PHILIP GROSSER
ALCATRAZ - UNCLE SAM'S DEVIL'S ISLAND
EXPERIENCES OF A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR IN AMERICA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Philip Grosser was sent to Alcatraz because he didn't want to murder anyone, even on government orders. He was a Boston anarchist and anti-militarist who refused to be drafted into the slaughter of World War One. He was, in his own words, 'not a very good example to other drafted men', and stayed a stubborn rebel who could not be turned into a soldier. As an anarchist he denied the government's right to run or throw away his life. For that reason he had to face the inhumanity of authority defied.

Grosser's account of his time inside is an early exposé of official brutality in America's most notorious prison. It's also a powerful account of resistance and endurance.

The original pamphlet was first published by Grosser's friends after his death in the 1930s. It's been expanded with letters by, to and about him from the Alexander Berkman papers at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. They shed a little more light on the life of a rebel who could be counted on in the struggle for human freedom.

"Phil was one of the finest comrades it has been my good fortune to meet. And well I remember his stand during the war. I know all the humiliation and tortures he had to go through because of his loyalty to a high ideal." – Alexander Berkman

ISBN-13: 9781873605240
ISBN-10: 1873605242

Kate Sharpley Library
BM Hurricane, London,
WC1N 3XX, UK

PMB 820, 2425 Channing
Way, Berkeley CA 94704,
USA
www.katesharpleylibrary.net

ISBN 978-1873605240
00300
9 781873 605240

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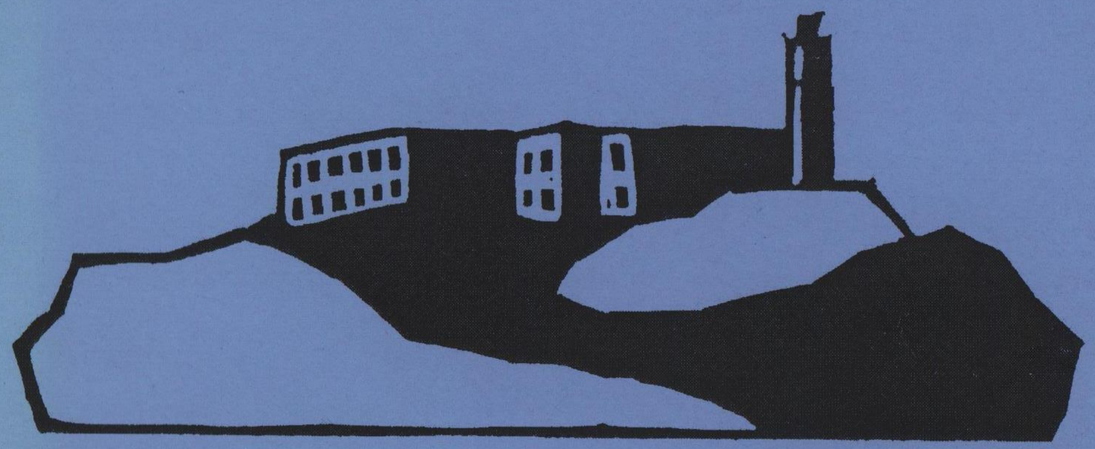

UNCLE SAM'S DEVIL'S ISLAND

EXPERIENCES OF A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR IN AMERICA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PHILIP GROSSER

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ALCATRAZ

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EXPERIENCES OF A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR IN AMERICA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

PHILIP GROSSER

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Philip Grosser
Alcatraz – Uncle Sam's Devil's Island : experiences of a Conscientious Objector in America during the First World War
First "Published by a group of friends" in 1933 [actually, it was probably 1934] as 'Uncle Sam's Devil's Island : experiences of a Conscientious Objector in America during the World War'. Printed Boston, Mass.: The Excelsior Press, Inc., 1933.

Expanded second edition published by the Kate Sharpley Library, 2007.

ISBN-13: 9781873605240 ISBN-10: 1873605242

Kate Sharpley Library
BM Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX, UK
PMB 820, 2425 Channing Way, Berkeley CA 94704, USA
www.katesharpleylibrary.net
A regular bulletin and a list of our publications are available from us. Please contact us for more details. 06-06; 12-06 [UK]

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Grosser, Philip
Alcatraz - Uncle Sam's Devil's Island : experiences of a conscientious objector in America during the First World War. - (Anarchist library series ; 16)
1.Grosser, Philip - Imprisonment 2.United States Penitentiary, Alcatraz Island, California 3.World War, 1914-1918 - Conscientious objectors - United States 4.Prisons - California - San Francisco - History - 20th century
I.Title
355.2'24'092
ISBN-13: 9781873605240
ISBN-10: 1873605242

What is Anarchism?
Anarchism is a political theory which opposes the State and capitalism. It says that people with economic power (capitalists) and those with political power (politicians of all stripes left, right or centre) use that power for their own benefit, and not (like they claim) for the benefit of society. Anarchism says that neither exploitation nor government is natural or necessary, and that a society based on freedom, mutual aid and equal shares of the good things in life would work better than this one.
Anarchism is also a political movement. Anarchists take part in day-to-day struggles (against poverty, oppression of any kind, war etc) and also promote the idea of comprehensive social change. Based on bitter experience, they warn that new 'revolutionary' bosses are no improvement: 'ends' and 'means' (what you want and how you get it) are closely connected.

Introduction

Philip Grosser was sent to Alcatraz because he didn't want to murder anyone, even on government orders. He was a Boston anarchist and anti-militarist who refused to be drafted into the slaughter of World War One. He was, in his own words, 'not a very good example to other drafted men', and stayed a stubborn rebel who could not be turned into a soldier. As an anarchist he denied the government's right to run or throw away his life. For that reason he had to face the inhumanity of authority defied.

World War One was the first total war, industrial killing carried out under slogans about civilisation against barbarism; a power struggle proclaimed a crusade to make the world safe for democracy. Democratic states criminalised disobedience or even disagreement: freedom's just another world for doing what you're told, apparently. The start of the war had been met by the individual resistance of conscientious objectors, but at the end came mutinies in France and revolutions in Russia and Germany. This only increased the intensity of government repression in America. The end of the war against Germany made no difference against radicals, foreigners, and bad thinking. The 'deportations delirium' or 'Red scare' was one of those repressive episodes in American history where the forces of order hunt out the enemy within, real or imagined (in addition to the state of siege African Americans have had to survive).

In December 1920, after three years in prison and not one day of being a soldier, Philip Grosser was released. In less spectacular ways, he kept up the struggle for freedom, keeping hope in a society without the state, offering solidarity where it was needed, especially to those still behind the bars. He may not have been a good example to soldiers, but in the big and little things of life, Philip Grosser is an inspiration to anyone looking for a free society.

KSL, January 2007

Thanks
To comrades at the Kate Sharpley Library for providing the original pamphlet (and answering questions).

To the comrade who typed the original pamphlet and The Great Corrector for proof-reading it for this edition.

To colleagues at the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam for providing copies of letters from the Alexander Berkman Papers, and for permission to reproduce them here. Contact them if you want to do anything with the letters beyond the usual 'fair use'.

To the friends of the library who've paid for the printing.

Notes on the text

The original pamphlet is reproduced with no changes to the text apart from obvious typos being corrected and a fancy dropped capital being replaced.

