

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT

- (1) The Direct Action Movement is a working class organisation.
- (2) Our aim is the creation of a free and classless society.
- (3) We are fighting to abolish the state, capitalism and wage slavery in all their forms and replace them by self-managed production for need not profit.
- (4) In order to bring about the new social order, the workers must take over the means of production and distribution. We are the sworn enemies of those who would take over on behalf of the workers.

(5) We believe that the only way for the working class to achieve this is for independent organisation in the workplace and community and federation with others in the same industry and locality, independent of, and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. All such workers organisations must be controlled by workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers movement. Any and all delegates of such workers organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers.

(6) We are opposed to all States and State institutions. The working class has no country. The class struggle is worldwide and recognises no artificial boundaries. The armies and police of all States do not exist to protect the workers of those States, they exist only as the repressive arm of the ruling class.

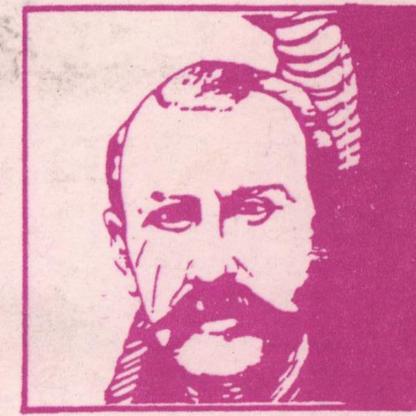
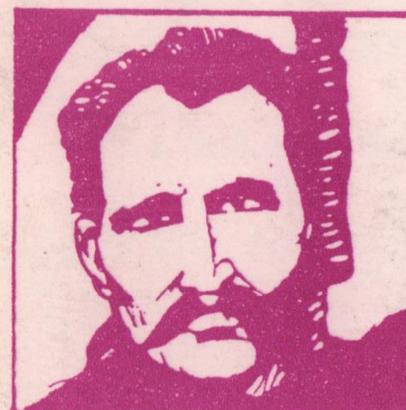
(7) We oppose racism, sexism, militarism and all attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all people everywhere to control their own lives and the environment.

(8) The Direct Action Movement is a federation of groups and individuals who believe in the principles of anarcho-syndicalism; a system where the workers alone control industry and the community without the dictates of politicians, bureaucrats, bosses and so-called experts.

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100 YEARS OF MAY DAY



DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT

One Hundred Years On.

The story of the Haymarket Incident,
The Chicago Martyrs,
and the origins of May Day.

Produced by the North West Direct Action Movement (D.A.M./I.W.A.)
The Direct Action Movement (DAM) is the British section of the
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ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON

On May First 1886 Chicago was disrupted by a General Strike; over three hundred thousand people from all sections of the working class community struck work in an effort to obtain an eight hour day. Of the estimated 800,000 people who went on strike throughout the U.S.A. over a third were from the Chicago area. This particular fight had been going on for over twenty years, and there had been some success. Six States had adopted the principle of an eight hour day by 1867, and a year later Congress passed the first Federal eight hour law, granting the right to Federal employees only. However these laws were ineffective; in practice both the private employers and the Federal Government ignored them.

By 1886 there was a new determination amongst many working class people to achieve their goal of a shorter working day. There was, as one commentator observed later, "the spectacle of thousands of workers, skilled and unskilled, men and women, negro and white, native and immigrant, organised and unorganised" being involved in the struggle.

"There is an eight hour agitation everywhere" said a contemporary writer reporting in mid-April, by this time there were a quarter of a million industrial workers involved in the conflict, and already over thirty thousand workers had achieved their goal, for the rest victory was in sight.

CHICAGO

Chicago was the main centre of struggle having a large industrial population that was heavily influenced by anarchist ideas, the movement was centered upon the Chicago Social Revolutionary Club. This was one of several spread throughout the country: Boston, Philadelphia and New York all had one as well as other cities.

