



THE WORKERS' MAY-POLE

Published in *Freedom*, May 1986



1886 : HAYMARKET : 1986

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# Haymarket and May Day a centennial history 1886-1986

HAYMARKET is one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of the labour movement and especially of the anarchist movement in the United States and indeed the world. As well as its immediate impact, it had a permanent effect through the establishment of May Day as the international festival of the labour movement. Its centenary is therefore worth marking with a full account of the events and their implications from the anarchist point of view.

## American labour before 1886

The situation which eventually led to the Haymarket affair was the result of three main factors – the rapid industrialisation of the United States after the mid-nineteenth century, accompanied by a great increase in the wealth and power of the capitalist class; the parallel increase in the size and poverty of the working class; and the continuous polarisation and intensification of the struggle between the two classes, in the context of the tradition of hysteria and violence in American public life.

The industrialisation of the United States on a large scale began after the Civil War of 1861-1865. The growth of industry led to the accumulation of huge fortunes by a few and the extension of working discipline to the many, and this led to the beginning of a labour movement on the pattern of Western Europe, fed by growing immigration. From the start both American capitalism and American trade unionism were particularly extreme in their methods, the two sides resorting to violence including assassination in many industrial conflicts all over the country. At the same time there was a strong tradition of secrecy and conspiracy on both sides, and the great capitalist trusts were matched by clandestine labour organisations – thus the first large American trade union (the Knights of Labor, formed in 1869) operated underground for several years.

The already bitter class struggle was considerably embittered by the great trade depression of 1873-1879, which involved bankruptcies, wage reductions, unemployment, lock-outs, homelessness and starvation, the response being strikes, demonstrations, riots and murders. There was a long tradition of utopian or communitarian socialism in the United States, but revolutionary socialism on the European pattern came relatively late. The trade union movement showed even less interest in politics than it did in Britain, and the International Working Men's Association (the First International) had little support, even after the General

Council was moved to New York in 1872 to keep it out of the hands of the anti-authoritarians.

But during the crisis of the mid-1870s the first significant socialist organisation in the United States was founded as the Social Democratic Working Men's Party in 1874, and in 1876 it joined the remnants of the IWMA and other socialist bodies to form the Working Men's Party. This was deeply divided by conflicts between reformists and revolutionaries, advocates of trade union action and of electoral political action, English-speakers and German-speakers, and so on, but it played an important part in the growing agitation.

In 1877 a rail strike in the East spread across the rest of the country and also into other industries, becoming known as the Great Strike, and involving major riots which became pitched battles between strikes and demonstrators on one side and police and soldiers on the other. Although the strikes were eventually broken, the broad movement was strengthened. The WMP increased in size and activity and became the Socialistic Labor Party.

The SLP was equally divided by the old conflicts. In particular there were angry controversies over cooperation with other political parties and over armed struggle. From 1878 many socialists favoured not only political action but also electoral alliances with other parties, especially the liberal Greenback Party, and the SLP was involved in fighting elections at all levels. But it achieved little success, often being cheated out of what success it had, and from 1880 there was increasing disillusion with such activity. From 1875 some socialists reacted to the violent methods of the bosses and the authorities by forming armed clubs, involving drilling and shooting practice, and open displays of weapons on demonstrations. In 1879 this was made illegal in Illinois, and the socialist organisations officially accepted the ban, but many members continued to support armed struggle in theory and also in practice.

## Social revolutionaries and anarchists

As a result of left-wing opposition to the moderate line of the leadership and most of the rank-and-file of the socialist organisations, so-called 'social revolutionary' organisations began to appear from 1880. This development was stimulated by the International Social Revolutionary Congress in London in July 1881, which was attended mainly by European anarchists but also by several American socialists, and which supported the policy of 'propaganda by deed' and tried in vain to revive the International. This was followed by a Social Revolutionary Congress in Chicago in October 1881, which led to the formation of the Revolutionary Socialist Party. At the same time a short-lived International Workmen's Association (the 'Red International') was formed in the West in 1881 by Burnette G. Haskell, an eccentric revolutionary socialist; one of its secretaries was William C. Owen, a British journalist in California, who was later active in the anarchist movement both in the United States and in Britain (where he worked for *Freedom*). The final stimulus came at the end of 1882, when Johann Most, the German revolutionary socialist who had moved towards anarchism and produced *Die Freiheit* in London for several years, emigrated to the United States and transferred *Die Freiheit* to New York.

