

McKinley Assassination - Part I

Lead: On September 4, 1901, Leon Czolgosz (chol-gosh) joined the crowd queuing to shake hands with the President of the United States William McKinley. His right was wrapped as if wounded. The hand contained a gun.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Leon Czolgosz was born in Detroit in 1873. As an adult while employed in a Cleveland, Ohio wire mill he became fascinated with radical politics, particularly anarchism. Anarchists were at base libertarian

socialists, they wanted a society based on the voluntary cooperation of free individuals. In general, they were hostile to the leadership class, rejected government and private property. Many anarchists spoke the language of violence and were willing to use it.

In 1897 immigrant Slavic miners staging a peaceful protest against labor conditions at the Lattimer Mines in Pennsylvania were brutally murdered. The sensational story affected Czolgosz so much that he apparently suffered a mental and emotional collapse. Thereafter, his behavior was erratic and unpredictable. In the early stages of this period of depression he rarely spoke to anyone, refused to work, seemed embittered by the

treatment of working men in America. In July, 1900 the assassination of Italy's King Umberto I snapped him out of his depression. An Italian American anarchist Gaetano Bresci had traveled at his own expense from the U.S. to Italy to commit this act of regicide. His daring act plus the praise heaped on Bresci by international anarchist publications, deeply impressed Czolgosz and he moved to Chicago to be closer to the movement. Soon, however, his dark intensity and bizarre behavior, alienated him from Chicago anarchists. An editorial in the anarchist publication *Free Society* specifically warned its readers to stay clear of Czolgosz because of his weird antics and conduct. Soon after this denunciation appeared he fled Chicago

only to surface months as an assassin.

In the fall of 1901 the former mill worker traveled to the American Exhibition in Buffalo determined to kill the President of the United States. Later, anarchist leaders speculated that Czolgosz' resolve grew out of a need to prove his loyalty to the movement and also to achieve acclaim earlier accorded to Bresci in his act of murder. Next time: William McKinley, a cooperative target.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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Resources

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**Morgan, Howard Wayne. *William McKinley and his
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