It was Chicago that had taken the lead in developing what became known as the "Chicago Idea", abandoning politics and concentrating on developing the principle of Direct Action, and linking it to workshop organisation. These proposals had been adopted by the anarchist "Pittsburgh Congress" in 1883.

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The Congress had also seen the formation of the International Working Peoples' Association. This, together with the Social Revolutionary Club had about five thousand members within the Chicago area and the propagating of their singular doctrine had caused them to become a serious threat to the establishment in the city. No less than five papers were published including the "Alarm" in English, edited by Albert Parsons, and a German language daily "Arbeiter Zeitung" edited by August Spies, this had a circulation of about five thousand copies daily.

By staging impressive mass demonstrations and public meetings as well as publishing the newspapers, the message of the anarchists had gained a foothold in the region. The result was that the "Chicago Social Revolutionaries were able to exert a much greater influence than their numbers would indicate."

The anarchists dominated the unions in the Chicago area, and they were the heart and soul of the struggle for shorter hours and were undoubtedly responsible for the success of the strike in their district. Originally the anarchists had been suspicious of the eight hour demand because they thought it gave legitimacy to the wage system and imagined that its acceptance was "a virtual concession that the wage system is right" and even if they were successful in prosecuting the struggle, it could divert the energies of the class from the fight to overthrow the whole economic system. Parsons, one of the martyrs, explained later that they finally supported it "because it was a class movement against domination, therefore historical and evolutionary, and necessary, and secondly because we did not choose to stand aloof and be misunderstood by our fellow workers".

Though they espoused the eight hour day the anarchists did not allow themselves to lose sight of essentials and repeatedly made it clear that Direct Action was the only way to achieve emancipation. In the context of the time and place this meant force. (Even the reformist trade unionists allowed this fact. Powderly, one of the leaders of the Knights of Labour, had said as early as 1880: "I am anxious that each of our lodges should be provided with powder and shot, bullets and Winchester rifles, when we intend to strike... if we anticipate strikes we must prepare to fight and use arms against the forces brought against us."). In October 1885 August Spies, at the Central Labour Union, put forward the following resolution: "We urgently call upon the wage-earning class to arm itself in order to be able to put forth against their exploiters such an argument which alone can be effective: violence."

It was February of this year that the workers at the McCormick Harvester Machine Co. went on strike. This was still in progress when the eight hour clash engulfed the city. At least half of the McCormick strikers joined the eight hour movement and on Monday 3rd of May in the afternoon an eight hour mass meeting was held by members of the lumber shovers union on Black Rd., near the McCormick works. Amongst those in attendance were five or six hundred strikers from McCormicks. The speaker was A. Spies, the anarchist editor who had been chosen to speak by the Central Labour Union. As he was in flow the strike-breakers left the factory, immediately both the strikers and many of their supporters tried to prevent them. Suddenly a detachment of police arrived and opened fire on the strikers, killing one and wounding four or five others. Horrified by the experience, Spies returned to his office at the 'Arbeiter Zeitung' and composed a circular in which he called for the workers of Chicago to "rise in your might... we call you to arms". This has been called the "Revenge Circular" because one of the printers added the word "Revenge" without Spies' knowledge. The circular was distributed and a meeting was called to take place in the Haymarket Square, Chicago for the evening of May 4th.

REVENGE!

Workingmen, to Arms!!!

Your masters sent out their bloodhounds — the police —; they killed six of your brothers at McCormicks this afternoon. They killed the poor wretches, because they, like you, had the courage to disobey the supreme will of your bosses. They killed them, because they dared ask for the shortening of the hours of toil. They killed them to show you, "Free American Citizens!", that you must be satisfied and contented with whatever your bosses condescend to allow you, or you will get killed!

You have for years endured the most abject humiliations; you have for years suffered unmeasurable iniquities; you have worked yourself to death; you have endured the pangs of want and hunger; your children you have sacrificed to the factory-lords — in short: You have been miserable and obedient slave all these years: Why? To satisfy the insatiable greed, to fill the coffers of your lazy thieving master? When you ask them now to lessen your burden, he sends his bloodhounds out to shoot you, kill you!