The letters (in the appendix at the end, not included in the original edition) have not had their spelling etc corrected. Any additions are put in square brackets. Hand- and typewritten text have been set in different typefaces, and we've tried to give a feel of how the letters were laid out, but if you need to know for sure, you ought to look at the originals. The folder numbers are:

10 Block, Harry. 1931, 1933-1934.

40 Grosser, Philip B. 1926-1932.

53 Phillips, James. 1933. With manuscript of an in memoriam of Phillip B. Grosser.

Further reading

This is not a biography of Philip Grosser. If anyone wants to write one, it would be good to get hold of his FBI file. Also, research in Boston might find evidence of what he was doing after his release, especially if he was involved in the Sacco-Vanzetti Defence campaign. As well as the International Institute of Social History, there are letters by Philip Grosser in the James B. McNamara correspondence at Penn State and The James B. and John J. McNamara Papers, Archives & Rare Books Department, University of Cincinnati. The holdings list for the latter collection has a good introduction to the *Los Angeles Times* bombing case:

http://www.libraries.uc.edu/libraries/arb/archives/inventories/mcnamara.pdf

For more on the history of American anarchism, good places to start are *Anarchist voices*, or *The Modern School Movement* by Paul Avrich. There is no biography of Alexander Berkman available, but *Life of an anarchist*, edited by Gene Fellner, collects some of his writing. A facsimile edition of *The Blast* gives a lot of information on the start of the Mooney-Billings campaign. Peter Brock has edited *These strange criminals: an anthology of prison memoirs by Conscientious Objectors from the Great War to the Cold War* (which Philip Grosser appears in). Two relevant Kate Sharpley Library compilations are *Under the yoke of the state: selected Anarchist responses to prison and crime, v.1, 1886-1929* edited by the Dawn Collective and *No war but the class war: libertarian anti-militarism then & now* edited by Anna Key. A good work on the 'deportations delirium' is *Aliens and dissenters : Federal suppression of radicals, 1903-1933* by William Preston.

PHILIP GROSSER
(1890-1933)

Friend of the lonely
Friend of the needy
Lover of truth
Hater of hypocrisy
Irreconcilable enemy of the State
Champion of peace
Enemy of war
Enemy of money-changers
Consistent disbeliever
in private property
Uncompromising indefatigable
fighter for righteousness
AN ANARCHIST.

Harry Block

PHILIP GROSSER

This is the story of a heretic, who trod that pathway of pain hollowed out by the feet of nonconformists throughout the ages. His heresy,—in 1917 the heresy,—consisted of a passionate belief that the common people of all lands were brothers, and that it was wrong to have any traffic with the business of slaughtering them. (A quaint idea, nineteen centuries old.)

If you had met him you would have seen a shabbily dressed working man, who would speak to you in foreign accent and idiom, but in a vocabulary enriched by reading good literature and drama. As he talked a sudden sense of humor flashed over his dark face in a transforming smile, as some grim prison horror was lightened by a touch of irony.

He was afraid of heroics, scornful of pity, resentful of invasion of his personal privacy, reticent of intellectual or spiritual revealment. We pressed him one night for the philosophy that impelled his extremity of endurance, and at last forced out of him the simple statement, "Well, if you must have it, it comes down to this: I figure that there are times and occasions when a man either has to show down or show up."

Unless you are prepared, for whatever faith is in you, to undergo the crucifixion of the chaining up, or tread the path of insanity in the black eternity of the dungeon, or in the cage, I do not think you are entitled to condemn his faith. It is at least a living one which will take a man voluntarily through hell.

The events set forth in this remarkable narrative form a chapter of American history which ought to be preserved, as a lesson and a warning. The facts speak for themselves: and the writer's sincerity is evident in every line.

Philip Grosser was punished as a soldier who violated military regulations, not as what he really was, a civilian who refused to be a soldier. His courage should be an inspiration to those who come after.

Alice Stone Blackwell

August, 1931

Philip Grosser was one of the finest comrades it has been my good fortune to meet. And well I remember his stand during the war. I know all the humiliation and tortures he had to go through because of his loyalty to a high ideal. He was a *man*, in the full sense of the word. About two years ago he had sent me the story of his imprisonment as a conscientious objector—the steadfast refusal to participate in things military in any shape or form, his imprisonment and terrible treatment.

The story is powerful, sincere and strongly written. It is an object lesson in the struggle of a heroic soul against man's inhumanity to man, a valuable document, both historically and socially.

It is the greatest condemnation of present conditions that men like Phil are driven to death.

May his memory remain green and his vital life and struggle be an inspiration to us all.

Alexander Berkman

Nov. 5, 1933

Many readers of the Metropolitan press, when they were confronted with the headline, 'Man leaped in front of fast running elevated train,' and then read the small print in detail, shuddered when they saw the name Philip Grosser. Had his picture appeared alongside the news item, more readers, though they were not intimate with him, would have known him.

Philip Grosser was a familiar figure in the city of Boston. He was a frequent visitor at the Boston Public Library, and often attended public lectures and meetings. Usually he sat by himself, taking a side seat, and seldom made himself heard. He could easily be recognized by his fast pace, by his demure expression,

and also by his attire,—baggy trousers and a coat of different color and quality. A working man, it was his policy to remain in that social stratum.

To readers who followed the liberal movement of this country the name Philip Grosser brought to mind the man who was a conscientious objector. It was then that he showed his mettle. When the President of the United States, was reelected on the popular slogan that he kept the people out of war, plunged the country into war soon after his election, Philip Grosser refused to join the army. He contended that war was of no benefit in general, and detrimental to the working man in particular. He was dragged from one prison camp to another, from one Federal penitentiary to another, spent weeks in solitary confinement and on bread and water, but his spirit was not daunted. He would not bear arms and he did not. The Christian Government lost to a solitary pagan, a radical of Jewish extraction. His stand on the Great World War was his main achievement by which he will be remembered.

Among his inmates he also was known as the indefatigable friend in need. It was not at all difficult for him to carry wood from one end of the city to make a needy family warm. And he was ready to donate and go out to collect donations to aid anyone in need. Being in jail, he never forgot the befriended ones he left behind. He kept a correspondence with them, and on holidays never failed to send them a token of cheer.

But the strong Philip was human after all. With the bursting of the American prosperity bubble, with the millions of unemployed starving and living on scavenging refuse, and he himself being unable to meet his immediate needs he, in defiance to God and society, delivered his spirit to God and his mutilated body to the latter.

If Messiah, Kingdom Come, or the Socialist millennium shall ever come, when, as the Prophet predicted, swords will be beaten into ploughs and modern bullets into gew-gaws, Philip Grosser will then be blazoned as one of the martyrs who hoped and worked for a better Mankind.

Harry Block

UNCLE SAM'S DEVIL'S ISLAND

I was never a soldier, yet I spent three years of my life in military prisons. After I registered for the draft as an objector to war on political grounds, I refused to submit to a physical examination for military purposes and refused to sign an enlistment and assignment card. Instead of being tried for violation of the war-time conscription act, which was a Federal civil offence, I was turned over to the military and was subjected to all forms of punishment as an erring soldier, not as a civilian who refused to participate in a war waged "to make the world safe for democracy."

My name was called among the first five per cent of the draft quota in August, 1917. The military machine was not quite ready at that time, and the local Draft Board did not know what to do with me when I reported to them and told them that I was opposed to war and that I would not participate in military life; that to be examined physically for military purposes was to me the same as a military order and that I refused to submit to it. Chairman Burroughs of Local No. 5 Draft Board, Boston, told me that my case would be turned over to the Federal District Attorney. A few days later I reported to the Federal District Attorney and submitted to arrest for violation of the conscript act. I was released on a five hundred dollar bond to await the action of the Federal Grand Jury. Provost Marshall General Crowder, however, defined the draft act so that a man could be automatically inducted into the "selective" army, and in December, 1917, I was notified to report for military service, that I was a soldier under the automatic ruling of General Crowder, that failure to report according to notification received constituted desertion, and desertion in time of war was punishable by death. I still refused to obey the military call and surrendered to the Federal District Attorney. He in turn notified the military, and a soldier from the Irvington Street Armory, Boston, with fixed bayonet on a rifle, was sent to the Federal Building to bring me in as a deserter.