A special unifying Congress of the Socialists of North America was held in Pittsburgh in October 1883. This accepted what was known as 'the Chicago idea', a revolutionary trade unionism which anticipated the later revolutionary syndicalism of Europe and the Industrial Workers of the World of America, and it adopted the Pittsburgh Manifesto, mainly drafted by Most, which called for revolutionary libertarian socialism – a combination of Marxist economics and Bakuninist politics. The RSP was re-formed as the International Working People's Association (the 'Black International') which became in effect a militant anarchist socialist party.

This drift towards revolutionary and libertarian socialism coincided with a new trade depression of 1883-1886, which resembled that of the previous decade. This time militant trade unionists began to break away from the established labour organisations, especially in Chicago, where in 1884 they seceded from the Amalgamated Trades and Labor Assembly and formed a revolutionary Central Labor



The Haymarket bomb, 4 May 1886 (as portrayed in *Harper's Weekly*).

Union, which was closely associated with the IWPA. The class struggle was particularly polarised in Chicago, the bosses and authorities using Pinkerton agents, police and soldiers to attack rebellious workers, frequently killing them. A notoriously brutal policeman was John Bonfield, whom the liberal mayor Carter Harrison tried to dismiss for his activities but who was instead promoted.

By the end of 1885 the IWPA had about 100 branches and 5,000 members all over the country. The majority were immigrants, especially from Germany, and the main concentrations of membership were in New York and Chicago. Although the best-known leader was Most in New York, the most active sections were in Chicago, where the main figures were Albert Parsons and August Spies, who dominated the English-speaking and German-speaking sections respectively and edited their papers the *Alarm* and the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. They were both veteran socialists who had taken a leading part in electoral politics and trade union activity and had become convinced anarchists. Other leading figures in the English-speaking American Group were Samuel Fielden and William Holmes (both from Britain), Dyer D. Lum and James D. Taylor, and several women including Lucy Parsons (Parsons's black wife), Lizzie Holmes and Sarah Ames. Other leading figures in the German Group were Michael Schwab, Oscar Neebe and Rudolph Schnaubelt. The latter also had a more militant faction, the Autonomists, which favoured terrorism and was led by George Engel and Adolph Fischer; and there were independent advocates of terrorism such as Louis Lingg and William Seliger.

The cult of violence on both sides went to remarkable extremes. The bosses

and the authorities, with the enthusiastic support of the press, encouraged a vigilante mentality involving a virtual lynch law. The revolutionary socialists and militant trade unionists responded by turning from violence as a means of defence to violence as a means of attack, and moved on to the use of terrorism by explosives. The best-known advocate of such methods was Most, and in July 1885 he published a standard work on the subject – *Revolutionary War Science: A Little Handbook of Instruction in the Use and Preparation of Nitroglycerine, Dynamite, Gun cotton, Fulminating Mercury, Bombs, Fuses, Poisons, &c, &c*. This was widely circulated and serialised, and its concluding message was taken literally: 'Proletarians of all countries, arm yourselves! Arm yourselves by whatever means you can. The hour of battle is near.'

Virtually all the leaders of the anarchist and syndicalist organisations took the same line, especially in Chicago, and even those who – like Most – never took part in violence themselves were closely involved in encouraging those who did take part. The approval of violence was expressed in very provocative ways, on a personal as well as a political level. On 15 November 1884 C. S. Griffin wrote an article in the *Alarm* ending: 'Assassination properly applied is wise, just, humane, and brave. For freedom all things are just.' On 21 February 1885 Gerhard Lizius wrote a letter in the *Alarm* beginning: 'Dynamite! Of all the good stuff, this is the stuff.' On 7 May 1885 the *Chicago Tribune* reported a speech by Lucy Parsons, including a passage which became famous: 'Let every dirty, lousy tramp arm himself with a revolver or knife, and lay in wait on the steps of the palaces of the rich and stab or shoot the owners as they come out.

Let us kill them without mercy, and let it be a war of extermination and without pity.'