If you are men, if you are the sons of your grand sires, who have shed their blood to free you, then you will rise in your might, Hercules, and destroy the hideous monster that seeks to destroy you. To arms we call you, to arms!

Your Brothers.

Attention Workingmen!

MASS-MEETING

TO-NIGHT, at 7.30 o'clock,

HAYMARKET, Randolph St., Bet. Desplaines and Halsted.

Good Speakers will be present to denounce the latest atrocious act of the police, the shooting of our fellow-workmen yesterday afternoon.

Workingmen Arm Yourselves and Appear in Full Force!

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Achtung, Arbeiter!

Große

Massen-Versammlung

Heute Abend, 7 1/2 Uhr, auf dem

Heumarkt, Randolph-Strasse, zwischen Desplaines- u. Halsted-Str.

Gute Redner werden den neuesten Schurkenstreich der Polizei, indem sie gestern Nachmittag unsere Brüder erschoss, geißeln.

Arbeiter, bewaffnet Euch und erscheint massenhaft!

Das Executiv-Komitee.

THE HAYMARKET MEETING

Two or three thousand people turned up to the fateful meeting. Because they were late starting the audience had dwindled and by the time the meeting was opened by Spies the number had fallen to twelve or thirteen hundred, this was at 8.30pm.

Spies was followed by Albert Parsons, the crowd was orderly and the mayor of Chicago who was present decided that nothing "looked likely to occur to require interference". He advised the captain of the nearby police station of this fact and suggested that the police reservists should be sent home. It was nearly ten in the evening when there appeared a force of policemen led by the same captain, who had obviously decided otherwise than the mayor.

It was pouring with rain and the crowd had fallen to no more than two or three hundred when Samuel Fielden (an Englishman from Todmorden in East Lancashire) finished his talk. Suddenly the column of police advanced towards the speaker, halting two or three yards from the wagon that was being used to speak from. One senior policeman, another captain called Ward turned to the people present and commanded them to disperse peaceably. Fielden protested: "We are peaceable". At the same time, he and the other men on the wagon began to alight.

At this moment a bomb went off. It was claimed that it was thrown at the police; it did kill at least one policeman, Mathias J. Degan. About seventy officers were also wounded and the police responded by opening fire on the crowd. No one appears to have bothered to query the deaths amongst the crowd, or the number of civilians wounded.

A reign of terror descended upon Chicago, anyone who had anarchist, socialist or even trade union affiliations were arrested. Both the secular and religious establishment called for revenge. Raids were made on working class districts, printing machinery was broken, homes and offices were ransacked, suspects were beaten up and subjected to the third degree. "Make all the raids first and look up the law afterwards" said the State's attorney general when some queried about search warrants.

On May 27th, thirty one people were indicted, charged with being accessories to the murder of Mathias J. Degan. Only eight of these people were brought to trial: Albert Parsons, George Engel, August Spies, Michael Schwab, Oscar Neebe, Louis Lingg, Adolph Fischer and Samuel Fielden.

THE TRIAL

" I am managing this case and I know what I am about. These fellows are going to be hanged as certain as death. I am calling such as the defendants will have to challenge peremptorily and waste their time and challenges. Then they will have to take such

men as the prosecution wants." So said the special bailiff nominated by the State's attorney to select the jurors. When the defence tried to present evidence of the man's partiality it was denied the chance.

When the trial commenced, only seven of the accused were present, Albert Parsons having left the square early with his wife and children, had escaped the police pogrom and escaped to Wisconsin where he remained safe for six weeks. When the trial began, the court was astonished when he appeared and informed Judge J.E. Gary: "I present myself for trial with my comrades your honour."

The trial was a farce, at no time did the State present evidence to prove that the defendants had thrown or planted the bomb, neither did the State at any time connect the "Chicago Eight" with even handling the bomb or even knowing about it. Neither was proof offered that they had in any way encouraged or approved of the act in question. Only two of the men had been present when the deed was done, Spies and Fielden. Indeed only three of the accused had been present at the meeting, and neither was any proof offered that the speakers incited violence, in fact the mayor described the speeches as "tame".