The desertion charge was not pressed, and I was transferred to Ft. Banks, Boston Harbor. Arriving at the harbor fort the guard took me to the guard house, yelled out, "Corporal of the Guard, one prisoner." A Corporal came out and answered "Turn him in." Next morning I refused to obey military orders and was put in solitary confinement on bread and water diet and tried by a special court-martial. Before being sentenced, however, I was transferred, not as a prisoner, to Ft. Andrews, Boston Harbor, where my objections to the military were to be overcome with kindness. Lt. Stanley G. Barker, the officer of tact,

was to take charge of me. After being in the guard house at Andrews, not as a prisoner, the officer of tact decided that the situation was impossible. I refused to don the uniform of a soldier, refused to stand in military formation and behaved in general as a civilian in a military post in time of war. I was not a very good example to other drafted men. An agent provocateur, posing as a Conscientious Objector, was placed with me in the guard house. He talked about blowing up the place, running away from the Island and other silly stuff. I was not taken in on that and the so-called CO (Conscientious Objector) suddenly disappeared. Immediately thereafter Lt. Barker and Post Adjutant Lt. Chase came to the guard house, searched me, took away all my letters, newspaper clippings, the book "Under Fire" by Henri Barbusse, and placed me under arrest by order of the Northeastern Department without preferring specific charges against me. All the prisoners in the guard house were ordered not to talk to me, and the order on the guard report was that I shouldn't be allowed to leave my cell unless a non-commissioned officer accompanied me. So to be taken from my solitary cell to the wash room in the same building a Corporal or Sergeant had to be my valet. For about ten weeks I underwent all forms of torture. I was dragged with a rope around my neck to the Quartermaster's Office to be given a pair of government shoes. I was beaten with a rifle butt. A couple of soldiers used to carry me out to stand in military formations, and when the soldiers were not holding on to me, I used to sit down on the parade ground and spoil the whole show. I was chained by my hands to the bars of my cell. My arms were stretched upwards till I had to stand on tiptoe. The blood was pushed back into my muscles and shoulders. Besides the twisters were tightened so that I could not move. For nineteen hours I was not allowed to go to the toilet. At intervals the Officer of the Day, Lt. Carpenter, came to ask me whether I'd submit to military authority, and upon my refusal he would order the Sergeant to leave me in my misery. After the first nineteen hours in chains, the Commandant, Lt.-Col. Ayers, ordered that the chaining to the bars should be three hours off and three hours on, day and night. All my belongings were removed from the cell, the straw sack taken out and the three hours I was off the chains I had to rest on the iron bunk with nothing to lie on and no blankets to cover up with. Between the cold and the chaining up, I did not sleep for nights.

On April 25, 1918, I was taken before a court-martial, charged and found guilty of the following military crimes:

"Refusing to obey a lawful command of Lt. Stanley G. Barker to go to work.

"Saying in the presence of officers and enlisted men that I would not obey any military orders.

"Refusing to stand at attention when ordered to do so by Lt. Carpenter.

"Attempting to create mutiny in the United States Army, by writing letters to other objectors, and urging them to stand fast, and not to submit to military authority."

My punishment, according to Court-Martial Order No. 152, Northeastern Department, Boston, was:

"To be dishonorably discharged from the service, to forfeit all pay and allowances due and to become due, and to be confined at hard labor for *Thirty Years* at such place as the reviewing authorities may direct."

The place of confinement was designated at Ft. Jay, Governor's Island, New York. On June 11, 1918, chained to another prisoner, who was found guilty of desertion and of throwing a live cat into a hot furnace and whose punishment was, four years imprisonment, I was brought to "Castle Bill", as the military prison at Ft. Jay is known in the army. My stay here was not of long duration. The place getting overcrowded, one hundred fifty of us were put "in irons" and, after a three day-and-night travel being chained, we arrived at Ft. Leavenworth military prison.

The mistreatment of the COs and the abuse of all other military prisoners at Leavenworth, with the resulting "prisoners' general strike" of February, 1919, is a story by itself. The Commandant blamed the revolt of the general prisoners on the Objectors, and soon after the strike all Objectors were removed to a stockade which was connected with the prison. We were practically left to do as we damned pleased, so on May 1, 1919, some of us even celebrated the International Workers' Holiday. The lining of our prison caps was red, so we turned our caps inside out, and carrying a few magazine photographs of Lenin and Trotzky and singing revolutionary songs, we went round and round the stockade enclosure. The guards notified the Commandant and he was running with a dozen officers, and told us not to be parading. We promised, and that was that.

Some of the boys imprisoned had newspaper experience. Many of them had office work assigned to them by the prison authorities and had access to typewriters, and spontaneously a crude sheet appeared for general distribution among the prisoners. It was called *"Wire City Weekly"*, one of the numerous underground Bolshevik weeklies in America, circulation subterranean, printed

in the United States Disciplinary Barracks, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. Somehow the Department of Justice got hold of a copy and immediately an agent came to fort, with full power to unearth the printing press. Of course they couldn't find a press because there wasn't any. The *"Wire City Weekly"* was made almost in the Commandant's office, on government paper and on typewriters owned by the United States Army Quartermaster Corps. Col. Rice, Commandant of Leavenworth military prison, got good and sore and decided that he had about enough of the slackers. Officers were heard to say with great sincerity that they cursed the day that Conscientious Objectors were ever sent to them. Col. Rice obtained permission from the War Department to get rid of all the undesirable prisoners. In June, 1919, thirty one prisoners and myself were transferred from the disciplinary barracks to the post guard house, and at two o'clock the following morning we were called out and some of us were chained in pairs by the wrists and others were in addition shackled in twos by the ankles. We were taken to a side track where a [of] couple cars were ready for us. The commissioned and non-commissioned officers accompanying us wouldn't tell us our destination. "Sealed orders," they claimed. To outside inquirers, however, they gave the information that we were a gang of German prisoners being transferred to a concentration camp. We were in "irons" all the time, confined in the cars from the morning we were placed at Leavenworth until we reached Oakland, California, where we were taken to Ft. Mason docks, and placed aboard a government boat to sail to "Uncle Sam's Own Devil's Island." At all stations, windows and doors of our cars were locked, and guards were posted to watch us. At railway junctions, where transfer to other lines had to be made, our cars were shifted to make the proper connections. Four train seats were allotted to each pair of convicts, and by having two vacant seats facing us we managed to fix up a "comfortable" sleeping place. If my partner, who happened to be an Oxford University graduate, forgot in his sleep that he was Uncle Sam's passenger and wanted to turn in his sleep he had to drag me along. The first day of our journey I suffered from diarrhea, and my partner had to go along with me quite often, for the bracelets were not taken off for any purpose whatsoever. The trip from Leavenworth to Alcatraz took us three days and three nights.

Alcatraz Island is a 12 acre rock at the mouth of the Golden Gate, capped with a white "house of silence." The fascination of the horrible clings about the misty Gibraltar whose history reaches back to the time when it was a military

post in the day of Spanish domain. The Island is reached by government boats only, and the visitor must obtain a pass from the Commandant. The place is known as "The Rock," and sometimes as "Uncle Sam's Own Devil's Island."

On my arrival at Alcatraz I refused to work or to stand military formations. I was taken before Executive Officer, Lt. J. J. Meskill. He gave me the formal military order to go to work at once, and when I refused he sentenced me to 14 days solitary confinement in the "hole" and a bread and water diet. He said, "If Jesus Christ were to come to this Island and refuse to work, I would put him in the dungeon and keep him there."

Sergeant Cole, overseer in charge, switched on the electric light and took me down a flight of stairs to the basement, hollowed out of the rock under the prison. He ordered me to take up a bucket, and when I wasn't quick enough he lifted his club and yelled, "I'll knock your God damn brains out!" He showed me into a cell, locked the iron barred door behind me, and I heard his footsteps going up the stairs as I was left alone in the dungeon. Then he switched off the lights and I found myself in complete darkness. I tried to investigate the place which was to be my abode for the next fourteen days. Attempting to walk through the cell I bumped my head against the ceiling. Feeling my way, I found that the cell roof was arched and lower at the sides than a man's height, so that it wasn't safe to walk around in the dark. I sat on the door-sill waiting for something to happen. After awhile the lights were turned on and a guard came down with a few slices of bread and a pitcher of water. Trying to have a good look at my cell while the lights were still on I found that there was no furniture or toilet facilities, the only things that were to be seen were the pitcher of water, the few slices of bread, and the "old wooden bucket" which the guard told me would be emptied only once every twenty-four hours. The dungeon cells were under the prison, situated so that not a ray of daylight ever penetrated them. The air in the cell was stagnant, the walls were wet and slimy, the bars of the cell door were rusty with the dampness, and the darkness was so complete that I could not make out my hand a few inches before my face. It seemed eternity until the officer of the day and a guard came about nine o'clock in the evening. The cell door opened and the guard threw in a pair of lousy army blankets, wholly insufficient, as was evidenced by the fact that four blankets were provided for the warmer and drier cells upstairs. The prison officer had to put a searchlight on me to note that I was "present and accounted for." The light was switched off, and as no other prisoners were at that particular time confined in

the dungeon I was left alone with the rats for company. The water and sewer system of the jails were located in the center of the underground dungeon in front of the cells and in case of accident, as the bursting of a pipe, a prisoner could have been drowned like a rat before anyone in the jail proper could have noticed it. I took off my shoes and coat and used them as a pillow, wrapped myself in two blankets, and with the concrete floor as a mattress made myself a nice comfortable bed.