## The eight-hour day and May Day

Thus the scene was set by the widening and deepening class struggle and the mutual extremism of both sides; but Haymarket was actually precipitated by the relatively moderate demand for the eight-hour day. Campaigns for shorter working hours began in the United States during the industrialisation of the late 1860s, and led to several Federal and State laws. But such laws had little effect, being generally ignored or evaded, and the average working week remained six ten-hour days (50 per cent more than the average today), and many workers spent up to 90 hours a week in their jobs. During the early 1880s the trade union movement therefore decided to campaign for more effective action to win a real eight-hour day.

A congress of the non-socialist Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions held in Chicago in November 1884 proposed that the eight-hour day should become the legal working day and that it should be imposed by direct action by the workers. At the suggestion of Gabriel Edmonston, a delegate from Washington DC, it was agreed that this should take effect from 1 May 1886. Here it is necessary to consider the traditional significance of this particular day.

May Day began as one of the spring festivals of the pagan world. Maia (a word cognate with and originally meaning *mother*) was a deity in classical Greece and Rome. In Greek mythology she was a daughter of Atlas and the mother of Hermes; but in Roman religion she was a spring goddess who gave her name to the month we still call May. The associated festival – the Floralia or Florales – was one of the traditional vegetation rituals of ancient Europe, versions appearing in every country at every age, surviving in many places into our own time. In Rome it was a festival of flowers and fun (celebrated, according to Ovid, in a highly indecent way), and everywhere it was a cheerful celebration of youth and joy at the coming of summer.

May Day continued into the Christian era, despite the opposition of all the churches and attempts to absorb it into Pentecost (known in England as Whitsunday). In England it was a day for young men and women to go 'maying', welcoming the dawn with May-songs and May-games, presided over by a Queen and King of the May, or a May Lady and May Lord, or a May Bride and May Groom, all decorated with symbolic May-flowers or May-wreaths, May-garlands or May-bushes, drinking from a May-bowl or May-cup, dancing round a suggestive May-pole, and

**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, 7½ Uhr, auf dem**

**Haymarkt, 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-Comite.

performing mock marriages and other rituals. Christians and others in authority might disapprove, but young people insisted on getting up at dawn to enjoy themselves year after year.

May Day was mixed up with the Germanic festival of Walpurgis and the Celtic festival of Beltane, when witches flew and fires were lit; but the main tradition for more than two thousand years remained one of youthful innocence and renewed fertility, with obvious feminist overtones, and there was little effective interference from the religious or social establishment. The festival survived long after its supernatural connections had faded away, and it remained a virtually non-religious ceremony marking the annual reunion of Humanity with Nature and the rebirth of love and life.

May Day would therefore have been a highly suitable occasion for festivity in the great secular movements of the past couple of centuries, and the strange thing is perhaps that it took so long for the connection to be made. In the French Revolution it was indeed proposed as a feast of Love or Nature, but this wasn't put into practice; though the appropriate month in the exquisite new Revolutionary Calendar invented by Fabre d'Eglantine in 1793 was called Floréal.

Later the British utopian socialists sometimes gave it special significance, but

this never lasted. When William Benbow made his imaginative proposal for a Grand National Holiday in 1832 to establish the New Order, he suggested no particular date; but when Robert Owen announced the New Moral World in 1833, he suggested that it should begin on 1 May 1834. However, the date passed and was forgotten, as the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, the first mass working-class movement in the world, fell apart in ruins. The date was next seriously announced half a century later and several thousand miles to the West.

In several parts of North America May Day was called Moving Day, being a conventional day to move house or change jobs, and several of the laws for shorter working hours came into effect on 1 May. But the connections between the traditional May Day and Moving Day or between Moving Day and the modern May Day have never been conclusively established.

The proposal to impose the eight-hour day by direct action on 1 May 1886 was repeated in 1885, and began to spread throughout the American labour movement, originally in the moderate unions and parties but eventually in the militant ones too. For some time the revolutionary socialists and anarchists opposed what they considered to be a reformist demand, and the IWPA and

CLU held back from the growing campaign until the beginning of 1886, when it became so large and so serious that they felt it was better to join and advocate a more radical view of working hours from within rather than from outside. Even then they always saw it only as a transitional demand, and insisted on the need both to take it by force and also to go beyond it to more revolutionary action altogether. Typically Albert Parsons, who had supported the eight-hour day during his moderate socialist period in 1878, attacked it in 1885, but supported it again in 1886. Yet although the anarchist support for the campaign was delayed and limited, it was enthusiastic and energetic, and in Chicago the IWPA and CLU took over the leadership and organisation several months before the fatal date.