As the State's attorney put it: "Anarchy is on trial... these men have been selected... because they are leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousands who follow them... hang them and you save our society". Here in effect you have the grim reason for the whole charade, even so the State placed great importance on the testimony of two former comrades of the defendants, Waller and Schrader. It was intended that Waller would prove the conspiracy to throw the bomb at the police. He ended up by telling the jury that not only did the organisers of the Haymarket meeting not expect the police, but also that at the preliminary meetings no one had even mentioned a bomb.

Schraders' game was to confirm the defendants' guilt, however he was another disappointment for the prosecution and in the end the angry Assistant Attorney, exclaiming to the Defence, said: "He's your witness not ours!"

The jury returned their poisoned verdict on the 20th August 1886: "We the jury, find the defendants August Spies, Michael Schwab, Samuel Fielden, Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, and Louis Lingg guilty of murder in the manner and form as charged in the indictment, and fix the penalty at death. We find the defendant Oscar W. Neebe guilty of murder in the manner and form as charged and fix the penalty at imprisonment in the penitentiary for fifteen years."

The defence request for a new trial was refused as was an appeal that was made to the Supreme Court of Illinois.

A defence movement of international proportions grew. In Britain both the G.B.Shaw and William Morris spoke at protest meetings, while other protests were held in France, Holland, Italy, Russia and Spain. As the time of execution drew close, the Illinois authorities were inundated with petitions and memorials as well as being swamped with letters. Over three hundred people pleaded personally with the Governor of Illinois, R.J.Oglesby.

Two of the defendants appealed for clemency, these were Fielden and Schwab. August Spies proposed the release of the other defendants and suggested that he alone be executed to satisfy the demand for vengeance.