Next morning, a guard took me up to the wash room to empty my bucket. Behind the guard's back I managed to beg some of the prisoners around to give me some tobacco. A few minutes later I was back in the "hole," searched by the guard and locked in safely again. I planted a part of the bootleg tobacco under a loose brick in the wall and "rolled my own." As soon as I lit my cigarette, however, the guard returned, searched me and confiscated the tobacco. The part that I had hidden in my cell he did not get, and I managed to have smokes for the next twenty-four hours in spite of the unexpected raid.

The things hardest to endure in the dungeon were the complete darkness, the sitting and sleeping on the damp concrete floor, and the lack of sight or sound of any human being. The eighteen ounces of bread was quite sufficient for the first few days, and towards the last I had some of the bread left over. The rats were quite peaceful and friendly. The fact that the dungeon was made a store house for the "ball and chain", straightjacket, wrist chains and other implements of medieval torture was not very pleasant.

After serving fourteen days in the rat-infested dungeon I was taken out in a weakened condition to the prison hospital. The prison doctor thought that eating too much bread was the cause of my sickness. I knew better. To place any human being in the "hole" for fourteen days, even if one were given a chicken diet, was enough to weaken him. It felt good to be given a soft hospital bed after the concrete floor as a sleeping place. The food, which was quite good in the hospital, was also a treat compared with the eighteen ounces of bread. Then the daylight and the association with human beings again made me feel as if I were on a holiday.

After a two-day stay in the hospital the Doctor transferred me back to the cell-house and I was assigned to "make little ones out of big ones" on the rock-pile. I did not refuse to file out with the workers, but I refused to accept tools or even perform any labor when I got there. Under military regulations no prisoner can be kept in solitary for more than 14 consecutive days, and must

have at least 14 days in the regular cell or normal diet before he can be returned to solitary. Being unable, therefore, to send me back to the "hole" at once, the authorities placed a special sentry over me and I was forced to parade around the windiest side of the Island for eight hours a day, while the other prisoners worked. At the end of 14 days of grace I again disobeyed a formal order to work and was returned to the dungeon. During my interval out of solitary, a charge of disobeying a military command, under the 96th article of war (not of peace) was preferred against me. The specific offence was that I did not obey Lt. J. J. Meskill's order to go to work. I was also placed in "yellow numbers" (3rd class prisoner), which meant being segregated with the degenerates in the cell block and being seated in the mess-hall at the same table with them. For one offence I was subjected to three-fold punishment: 14 days in the "hole", court-martial under the 96th article of war and "yellow numbers." On being called for trial I refused to plead or to say anything to the military judge. He (his honor, the judge) was quite perplexed. Then he said, "The prisoner stands mute." I was found guilty and three more months of hard labor were added to my original thirty-year sentence.

Visitors were allowed to see prisoners on Sunday provided they procured a pass from the Commandant. Men in the "hole" were not entitled to have visitors. The first visitors to the Island were Anna Coggins and Margaret Stanislowky of Oakland, Cal. They came to see Clark Getts, underground postman of Leavenworth fame, who had informed the outside world of the torture and chaining to cell bars of Objectors in that prison, and was punished with solitary for fourteen days when found out. Capt. Chambers, psychiatrist at Leavenworth, confined him in a cell with the violently insane after his fourteen days solitary was served. It was only the news smuggled out that procured his release from the "nut" factory. At Alcatraz, Getts again started the underground ball rolling and the Commandant, Col. Jos. Garrard, started to receive protests against the use of the dungeon from all over the country. My brother and friends in Boston, and the Civil Liberties Union of New York protested to President Wilson and Secretary of War, Baker. Friends in California tried to obtain a pass to visit me, but the Commandant, abiding by the rule that no prisoner in solitary confinement was entitled to a visitor, refused passes. Alice Park, of Palo Alto, wired to Senators, to Newton D. Baker, and to the President of the United States until Col. Garrard allowed her and two other friends, Robert Whitaker and Marion Alderton, to visit me although I was in solitary.

On the second term of my fourteen days solitary I was treated to the most unusual thing, a visit of three friends. I was taken up to the library by an old soldier who was to listen in, and my visitors talked with me for about three hours, or rather, I talked and they listened. After one is denied the privilege of talking, as at Alcatraz, where the silence system prevailed, when one is given the opportunity, one talks a mile a minute. The old soldier became rather tired and snoozed a little. That gave my visitors a chance to take notes.

In a letter to my brother David, Lt. J. J. Meskill, Executive Officer of Alcatraz prison, states: "Your brother Philip has assumed the role (sic) of a Conscientious Objector and when given an order by me to go to work he persistently refused. He also refused to recognize military authority. For his persistent refusal, he was placed in solitary confinement for 14 days on a bread and water diet. When not in solitary your brother has the freedom of the air and sunshine, notwithstanding the fact that he persistently refuses to work and bores his fellow inmates, who labor arduously while he stands looking on."

On account of the protests of the Civil Liberties Union and others the War Department ordered an investigation and assigned Col. Phillips to investigate the doings of Col. Garrard. The Alcatraz authorities got wind that an investigation was contemplated and prepared for it. Other Objectors and I, who were serving time in the dungeon, were transferred to solitary dark cells on the ground floor of the prison. These are ordinary cells with no bed to sleep on and the barred cell door boarded up to shut out the light. Through the cracks of the boarded door I could see prisoners carrying cement bags and beds with iron springs to the dungeon. I did not know the reason. It seemed, however, that the authorities of the jail knew the reason. At the same time the Colonel allowed four blankets for men in solitary. A few days later the investigator arrived. Everything was nicely prepared, the dungeons were floored with concrete smoothly polished, all rat-holes were blocked up, the iron springs and beds arranged. A plate of freshly grated cheese was placed in one of the cells over night to prove that there were no rats. Col. Phillips had an army stenographer with him and all those in solitary that were previously confined in the dungeon were called before the investigator. I told Col. Phillips that there was no bed in the dungeon cell where I served my 14 day stretch in, also that the concrete floor polishing was done in anticipation of his arrival, and though all my testimony was taken down by the stenographer not a word of it was reported to the Secretary of War who ordered the investigation. Col. Phillips, the military man,

could hardly be expected to be dissatisfied with Col. Garrard's methods of handling men who refused to recognize military authority and who according to army regulation were justly punished. The dungeon was not officially condemned, but on the investigator's departure the dungeon, so far as Objectors were concerned, was done away with.

On completing the third term of solitary, which was served in the dark cells, I was chased out again on the rock piles. The number of non-working COs increased to nine and all of us at that time were out of solitary. We were assigned to work on the rock pile, but refused to accept tools or to perform labor. The sentry paraded our army of the unemployed right near the quarry laborers, until one day we simply struck on the guard, refused to obey his orders to parade, sat down and did as we damned please. After numerous threats of bodily violence, the guard turned us to the Executive Officer. He, not being able to place us again in solitary until fourteen days of grace was over, locked us in the cells and did not order us out to the quarry any more.

A group of young men and women in Oakland and San Francisco organized regular visiting parties to the Island. Many of the civilian visitors were penalized for their sympathy with the slackers. Thus Prof. W. W. Lyman and Prof. Anderson of the University of California were not reappointed as teachers. Prof. Witter Bynner was denied the privilege of being annual poet laureate at the Bohemian Club of San Francisco. Some of the visitors were questioned by Department of Justice agents. When the district attorney of Oakland decided to try Anita Whitney, liberal and social reformer for the violation of the criminal syndicalism law, he made a trip to the Island to get evidence against her from us whom she had visited. Of course we were not taken in and his trip was useless. Most of the visitors got by, by giving fictitious names. Others who were recognized by the guards as undesirables even disguised themselves in order to get to the Island.