**Haymarket and the Red Scare**

On 1 May 1886, a Saturday, there were strikes and demonstrations across the United States, involving hundreds of thousands of workers. In Chicago about 40,000 people went out on strike, and there were marches and meetings all day, the largest being those organised by the IWPA and CLU. But there were no serious incidents, and the next day, a Sunday, was relatively calm.

Real trouble began on the following day, a Monday, especially at the McCormick Reaper Works, where there had been an anti-union lock-out since February, and where Pinkertons and police were protecting scab workers from the sacked strikers. At the end of the working day on 3 May, there was a pitched battle, during which the police deliberately fired revolvers into the crowd, killing at least two people and injuring many more. After witnessing the carnage, August Spies produced a bilingual leaflet calling for revenge. During the evening this was widely distributed, and at the same time the militant leaders decided to hold a protest meeting the next evening in the large Haymarket square.

On the morning of 4 May Adolph Fischer produced a bilingual leaflet calling the meeting; a line calling for workers to come armed was later deleted, but some copies of the original version were circulated. During the day the atmosphere remained tense, and there were running battles in several places. The evening meeting began late, and it was so badly attended that the organisers moved the few hundred people present around the corner into Desplaines Street; so the Haymarket tragedy ironically didn't happen in Haymarket at all — or of course on May Day.

The meeting was completely peaceful from beginning to end. Despite the leaflets, few people came armed, and the speakers — Spies, Parsons and Samuel

Fielden — all explicitly discouraged violence, despite their eloquent indignation about the recent events. Mayor Harrison, who sincerely believed both in free speech and in public order, was present until near the end, when he went to the nearest police station to say that the meeting was quiet, and then went home. The crowd began to leave while Fielden was finishing his speech, after 10.00 pm, and only a couple of hundred people were left when the meeting was suddenly confronted by an equally large contingent of armed policemen led by Bonfield.

There was never any serious doubt that the violence at Haymarket was planned, provoked, and largely perpetrated by the police, even though it didn't go quite as they had intended. The meeting was ordered to disperse, and the police prepared to charge, when without warning a single dynamite bomb was thrown into their ranks, the explosion killing one policeman and wounding several others. The police immediately responded by firing their revolvers into the crowd. In the confusion, seven policemen were killed and about sixty injured, mostly by their own bullets, and about the same number of civilians were killed and injured by the police.

No one was ever caught or tried for throwing the bomb, or has ever been conclusively identified as doing so. Indeed after a century it is still completely uncertain who was responsible, and the true answer will probably never be known. The right immediately suspected an anarchist, and the left immediately suspected an agent-provocateur, but neither side could find any direct evidence either way. The man who was named at the time, Rudolph Schnaubelt, was present at the Haymarket meeting, was among the many arrested and released soon afterwards before any charges were brought, and fled to Canada, to England, and then to Argentina, where he lived for several decades. Frank Harris's journalistic novel about the case, *The Bomb* (1908), repeated the accusation against him, but all that anyone could prove was the circumstantial evidence of his presence and flight. Several leading anarchists, including some closely involved at the time, always insisted that the bomber was not Schnaubelt but another anarchist who also fled; the likeliest candidate, who was named publicly half a century later, seems to be one of the German Autonomists, George Schwab (no relation to Michael), who also escaped from the scene and survived for several decades.

But the important point is not so much that the bomber was never identified as that the identity of the bomber was irrelevant to what happened after Haymarket. What happened was the first Red Scare in American history — though

by no means the last, the experience being repeated at the time of the assassination of President McKinley in 1901 and during the IWW movement before the First World War, at the time of the Russian Revolution after the First World War (when Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were deported and Sacco and Vanzetti were framed), and again during the Cold War after the Second World War (when the McCarthyist movement led to Hiss being framed and the Rosenbergs being judicially murdered).