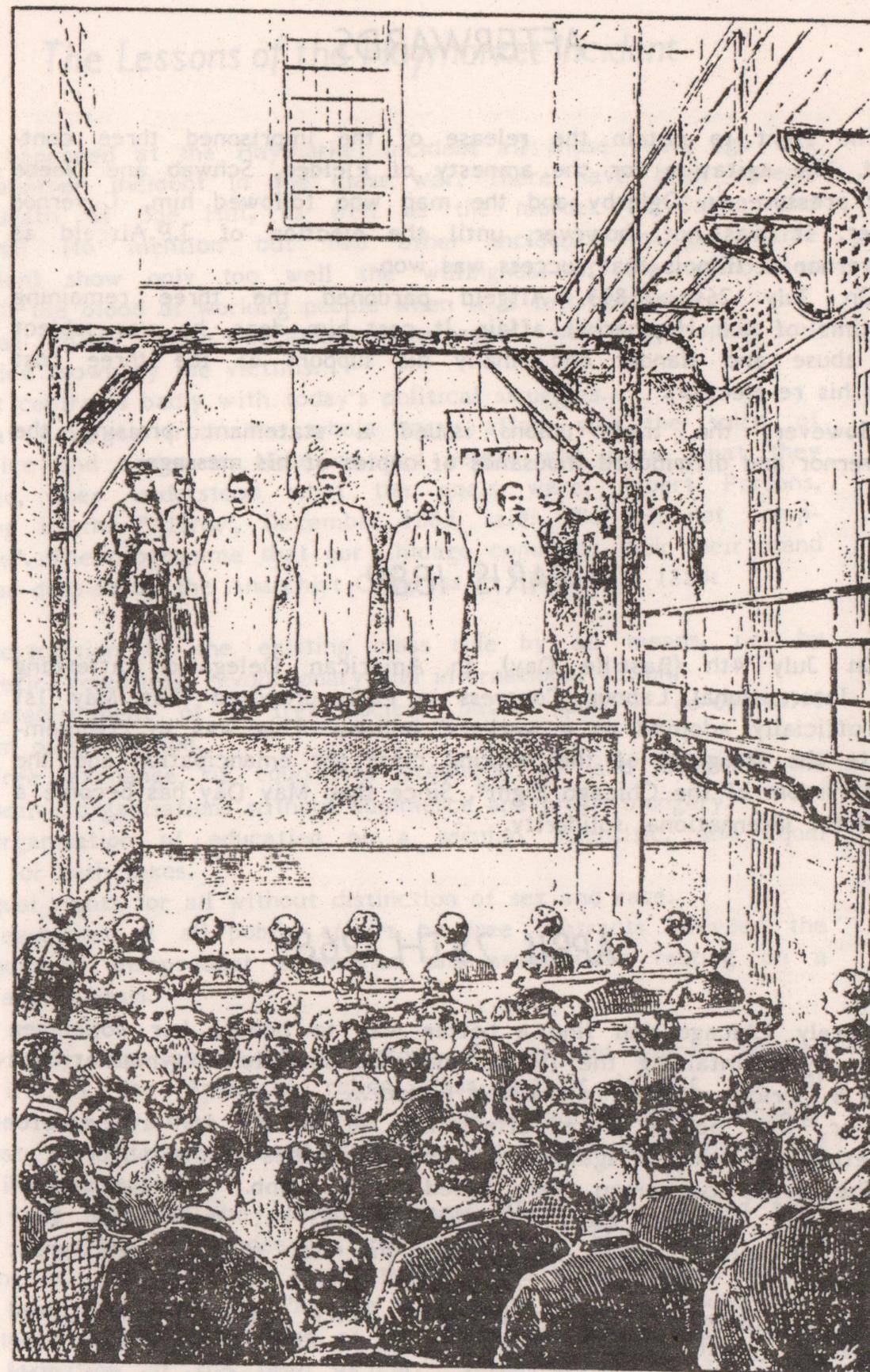
Judge Gary and Prosecutor Grindell joined in asking for mercy for Fielden and Schwab, and their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Parsons was told that he could have a pardon for the asking, but finding his remaining five comrades would have to suffer he refused to beg. The defence council made strenuous efforts to have Parsons change his mind and plead; Parsons replied:

"I will not do it... I am an innocent man... If I am to be executed at all it is because I am an anarchist, not because I am a murderer; it is because of what I have taught and spoken, and written in the past... I can afford to be hanged for the sake of the ideas I hold and the cause I have espoused."

The day before his execution Lingg ended his life by exploding a bomb in his mouth, thus cheating the State of its victim.

THE EXECUTION

On November 11th, 1887, Fischer, Spies, Parsons and Engel were hanged. Later the State turned their bodies over to their families and friends. What must have been the largest funeral procession in Chicago's history was held, with an estimated 500,000 people lining the route taken by it. The burial of the five men took place within the Waldheim Cemetery in a temporary vault. Anywhere from ten thousand to twenty five thousand people saw the burial. On December 18th, at Waldheim the coffins were placed in their final resting place, a permanent grave. On June 25th, 1893, a monument to the murdered men was unveiled at Waldheim cemetery.



Black Friday, 11 November 1887.

AFTERWARDS

The fight to obtain the release of the imprisoned three continued. The agitation for the amnesty of Fielden, Schwab and Neebe put pressure on Oglesby and the man who followed him, Governor Fifer. It was not, however, until the election of J.P. Altgeld as Governor of Illinois that success was won.

On July 26th, 1893, Altgeld pardoned the three remaining victims of the Haymarket affair. It cost him dear, he was subject to abuse and slander and finally his support of the three cost him his re-election.

However, the trade unions issued a statement praising the Governor and distributed thousands of copies of his message.

PARIS 1889

On July 4th (Bastille Day) an American Delegation attending the International Labour Congress in Paris proposed that May 1st be officially adopted as a workers' holiday. This was to commemorate the struggles of the working class for emancipation and the "Martyrdom of the Chicago Eight". Since then May Day has become a date for international solidarity.