Liberal, radical, even "bolshevik" literature was received by us underground regularly. A few tricks of the trade. We had some one in New York insert a two-sheet I. W. W. paper in a N. Y. Sunday Times, and the censor was fooled. Some of our papers were mailed to a Sergeant on the Island, and a trusted prisoner who was not suspected of radicalism and who worked for this non-com got hold of the papers ahead of the Sergeant and brought them to us. A copy of the Communist Manifesto was bound in the covers of the Holy Bible, etc. Why, when the right and left wing controversy in the Socialist Party

culminated in the forming of the Communist Party, some of us even signed the roll and joined the Communist Party in jail.

A change of administration at Alcatraz. Brigadier General James B. McDonald was appointed Commandant in place of Col. Garrard. Major Johnson became Executive Officer to replace Lt. Meskill. Old Col. Garrard was about 80 years and in his second childhood. He had been retired long before the war began. On declaration of war, however, he was called back to service and appointed Commandant of the Pacific Branch United States Disciplinary Barracks, and the destinies of hundreds of young Americans were placed in the hands of an old, deaf Southern Gentleman, who was physically unable to handle the situation. The result was that Alcatraz Prison was mismanaged by Col. Garrard's subordinates. The notoriety and publicity Alcatraz received after the arrival of the war Objectors may have been the cause of Col. Garrard's going back into retirement.

Executive Officer, Maj. Johnson, and the newly appointed Commandant thought that the army regulations for the punishment of military prisoners were too mild when applied to Objectors. The chaining up of prisoners to cell doors had been abolished by Sec. Baker in 1918, as a result of the undue attention attracted by the publicity given that practice by the CO prisoners at Leavenworth. The War Department News Bureau release No 9, Dec. 6, 1918, read:

"The Secretary of War authorizes the following statement: Disciplinary regulations in force in military prisons have been modified by the War Department order. Fastening of prisoners to the bars of cells will no more be used as a mode of punishment. This and milder devices have been effective in the past in breaking the wilful or stubborn opposition of prisoners of the usual military type, who would not submit to work requirement of disciplinary barracks. Instead of being allowed to lie in the bunks while others worked, they were compelled to choose between working or standing in discomfort during working hours. Practically, under usual conditions, this has been more of a threat than an actuality, and as such it has been effective, but during recent months with the influx of political prisoners to the disciplinary barracks, particularly Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, extremity of attitude on the part of this new type of prisoner has at times led to extremity of discipline, as provided by military regulations. These clearly were not formulated with the political type of

prisoner in mind, and their effectiveness as deterrents has been questionable. Men have returned for repeated experiences of the severest form of discipline. The most extreme of these is discarded and the order is comprehensive. It applies to not merely political prisoners, but to every other type."

Not being able to chain us up, therefore, McDonald and Johnson conceived the idea of building "Iron Cages", which they afterwards named "vestibule doors", in which to confine men who still refused to work after repeatedly enduring dungeon and solitary punishment. These "coffin cages" were 23 inches wide and 12 inches deep. Each cage was made of iron bars bolted to the doors of the cells. The prisoner stands upright, with an adjustable board at his back to reduce the depth to about nine inches so as to make a tight fit,—a veritable iron straight jacket. A religious Objector named Simmons and I were placed in the "Iron Maiden" for eight hours a day, alternated by sixteen hours of solitary confinement in dark cells on a bread and water diet.

By that time our underground news traveled fast, and the American Civil Liberties Union managed to have the news of the cages on the Associated Press wired the first day they were used at the Island. The cage form of punishment for Objectors to war was introduced about a year and a half after the war for democracy was fought and won, and many of our liberals thought that it was safe to protest against this form of cruel and unusual punishment. Newspaper reporters came to the Island and the authorities had to find a way to explain the torture chambers to the War Department and to the press. Commandant McDonald's explanation was as follows: "In other prisons they chain prisoners to the cell doors when they refuse to work. We place them in those standing cages, "vestibule doors", and compel them in those to remain in an upright position during working hours only." All along the war, Objectors had puzzled the authorities. Col. Garrard had complained to a reporter, "I have had more trouble with the COs, IWWs, than with any other prisoners. I came here from West Point in '77 and had many prisoner soldiers under my charge, but the COs I cannot understand. They refuse to work, some of them even refuse to eat. Now what are you going to do when you are faced with a situation like that?... These so called COs are yellow men not white men, and as yellow men, sir, we are so treating them when they seek to break the rules of this institution."

The undue attention or publicity was, however, successful to the limited extent that the cage punishment was not thereafter given in combination with solitary, and we who were "caged" and put in an ordinary cell, were allowed regular rations, and were placed in the torture chambers only for eight hours every day. I endured it for about two months, until I saw my reason going, and realized that brain and body could stand no more. I had made my protest—I gave in and agreed to work and was taken out of the torture cage.

Adjutant General Harris sanctioned the use of the Iron Cages. In a letter to Beatrice Kinkhead, of Palo Alto, Cal., dated April 27, 1920, he says that the cage punishment was "not cruel or unusual." The Iron Maidens are still at Alcatraz, though they have not been used of late. Adjutant General Lutz Wahl, at Washington, replied to an inquirer about the cages under date of Nov. 1928:

"The arrangement of the 'double cell door' as a punishment for the military prisoners at Alcatraz, was discontinued shortly after 1920, not because punishment was believed to be severe, but rather because of the undue attention attracted to it by misrepresentation as to its severity."

Though it may be true that no one has been confined in the cages recently, I have reliable information, as late as 1929, that the "Iron Maidens" four steel cages erected in Alcatraz military prison in January 1920, are still in their proper places as before, ready for use.

Time and again my friends were advised that if I'd ask for clemency my release might have been granted. I never asked for mercy. On November 23, 1920, Wilson and Baker were magnanimous enough to release all Objectors. My release also was signed and forwarded to Alcatraz.

On Dec. 2, 1920, the authorities of Alcatraz Island, San Francisco, California, were ordered by the War Department to set me free. They put me in solitary confinement for refusing to sign soldier's release papers which stated that I was a recruit unassigned not eligible for re-enlistment, had no previous enlistment, no horsemanship, no markmanship, etc. My answer was that I never consented to obey the draft act, that I did not recognize the government's right to make a soldier automatically, that I did not sign any papers to get into military jails and that I would not sign any papers to get out. A wire was sent to the War Department to have my release cancelled and to have me court-martialed again for disobedience to military orders. Evidently the War

Department did not care to keep me any longer, for an order was given to let me go free without my signature. So I was inducted into the service of the United States Army automatically, after being transferred from one military prison to another, without serving a single day in a military barracks.

The government gave me a new prison-made suit of clothes, a Dishonorable Discharge and a "donation" of $10. I was free to face the world and the American Legion.

Yours for liberty

Letters to, from and about Philip Grosser
from the Alexander Berkman Papers at the
International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

★★★

Philip Grosser to Alexander Berkman, 27 November 1928

[Philip Grosser sent cuttings on American affairs, especially for prison solidarity campaigns, to stateless anarchist militant Alexander Berkman (1870-1936) in France. Here he sends material on the notorious Sacco-Vanzetti case. Lincoln Steffens (1866-1936) was an investigative journalist. John J. and James B. McNamara, along with David Caplan and Matthew Schmidt were convicted of the 1910 bombing of the *Los Angeles Times*. Grosser was a correspondent and supporter of both James B. and Schmidt, who had been given life sentences. John J. had been released 10 May 1921. James B. McNamara died in prison on 8 March 1941. Schmidt was pardoned on 22 December 1942.]

