especially in America, is not only permission for free discussion, but a recognition that the positive encouragement of free discussion, and the provision of practical opportunities for it, are vital necessities. The biggest and most strident newspaper is no adequate substitute for free discussion. One cannot argue with a newspaper, and the increasing size and complexity of the industrial unit has transformed, by division of labor between the proprietor and the staff, the whole conditions of journalism. No one now believes that a newspaper article always represents the serious and independent thought of the writer. A distant "boss" may have telephoned a curt order to the editor, which the editor passed on to the writer. In the leading articles, and even the news columns, of some of the great New York or London daily papers, any man who is himself a professional writer constantly feels this. In paragraph after paragraph the professional eye misses those signs of exploring thought

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William Z. Foster (right foreground) with three unidentified men (n.d.).

and considered statement which mark the effort of veracity. The writer, one feels, has merely been told to “boost” one cause or person, or to “knock” another.

If I had space, I might deal with the effect which this difficulty in securing serious and fruitful discussion is likely to produce upon party politics, upon law and order, and upon the workman’s or employer’s sense that he is being fairly treated by the community. But here I propose to deal only with its probable effect on the work of the professed political and social thinker.

Mr. Lowell, in his report as President of Harvard College for 1916-1917, said, “Experience has proved, and probably no one would now deny, that knowledge can advance, or at least can advance most rapidly, only by means of an unfettered search for truth on the part of those who devote their lives to seeking it in their respective fields, and by complete freedom in imparting to their pupils the truth that they have found.”⁷

⁷ *Academic Freedom*, 26 THE HARVARD GRADUATES’ MAGAZINE 518, 524, 525 (Mar. 1918).

Those who devote their lives to seeking truth in the field of politics and sociology require food and lodging, and help, and encouragement, if they are to do their work. When Socrates was asked, after his conviction, to suggest his own punishment, he suggested the daily provision of a plain dinner for himself in the Athenian town-hall. The jury thought him either insane, or guilty of an insolent paradox. We can see that he was making a moderate and sensible proposal. The need for the intellectual “midwifery” of Socrates is greater now than it was in the fifth century before Christ at Athens. But if Socrates, or Aristotle, or Locke, or Bentham, should be living now, say, at the age of twenty-three, in a great American city, conscious of the power and the will to undertake on behalf of mankind the “intolerable disease” of political thought, how would he be received?

We recognize, as the contemporaries of Socrates did not, our dependence for material wealth on the natural sciences, and men now feel respect, and even gratitude, for any signs of preëminent genius and devotion in those sciences. When William Thomson (afterwards Lord Kelvin) won the Smith’s Prize for mathematics in Cambridge University, one of his examiners said to another, “The fact is that you and I are just about fit to black young Thomson’s boots.”⁸ But political science, because it deals with human beings, inevitably arouses human passions. A young political genius would, by the necessity of his being, extend his thinking to include every man, woman, and child whom any proposed political or social arrangement affects; and that fact would make him, as Wedderburn in 1776 said of the young Bentham, “dangerous” in the eyes of those who think in terms of a class or a profession.⁹ Even if so conservative a thinker as Alexander Hamilton was in 1780 were now alive in America, he would certainly be delated¹⁰ by someone as a “Bolshevik.”

⁸ And this is another line for which we could not find Wallas’s source.

⁹ See JEREMY BENTHAM, 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS AND LEGISLATION 7-8 n.* (new and corrected ed. 1823) (responding – with a combination of cleverness and civility that is, unfortunately, too long-winded to reproduce here – to the critique by Alexander Wedderburn, one of the great figures of the late-18th-century English bar).

¹⁰ We confess: We had to look it up. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “delate” means, “To accuse, bring a charge against, impeach; to inform against; to denounce to a judicial tribunal, esp. that of the Scotch ecclesiastical courts.” One of the OED’s examples is from Boswell quoting Johnson: “If a minister be thus left at liberty to delate sinners from the pulpit . . . he may often blast the innocent.”

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In 1915 I reviewed for the *Harvard Quarterly Journal of Economics* an extraordinarily interesting and penetrating book on Imperial Germany, by Professor Thorstein Veblen, then of the University of Missouri.¹¹ His analysis of the causes of German aggression was so effective, that the United States Bureau of Public Information suggested, in 1918, its use as anti-German propaganda. The director of the bureau did not then know that, some months before, the Postmaster General had forbidden the transmission of the book by post.¹² It is still, as I write, barred, and the publisher, who has repeatedly asked for the reason, has received no answer. The whole story seems to show, if history had not already shown it in every country and every century, that those officers of the Secret Service Department on whom Judge Gary depends for “stamping out Bolshevism” are apt to be almost incredibly stupid when they deal with the censorship of serious and sincere thought.

If, therefore, the American community had now to deal with a young Bentham, whose promise of preëminence in the human sciences was as great as was William Thomson’s in the natural sciences, it is pretty certain that he would be suspected and abused. If he had something less than Bentham’s dogged courage, and did not, like Bentham, inherit a competence from his father, he would probably be silenced. Lesser men might either choose more profitable occupations than that of political thinker, or might think and write on timid and conventional lines. As a fact, in spite of numerous and important exceptions, the great mass of American writing on social and political subjects has seemed to many outside critics timid and conventional. And some American leaders in industry and finance and politics – men who would never dream of employing a timid and conventional chemist, or engineer, or surgeon – are, I honestly believe, content that it should be so.

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¹¹ *Veblen’s Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, 30 Q.J. ECON. 179 (Nov. 1915).

¹² See DAVID M. KENNEDY, *OVER HERE: THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND AMERICAN SOCIETY* 77-78 (1980; 2004 anniversary ed.); Brenda Roth, *Burleson, Albert Sidney*, in *THE UNITED STATES IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA* 114-15 (1995; 2012 ed.) (Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed.).