A White Terror seized the United States, and especially Chicago. The press and politicians reached new heights of hysteria, the business community raised large sums of money, and the police made hundreds of raids and arrests, especially of people who were anarchists or foreigners or both. Civil liberties were virtually suspended for two months, and although nearly everyone arrested was quickly released, the atmosphere was that of a town in the American West or South dominated by a posse or lynch mob. The scene was set for a show trial and a purge of the revolutionary left.



Rudolph Schnaubelt.

**The martyrdom**

During the next eighteen months a small group of anarchists were turned into the Chicago Martyrs. On 27 May a grand jury indicted ten people for the murder of the one policeman known to have been killed by the bomb — Albert Parsons, August Spies, Michael Schwab, Samuel Fielden, George Engel, Adolph Fischer, Oscar Neebe, Louis Lingg, William Seliger, and Rudolph Schnaubelt. Parsons was the only fully native American; Fielden came from England (Todmorden, on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border); Neebe, though born in New York, spent his childhood in Germany; all the rest were German immigrants. Schnaubelt was

never caught, and Seliger gave evidence for the prosecution; the eight who were eventually put on trial were the vulnerable hard core of anarchist leadership in the Chicago labour movement, and they were now deliberately framed for murder and most of them murdered in revenge. If Most had ventured near Chicago he would undoubtedly have suffered the same fate; as it was, he had already been arrested, tried, and imprisoned for a year in New York for his inflammatory propaganda during the crisis.

The trial lasted for two months, beginning on 21 June. Parsons, who had managed to escape arrest, joined his comrades on the first day, voluntarily risking and eventually losing his life out of solidarity. The judge, Joseph E. Gary, was openly prejudiced against the defendants from beginning to end. The jury was openly packed. Much of the prosecution testimony was obviously perjured, but even then there was no convincing evidence linking any of the defendants directly or indirectly with the bomb. Instead they were accused of being accessories to murder on the grounds that their political propaganda had incited revolutionary violence and might have influenced the unknown bomber. On 20 August all eight were found guilty of murder and seven were sentenced to death, Neebe being sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment.

The verdicts and sentences won general approval in Chicago and the country at large. On 7 October the judge denied a request for a re-trial, but then allowed the defendants to make long and remarkable speeches before confirming their sentences on 9 October. On 2 November the defence appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court, and in the long interval a growing campaign of solidarity began to spread across the country and then the world. Non-anarchist socialists and non-socialist anarchists, though repudiating the methods of the anarchist socialists, supported the cause of the defendants. Liberals, at first hostile to both, began to swing in their favour as doubts about the trial increased.

The eight defendants remained continuously active in Cook County Jail, receiving hundreds of visitors, including many outsiders, such as the British socialists Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, who visited the United States in autumn 1886 and strongly defended the Chicago Martyrs in public on both sides of the Atlantic, despite their equally strong opposition to anarchism.

On 14 September 1887 the Illinois Supreme Court rejected the appeal and fixed the executions for 11 November. During the few remaining weeks the campaign for reprieve reached its peak. An Amnesty Association mobilised respectable opinion, getting support from many leading Americans, including such labour



vain. Well might Adolph Fischer exclaim, as he stood beneath the gallows: 'This is the happiest moment of my life. Long live Anarchy!' The martyrdom which crowned his life has indeed inspired those for whom he died with fresh indignation against wrong, fresh devotion to freedom. He and his comrades have perished that the principles they represent may live for ever in the hearts of men.

(December 1887)

In 1888 Lucy Parsons came to Britain as the guest of the Socialist League for the commemoration of the first anniversary of Bloody Friday. She spoke at several meetings around the country, and made a profound impact, her dark hair and skin accentuated by her black clothes, and her beautiful face and voice reinforcing her passionate rhetoric. *Freedom* reported:

In England this first anniversary has been rendered the more impressive by the visit of our honoured comrade Lucy Parsons, who had addressed great and enthusiastic meetings in London, Norwich, Ipswich and Edinburgh; everywhere stirring a deeper chord of social and revolutionary feeling by her noble personality and the simple directness of her heart-felt eloquence. Everywhere the workers have met her with the enthusiastic sympathy due to her suffering, her courage and her devotion. Everywhere she has caused those who heard her to realise the true-hearted earnestness of the men and women who have been most energetic in the Chicago labour movement, and deepened the sense of solidarity between them and the English workers.