83 Holworthy St.
Roxbury Mass. Nov. 27 1928

Dear Comrade:

Your letter of Nov. 12th is at hand. I have mailed (under separate cover) all printed information I could collect on the Sacco and Vanzetti case. The copy of a letter from Miriam De-Ford may also be of interest. I am enclosing copy that was recently mailed to the Manchester Guardian I do not know whether it will be published or not. You misunderstood me, I am not a prison reformer. I simply reacted to the editorial of the Boston Herald Oct 11 asking "can it be true that people in Europe are caged in coffin-like cells." I know that I was caged in a coffin-like cell, not in Europe, but in the "land of the brave and the free". It seems to me, that advertising torturous practices in jails is very advisable and appealed to you to help in this regard.

Lincoln Steffens talked before the "ethical culture society" in Boston, I talked with him and asked him what was accomplished in the McNamara and Schmidt cases. Steffens informed me, that after many appeals to Schmidt he concented to apply for parole alone not jointly with James B. Matt did not want to ask for his release ahead of McNamara. The important people, however, thought that Matt stands a better chance with the Parole board alone. Jim does not object to this proceedure. He will apply for parole after the Schmidt case is acted on favorably

Yours for liberty
Philip B. Grosser

★★★

Philip Grosser to Alexander Berkman, 10 February 1929

[Grosser mentions the return to Boston of Governor Alvan T. Fuller (there are more details in the following letter). Fuller had been involved in the review of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and, concluding they had had a fair trial, allowed the joint execution to go ahead. 'Hallelujah, I'm a bum' is song made famous by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He gives the first mention of writing the story of his time on Alcatraz: the *American Mercury* was edited by the Liberal H.L. Mencken (1880-1956). Grosser no longer sees Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) as a symbol of the Russian revolution, but one of the Bolsheviks who destroyed it to consolidate their own power. James P. Cannon (1890-1974) was a leading light in American Trotskyism.]

[Annotation by Berkman] *13/III*

83 Holworthy Street,
Boston, Massachusetts, Feb, 10 1929.

Dear Berkman:-

Your letter of Jan. 27, is at hand. "That skunk of a Fuller" is back home again. (Peter Bond) the former governor of Massachusetts seems to be afraid of his own shadow. Our comrades are dead but not forgotten, as you will note from the cutting I am enclosing.

You ask, 'what are you doing just now?' practically nothing. I am *a* house-painter, by trade, and I have a hell of a time to earn a living, on season*al* employment, I have a youngster, a little less than two years old, and for the last three months that I am out of work, I am busy with the little fellow. I [te]ach him to sing 'hallelujah, I am a bum', hallelujha bum again', give his bacon and potatoes early and the morning etc.

I have written an article, called, "Caged On Uncle Sam's Own Devil's Island" and submitted it to the American Mercury, it may be accepted when it is printed I'll send you a copy of same. It is true that reaction is supreme in the 'land of the free and the home of the brave', the only activity is by the Communists and damn them if I can see anything but reaction in their doings[.] Cannon, a former I.W.W., who joined the communist[s] and was sec'y., [of?] the Communist Labor Defence was expelled from the party for being in sympathy with Trotzky, they run a little sheet called the militant, to air their grievances against the dictators. To my mind, however, the oppositionists are

stewing in their own shit, don't they approve of dictatorship, Hasn't Leon Trotzky oppressed and dictated when he had the chance, now, when some one is trying to dictate to him he is yelling, To hell with him and his opposition!!

Yours for liberty,
Philip B. Grosser

★★★

Philip Grosser to Alexander Berkman, 26 February 1929

[Aldino Felicani (1891-1967) was a Boston anarchist and founder and treasurer of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. The 'letters' presumably refers to the book of prison letters of Sacco and Vanzetti.]

13/III

83 Holworthy St.
Roxbury Feb. 26, 1929

Dear Berkman,

Your letter of Feb. 10 I have received. I have seen Felicani, he promised to mail you a copy of the "letters." The clipping about Asa Keyes may be of interest, he prosecuted as district attorney of Los Angeles most of the criminal syndicalist cases, he sent more I.W.W. boys to San Quentin from his county than any other prosecutor. "Peter Bond" is Alvan T. Fuller's assumed name. After the execution of S+V he needed a rest and made a hurried trip to France with his mother on the assumed name of "Peter Bond"

It occurred to me, that some of us may be able to send you a typewriter. Please, find out the cost of the particular machine you want and let us know, or is it advisable to buy one in the U.S.A. and forward it to France.

In previous letter I mentioned that I had a chance to place my story with "The American Mercury." It was not accepted. The readers of Mencken's publication are the sons and daughters of the tired radicals and I thought that it may do them some good to know the story of an anti-militarist who refused to participate in a war waged "to make the world safe for democracy." Mencken, however, thought otherwise, he is the boss. The Nation, New Republic or Survey, readers are pacifists in peace time and my story will do them no good and I do not care to submit my manuscript to the Army and Navy Journal or the American Legion weekly. Pamphlets cost money to publish and my trade as a house painter will not pay my personal expenses not to mention printers bills.

If you think it advisable to inform Europeans of Uncle Sam's treatment of war opponents? I'll mail you the article. You know I am not an author, and my story may not be good literature, but it is a true statement of facts. I took pains to look up every statement I

make. It is mighty hard for me to get my stuff to any paper. I am a "man of no importance" and even liberal weeklies do not care to have correspondence of my kind.

The New Republic, however, accepted a letter about Alcatraz, which they promised to publish.

Yours Philip Grosser

★★★

Philip Grosser to Alexander Berkman, 5 October 1931

['Tom' is Thomas J. Mooney (1892-1942), a labour militant framed with Warren K. Billings (1893-1972) for the 22 July 1916 San Francisco Preparedness Day bombing. Berkman had been heavily involved in defending them before and even after his deportation to Russia in 1919. They were finally released in 1939. The Molder's Defense Committee was also supporting Mooney. *Living my Life* is the autobiography of Emma Goldman (1869-1940). The high price of the first edition upset many in the anarchist movement, Goldman included.]

[stamped] 19 OCT 1931

37 Joy St.
Boston, Mass Oct. 5 1931

Dear Berkman:-

your letter of Sept. 22nd in hand. "Only when people raise hell do they accomplish anything" you say, the Communist raise the dickens, and to my mind, they get nothing and I can not co-operate with them. Tom is most anxious to have genuine united front committees, the "commies" are great for United Front but when there is any attempt to get together the dictators of the Proletariat want the front all for themselves. A sample of their U.F. you can read in the clipping from the Communist sheet I enclose. They couldn't capture the conference so they boycot it.

Do you receive any publicity matter from the Molder's Defense Committee, San Francisco? I am sending you bulletins that may be of interest to you

I would greatly appreciate if Emma would send me a copy of "Living my Life": I can not afford to pay the $7.50 for the book.

Yours fraternally
Philip B. Grosser

★★★

Philip Grosser to Alexander Berkman, 31 December 1931

[Here Grosser encourages Berkman to help publicise the cases of James B. McNamara and Schmidt. Freemont Older (1856-1935) was editor of the *San Francisco Bulletin*. Grosser also raises the idea of Tom Mooney, McNamara or Schmidt escaping from 'S.Q.' (San Quentin prison). Berkman's 'other qualification' presumably his experience of attempting to break out of the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, in Allegheny City. The 'M and M' is the Merchants and Manufacturers Association of San Francisco, which was involved in framing Mooney and Billings. 'E.G.' is Emma Goldman. Despite the stamped date, this letter is from 1931. At the head of the first page is the handwritten address of Carlo Frigerio (Case Poste Stand 128, Geneve), who was to see Dante Sacco (see note on following letter).]

[Stamped] 9 FEVR 1926

9 Anderson St.,
Boston, Dec. 31 1931

Dear Berkman:-

It occurred to me that, you may be able to start some publicity in Europe in behalf of Matt. Schmidt and James B. McNamara. A few years ago, Freemont Older, Lincoln Steffens and others tried to get the boys out on parole. I talked with L.S. about the possibilities and he was quite optimistic. The letter I enclose, tells the story, it seems that the labor skates spiked it. You as a resident of the U.S.A. for thirty years, understands the difficulties to get any sympathy for confessed dynimiters in this country. Something ought to be done, however, the European can understand the political and Industrial prisoner, and by getting prominent people in Europe interested something may be accomplished. It is a shame to have Matt. and James B. neglected and forgotten.

