

Emma Goldman

I am writing from Russia, to which I have been deported under the Sedition Act, passed by Congress in 1918. This law made it a crime to criticize the government or the Constitution by making a speech or in writing. Under this law and the Espionage Act, 1500 people were arrested. A few of them were friends, but most of them were people with whom I have never associated. A few of us were then deported to Russia after our release. This only proves what I have been saying – that America is not a democracy, but rather an autocracy, which means rule by the wealthy. The wealthy businessmen in our country did not like what I was saying about their exploitation of their workers and profiting on the misery of the majority of Americans. Because I hold views that are different from theirs, they kicked me out of the country. I'd like to tell you about my views and why I feel they are important for helping America achieve true greatness.

First of all I'm an anarchist, a political view that is always misunderstood. Most people think we believe in no government so we can run around doing what ever we want to do. I am constantly being accused of being a Russian revolutionary trying to overthrow the government. This could not be more untrue because I have denounced as corrupt the Bolshevik movement in Russia. They have violated and moved away from Marx's views by becoming power hungry and dictatorial themselves. As an anarchist, I believe there should be no government, police, or laws. Instead our society should be a free association of its members. This means people would choose to work together, not be forced to live under rules they did not make. In order for this to work, people must have strong morals.

With your group, pause in your reading to discuss and answer these questions:

1. Is this character real or fictitious? What is her current situation?
2. What is Goldman's view of capitalism? Provide an example of why she feels this way.
3. What is Goldman's political and economic system called? Why does she like it?

Right now our society does not have good morals. We allow workers to be exploited and starved while the factory owners grow fat, waste their money on expensive items museums would crave to have. They are selfish, greedy, and ultimately murderous as so many laborers die in their factories from exhaustion, unsafe machines, mal-nutrition, unsafe housing, etc. The morality of our community must be awakened. This is where we anarchists run into trouble with the laws. When we attempt to point out our views through labor strikes, the police break up these peaceful demonstrations with night sticks and bullets. I'll admit not all of our strikes are peaceful. I give speech after speech trying to urge the laborers to be patient. However, it is hard to contain their anger when they risk going on strike from a job that is barely feeding their families. They are frustrated beyond patience. Their families' lives and their honor as fathers and husbands are at stake. When we ask them to strike, it is a huge risk for them. They face threats of being fired, losing their housing, or going to

jail. So, it is not surprising if some of our strikers are driven to violence. However, that is not the message we are trying to get out. Anarchists are not advocating violence. It is the industrial capitalists who drive our laborers to desperation that leads to this violence. They are the immoral people, not us.

With your group, pause in your reading to discuss and answer these questions:

4. What is Goldman's position on violence in protests?
5. List two possible reasons for the violence according to her.
6. List 2-3 reasons the strikers are frustrated with their working conditions.

The other issue that gets me in trouble is my fighting for the rights of women. Women are suffering at the hands of their fathers, husbands, and employers, but are powerless to stop it. They have no legal rights to wages, property, or even their own bodies. I fought for years for women to have the right to vote. This is in the process of being ratified and it will be a great accomplishment for our movement. However, it is only the first step. Women do not earn nearly as much as men do for the work they do in the factories. The main economic problem is two-fold: first, marriage as it now stands is not a mutual relationship but rather an exploitative relationship where the man completely controls the woman; second, they have no control over how many children they have because birth control is illegal. The conservatives in our country tell me if we distribute birth control to women they will become "loose" morally and sexual relations will no longer be pure and chaste within marriage. I say they are wrong. The main concern I have is for married women. The average married woman is having six children. One third of the married women are having eight or more. This is dangerous to the woman physically, but also hinders them economically. Women should be able to control how many children she chooses to have for her physical and economic well being. They should also be free to leave a relationship that is not mutually beneficial for her. If she is being controlled economically, politically, and socially by her husband, she is in bondage. Therefore, I support ending legal marriage and instead propose mutual agreements between couples that are not bound by legal restrictions.

With your group, pause in your reading to discuss and answer these questions:

7. What is Goldman's position on marriage?
8. Why does Goldman see birth control as such an important issue?
9. Why is Goldman willing to break the law (Alien and Sedition Acts) to speak about these issues? What is her motive?