APRIL 25TH 1968

"Surely Chicago can find a better way to honour her policemen than by maintaining the fiction that the so-called Haymarket riot was a glorious chapter in anyone's history..."

For the police were attempting to break up a peaceful meeting and doing so against the expressed wishes of the mayor.

The seven policemen were killed by a bomb. The identity of the bomb thrower was never established, yet this minor flaw didn't prevent Chicago from using the riot to do itself great discredit.

After a general panic in which a police captain manufactured evidence, eight persons were put on trial..... Four men were hanged, not so much for what they did or did not do as for their off-beat views."

The Lessons of the Haymarket Incident

What happened at the Haymarket incident all those years ago was just another incident in the class war. There have been others, the death of Joe Hill, as well as the murder of Sacco and Vanzetti (to mention but two other incidents in the same tradition) show only too well the willingness of the authorities to spill the blood of working people when it is felt necessary.

What made these occasions memorable was the spirit of sacrifice shown by the victims.

It contrasts badly with today's political struggles.

What emerges from the whole sorry affair was the spirit of sacrifice and endeavor. Here we had people who knew what they wanted, they understood what the goals were. Albert Parsons, writing in the "Alarm", December 1885, said: "We will not compromise". The programme that our Chicago comrades took their stand on was defined by the Anarchist Congress in Pittsburgh, 1883:

1. Destruction of the existing class rule by all means, i.e. by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action.
2. Establishment of a free society based upon a co-operative system of production.
3. Free exchange of equivalent products, by and between the productive organisations without commerce and profit mongery.
4. Organisation of education on a secular, scientific, and equal basis for both sexes.
5. Equal rights for all without distinction of sex and race.
6. Regulation of all public affairs by free contracts between the autonomous, independent communes and associations resting on a federalistic basis.

Obviously the success of this group of men and women aroused the ire of the American ruling class and it is not too far fetched to say that the climax of the establishment's campaign against the Pittsburgh Declaration was the cold-blooded murder of four innocent men.

But not only did the anarchists know WHAT they wanted from their struggles and endeavors, they also knew how to go about getting it. "The Chicago Idea", that is "the direct action of the rank and file..." serving "as the instrument of the working class for the complete destruction of capitalism and as the nucleus for the formation of the new society." These quotes of a modern commentator describe well the "Chicago Idea".

Yet having embarked upon their crusade, the Chicago Martyrs didn't shirk from the consequences: "I can afford to be hung for the sake of the ideas I hold and the cause I have espoused" said Parsons.

"I am ready to die for the cause of the people", Adolph Fischer.

"There will be a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today.", August Theodore Vincent Spies.

"Hurrah for anarchy!", Adolph Fischer.

"In so exalted a state were they (the anarchists), sure that death by the gallows was but a means of spreading further into the hearts of the people they loved, the ideas apart from which they had no life, that it was exactly the truth when Fischer said "This is the happiest moment of my life". And those who saw his face said it shone with a white light on the scaffold."

(Dyer D. Lum)

It isn't just a question of 'ancestor worship' that makes us study the beliefs and actions of the Chicago Anarchists, that would be too easy. The plain fact is that today, for many of us the fight against Capital is relegated to the moments between pleasure and work. While the enemy use the twenty four hours in a day to encompass the virtual servitude of of working people to their aim, we who have the key to emancipation play about seeking the election of political neuters to Parliament or to high positions within trade unions.

Today these charlatans are seeking to hijack May Day and to obscure the principles involved, that is. Solidarity, Direct Action and Shop Floor Organisation.

These 'leaders' who lack any dignity whatsoever and who do not hesitate to sell themselves on television like so many cans of dog meat, seek to use working class history to emasculate the working class itself. Just as they have devalued the principles of solidarity, direct action and organisation, so they seek to use the deaths of anarchist militants to win people over to social democracy.

We should not let them. May Day is a day for remembrance, but even more a day for education, and for action.