Some one suggested that Tom ought to try and get out of S. Q. without a pardon or parole from any politician... Of course, he is not willing to even consider a proposition of this kind. I tried to introduce the idea to some people and they think that I was insane. In European countries it was not considered a disgrace for a political to escape. It was more shameful to ask for pardon from the tyrants. But in the U.S.A. you can not even get the so called rebellious workers interested in a movement of liberation. Is there any glory to waste a life time in S. Q. Mc. has been there over twenty years. Matt about 17 years and even when the liberals manage to get around the M+M association and others, the Political Labor Leaders are against it. Why not try... You lived in S.F. and have other qualification. I think if Matt tries he would be successful.

I do not know whether the boys are ready to take the plunge. The other day, I have ordered a copy of "Living My Life" to be mailed to Matt and those insane ideas about getting them out any old way keep on bothering me. I would like to have your opinion about it. Can E.G. be of any help? She has many friends in the State of "Orange Groves and Jails".

Please return Bob's letter
Yours sincerely,
Philip B. Grosser

send mail to #9 Anderson St.
Boston, Mass.

★★★

Alexander Berkman to Philip Grosser, 27 January 1932

[Berkman here gives a gloomy assessment of the prospect of freedom for Mooney, Billings, Schmidt ('Smithy') and James B. McNamara. Roger Baldwin (1884-1981) was a 'philosophical anarchist' and founder of the American Civil Liberties Union. Dante S. is the son of Nicola Sacco: after his father's execution he was taken to Geneva by Edward Holton James, a wealthy Bostonian. Grosser had asked Berkman if James was a suitable guardian for Dante. Berkman replied (20 Feb 1932, not reproduced here) that 'Dante seems to be in good hands'.]

Nice, Jan. 27, 1932

Dear Grosser,

I couldn't write to you before. I am not well at all of late, and just now in the midst of moving to other quarters. My present place has [g]otten too dear for my pocket.

Thanks for clippings etc. Everything like that is very useful to me. I am also receiving regularly now printed matter from the Tom Mooney Comm.

Regarding your letter of Dec. 31, referring to Fremont Older, Steffens etc. Let me tell you this, comrade: They are all well-meaning people, but that is damned little.

I remember the days, in San Francisco, in 1917, soon after Mooney etc. were arrested. I had a hell of a time getting Older to listen to my plea for Mooney. Like the labor politicians and others, Older "thought" right from the

beginning that Mooney was guilty and he wanted to have nothing to do with the case.

Well, he changed his mind since, but Mooney and Billings are still in prison.

As to Lincoln, he is clever yet a muddlehead. It took him a lifetime to find out that political and other corruption is not a matter of this or that person, or of this or that city or State. It took him 40 years of muckraking to learn what any man with common sense and open eyes should know at 20. Namely, that capitalism and government are a foul swamp and that everything they touch MUST be rotten, corrupt and vile. I see in his autobiography that some one lent me that he ends his life as he began it: still hopin[g] that the powers that be will "keep their promise" -- this in reference to Smithy and McNamara, as well as to the whole social life. What can you expect from people who never learn anything?

Understand me: both Older and Steffens are fine boys, but in social matters and in the labor struggle they are babies in the woods. To this category unfortunately belong most of the American "liberals", including such as Roger Baldwin. Till doomsday they will hope (notwithstanding all past and current history) that the wolves will become the friends of the sheep. They are all governmentalists at heart, whatever they may call themselves: their last hope is the government, after all.

It is Lincoln Steffens and his coworkers who had doomed McNamara by their wire-pulling. If we cannot get Mooney and Billings out of prison in spite of their internationally known innocence, what can we expect in regard to McNamara whom that bunch got to plead guilty? Sch[m]idty of course shares the fate of MacN.

I worked on all these cases when I was in the U.S., worked on them from the very beginning, and I am fully familiar with all the details. I must speak frankly to you: I am afraid there is no hope for either Mac or Schm.

About making propaganda for them in Europe, that is a different matter, of course. I must say that almost nothing is known here about the cases of McN. and S. Years ago I spoke and wrote in Europe about their cases, but in the last years the Mooney case took precedence, and the others were forgotten.

I am going to prepare some material on the case of McN. and S. for the European press that is accessible to me. Another thing, Comrade Emma Goldman is about to start a lecture tour in various European countries, and I will supply her with material on the case. She is to deal with various labor matters, and naturally also with the cases of Sacco-Van., Mooney-Billings, and MacN.-Schmidt. This is good for the propaganda, but it can hardly have any effect on the U.S. At least not until the Mooney-Billings case is disposed of.

Regarding your suggestion about Tom leaving prison, - I know Tom very well personally and I think he will not agree with your suggestion. I personally certainly think your idea is by no means "insane". It should have really been tried long ago. But of course it is of no practical value as long as Tom is against it.

About James and Dante S. -- I am in touch with comrades in Geneva and I shall soon see what can be done in the matter.

I do not expect any favorable action in Tom's case by the Governor. One can see what a rat he is, and a coward, too cowardly to take any action. As to the Wickersham report, it may help in the propaganda, but it will not get Tom out.

Fraternal greetings to you,

P.S. Am enclosing here the two letters you wanted returned.

TAKE NOTE: My new address: 22, Avenue Mon Plaisir
NICE (A.M.) FRANCE

★★★

Harry Block to Alexander Berkman, 22 October 1933

[Here Philip Grosser's friend, the anarchist physician Harry Block, breaks the news of his death to Berkman. Alice Stone Blackwell (1857-1950) was a feminist and political activist who was involved in the Sacco-Vanzetti defence campaign. This letter was filed with a cutting from the San Francisco anarchist paper *Man!* (November 1933), of Block's poem in tribute to Grosser which was included in full in the pamphlet, except in *Man!* it is dated October 21, 1933.]

10/22/33

Dear Alexander Berkman,
I was chosen to be the cruel informer of the bad news. Your friend in Boston who loved you, who was devoted to you, Phillip Grosser, leaped or fell(?) in front of an elevated train. He died as he lived - vehemently. He would choose to get rid of his life by crushing his body. There was not another like him, I did not meet any, in sincerity and consistency in his belief. We were devoted friends for over twenty years and we never had any words. To think that sheer poverty should drive him to die, when so many friends, not saying his seven year old child whom he loved and his wife Gussie whom he loved and respected, depended on his good nature, on his advice. But he is gone. Among his friends who attended his funeral was Miss Alice Stone Blackwell. I can not replace Grosser for you, but if you think I can be of any assistance nothing will be too difficult for me - anyway, I shall try.
I hope you are well and of good cheer.

Yours sincerely
Harry Block
141 Hawthorn St.,
Chelsea, Mass.,
U.S.A.

★★★

Alexander Berkman to Harry Block, 5 November 1933

[This letter from Berkman was edited to produce the short tribute which introduced the pamphlet. Berkman suggests publishing 'Uncle Sam's Devil's Island' as a memorial to Grosser. In this letter we also see the attitude ("there often comes a time when life loses its meaning, deprives one of the possibility of usefulness, and then indeed it becomes a burden") which would lead a seriously ill Berkman to take his own life in 1936. Henry Alsberg was a writer who "as a newspaper correspondent in Russia had been friendly with Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman" (Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, p.340)]

Dr. Harry Block
141 Hawthorne Street
Chelsea, Mass., U.S.A.

St. Tropez, Nov. 5, 1933

Dear Comrade,

It is sad news indeed that your letter of the 22. ult. brought me. I received only today, the delay being due to

the fact that you addressed me to my OLD address. I have since moved, as per address below.

It is heartbreaking to know that men like Phil Grosser have to commit suicide to escape these rotten economic conditions. I knew Phil - have been in correspondence with him for years now, and only a few weeks ago he sent me the usual batch of clippings with which he used to supply me on labor and social doings in the U.S.

Yes, you are right: Phil was one of the finest comrades it has been my good fortune to meet. And well I remember his stand during the war. I know all the humiliation and tortures he had to go through because of his loyalty to a high ideal. He was a MAN, in the full sense of the word. About two years ago he had sent me the story of his imprisonment as a conscientious objector - the steadfast refusal to participate to things military in any shape or form, his imprisonment and terrible treatment.

The story was powerful, sincere and strongly written. The "liberal" magazines, such as the Nation of course did not dare publish it. I tried to p[l]ace the story for Phil, but in Europe it is almost impossible, of course, because there have been many similar cases here of conscientious objectors. Finally I gave the story to Henry Alsberg, a literary friend of mine. He tried and also failed to have it published. That is a great pity, for the story was more than worth publication: it was an object lesson in the struggle of a heroic soul against man's inhumanity to man, a valuable document, both historically and socially.

I wonder whether our friends in Chelsea and elsewhere could not manage to issue that story as a pamphlet. It would not require a very great expense and surely the friends of Phil should do that much for his memory. Perhaps Phil left a copy of that story. The copy I had is in the hands of Henry Alsberg, as I have already mentioned. If you decide to publish the story, and if you need the Alsberg copy, write to him in my name and demand the copy.

His address: Henry Alsberg, 56 West 95th St., New York City.

It is the greatest condemnation of present conditions that men like Phil are driven to death. The best of our people are going, leaving us. As long as one can be useful and active for his ideas, life is worth living, whatever all personal tragedies and difficulties. But there often comes a

time when life loses its meaning, deprives one of the possibility of usefulness, and then indeed it becomes a burden. I am afraid Phil, my dear friend and comrade, has gone through that torture. May his memory remain green and his vital life and struggle be an inspiration to us all.

Dear Comrade, please convey my deepest sympathy to the wife and child of Phil. Tell them that if Phil has left, it had become impossible for him to remain. He was a man and friend to be proud of.

Kindly remember me to our comrades. I have not been at all well for a long time now, and often feel that life is growing to be a useless thing for me.

Fraternally,

P.S. I am visiting a friend here for a few days. My address in Nice is
101 Boulevard de Cessole, NICE (A.M.) FRANCE

★★★

Harry Block to Alexander Berkman, 19 December 1933

[Block reports on the progress of the memorial pamphlet, and asks for a preface. A hand-written annotation by Berkman at the head of the letter gives the date of response and the reply: 'use my letter of nov 5. [19]33'. The tribute mentioned seems to have been included in his next letter (below). *Man!* (1933-40) was edited by Marcus Graham (1893-1985). *Freedom* was a New York anarchist paper (1933-34), edited by Harry Kelly, Moritz Jagendorf and Louis Raymond (Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, p.530-1).]

[Annotation by Berkman] *Jan 9.*
use my letter of nov 5. 33

12/19/33
141 Hawthorn St
Chelsea, Mass.

Dear Alexander Berkman,
Your suggestion to print Grosser's 'experiences' has been undertaken, and we are working on it. Mr. Alsberg replied but thinks that he mailed the manuscript back. I did want to see the pages after you or Alsberg looked over to note the changes. I had to depend on myself. I did not change any

sentences. I transposed about two thirds of the first page to the last one, then changed a word here and there, also some punctuations and paragraphs[.] I think that it will make an effect on the reader, and it will always be timely. The dogs of War still are mad, and unleashed.

The manuscript was accompanied with a Forword from Miss Alice Stone Blackwell, what we now need to have the pamphlet be most complete is a Preface by Alexander Berkman. The manuscript is at the printer's already and you will be so kind and forward us the Preface. Thank you.

I don't know whether you read 'Man', and I [don]'t want to take chances to send you a copy, France may not like 'him', so I enclose only my tribute to my only friend I had, I mean the all around most tolerant to me, I also enclose a tribute to J.A.Labadie. 'Man' has a fool for an editor and Freedom has its pages filled with names and paltry contributions which contributes much to the New Deal.

Hoping to hear from you, I wish you health and cheer.

Sincerely yours, Harry Block.

★★★

Harry Block to Alexander Berkman, 3 February 1934

[Block reports in early February that the pamphlet is 'well under way', which suggests that though started in 1933, it was not actually published until 1934. This letter was accompanied by a tribute to Grosser by Block from *Man!*, which was included in full in the pamphlet. Hippolyte Havel (1871-1950) was a Czech-born anarchist and heavy drinker who lived at the Stelton Colony in New Jersey. The Annotation at the top presumably refers to the money order mentioned in the letter.]

[Annotation by Berkman?] *Recd 76[.]92 [for Fch.20?] March 4*

2/3/34

Dear Alexander Berkman,

I am restless, have no wings, and no place of welcome; those who want me have no place. I still have in me the American flurry, but the hampering is immense, and the energy has to be consumed in brooding and in worries; I frequently have to resort to reading the Psalms, and exhorting the Lord in David's l[an]guage. Many of the Psalms bore me, but they stupefy me and are less harmful than narcotics or liquors. Even liquors don't exhilarate one now.

Excuse me if I don't use the term Comrade - I always felt something functionary about it, something definable, well it just is not chaotic, and I can't employ it.

The 'booklet', Grosser's story, is well under way. Your suggestion to add my verse was accepted by the friends, they also may add my tribute which I enclose except for the first paragraph. I shall trail along my friend Grosser; I have no story of my own, or perhaps it is not yet finished.

Please accept the deflated small money-order. [Phil?] frequently helped, and so it goes. I may go to N.Y. today - just to run away from my daily surroundings, and I may get drunk with Havel at Stelton - I wish a miracle occurrs and I don't have to come back. I shall extend your regards to the few friends. We must resort to Dame Laughter again. Wishing you well,

with friendship,

Harry Block
141 Hawthorn St.
Chelsea, Mass, U.S.A.

(The Post-clerk told me that the p.o. will deliver the check to you - $5.00) HB

★★★

James Phillips to Alexander Berkman, 4 November 1933

[The tribute by Phillips was published (in a slightly edited form) in *Freedom* (New York), December 1933. It was reprinted in *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* number 39.]

[Annotation by Berkman] *Nov. 25 letter*

Boston, Mass.
Nov. 4-33

Alexander Berkman-

Dear Comrade-

knowing that you and Phillip B. Grosser were good friends, I am enclosing an article which was sent to several papers, and which tells the whole story.

All the comrades here who knew Grosser were sure shocked to hear of his horrible death, and his untimely death is sure a loss to everything that was noble and inspiring.

Acknowledgement of the receipt of this letter will be appreciated.

Yours for a better world to live in
James Phillips

36 Anderson St
Boston, Mass.

[Annotation by Berkman] *These two pages found after I sent reply to James Phillips Nov. 25.*

Boston, Mass.
October 24 33.

A True Rebel Passes away.

Philip Grosser who attracted nation wide attention as Conscientious Objector in 1917 for his fearless and courageous stand against war and who survived untold sufferings and tortures in the military prisons of Leavenworth and Alcatraz, was killed here by an elevated train on Oct. 18th. He was 42 years of age.

He is well known from coast to coast to all, who were at any time interested in the Defense and Relief work for the class-war and Political Prisoners. Tirelessly, and in the Jimmie Higgins style, he was always doing something for somebody behind the bars or for anybody who needed it on the outside.

Right up to his death he was corresponding with Tom Mooney, Billings, Schmidt, McNamara and many others in the different prisons.

Belonging to an Anarchist school, believing in the class struggle, Philip Grosser was a staunch union man. At one time he was a member of the I.W.W. In later years he was active in Local 11 Painters Union, where he was respected, feared and hated by the labor fakers. He was also a member of the Boston Central Labor Union, representing the Painters Local. Always at odds with the politicians and misleaders of labor. Though things looked dark at times, and it seemed that he was fighting a losing battle - he never lost courage and kept the fight up to the last minute.

He was well known and respected for his integrity and honesty, even by those who did not agree with him Politically and Otherwise.

He was laid at rest Friday Oct. 20th.

Appropriate speeches were made at the grave by Alice Stone Blackwell, noted Liberal, and by Mike Flaherty Secretary of the Painters' Union.

The radical movement has lost one of their truest fighters and supporters, His untimely death is a terrible blow to all of us who knew him.

★★★