(December 1888)

Ironically, during the next few years Lucy Parsons moved away from anarchism and propaganda by deed towards syndicalism and the general strike. Later she joined the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World, and eventually became a fellow-traveller with the Communist regime in Russia and worked with the Communist Party until her death in 1942. Johann Most never abandoned anarchism, but after Haymarket he did abandon propaganda by deed, and during the 1890s strongly opposed it.

For many years afterwards, whatever socialists and even anarchists may have felt about the politics of Haymarket, the anniversary of Bloody Friday — what Charles Mowbray in 1892 called the anarchist Good Friday — was commemorated by left-wing organisations around the world, in much the same way as the anniversary of the Paris Commune on 18 March. Meetings and demonstrations were held, articles and pamphlets were pub-

lished, the biographies of the martyrs and the history of the case were repeated. This custom continued in the United States until the Second World War, but elsewhere the custom died out by the First World War, being ironically displaced afterwards by Armistice Day, the anniversary of the end of the war on 11 November 1918. Anyway, by this time it had been increasingly replaced by May Day.

#### The international May Day

May Day, which had been overshadowed by the tragedy of 1886-1887, was soon revived and then established on a permanent basis. During 1888 the moderate American Federation of Labor, which had emerged from the Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions in 1886, resumed the campaign for the eight-hour day, and in December 1888 it

called for a national day of strikes and demonstrations on 1 May 1890 — a repeat of the campaign four years before, without the militant anarchists and syndicalists. This time the movement became international as well as national, partly because of the impact of Haymarket, though the memory of the anarchist martyrs was played down and the eight-hour day aspect was played up.

Already in November 1888, during the International Trades Union Congress in London, a Belgian socialist called Edouard Anseele had proposed international labour demonstrations in May 1889, and an unknown delegate had amended the date to 1 May 1890. The proposal was lost, but the idea was discussed in several labour congresses in several countries during the next few months, winning growing support. The final decision came in 1889, during the

celebration of the centenary of the French Revolution.

During July 1889 there were two simultaneous international socialist congresses in Paris — a moderate one attended mainly by parliamentarist socialists, and a radical one attended mainly by Marxists, Blanquists and anarchists (the British delegates including Keir Hardie and Edward Carpenter, William Morris and Frank Kitz, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling). The latter founded the Second International; and in the closing session it also made two other lasting decisions on the suggestion of a French socialist called Raymond Lavigne. The first was to hold a day of international labour demonstrations in 1890; the second — after considering 18 March (the proclamation of the Paris Commune in 1871) and 14 July (the fall of the Paris Bastille in 1789) — was to choose 1 May, in solidarity with the American labour movement. So 1 May 1890 was proclaimed as a worldwide demonstration of labour solidarity in the struggle for the eight-hour day, the example of the Chicago Martyrs being almost forgotten except by the anarchists.

In the event the demonstrations were very successful in many countries, involving peaceful marches and meetings in most places, though fights and riots in some, and the occasion was repeated in 1891. This time they were even more successful, leading to serious conflict with the authorities in many places. The riot in Paris started the series of events leading to the Bomb Era and the official persecution of the anarchist movement, and the riots in Italy and Spain had an important influence on developments in the anarchist movement. The demonstrations were repeated again in 1892, and with the sanction of the Second International May Day became the annual festival of the whole labour movement, especially in Europe and Latin America.

Elsewhere things were sometimes different. Australia already had a labour day, marking the achievement of the eight-hour day as early as 1856, which became an official holiday on various dates in spring and autumn in various places; New Zealand followed suit. Most ironically, in the United States and Canada May Day was abandoned soon after it was revived, mainly because of the opposition to socialism in the labour movement, dominated for many years by Samuel Gompers of the AFL, which had actually initiated the revival of May Day. It was replaced by Labor Day, which had been proposed by the Knights of Labor back in 1882 as a sort of industrial equivalent of a harvest festival on the first Monday in September; this was made a national holiday in 1894, and is still celebrated today.

In Britain there was typical confusion and compromise from the start. The first

# 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! your might, Hercules, and destroy the hideous monster that seeks to destroy you. To arms we call you, to arms!

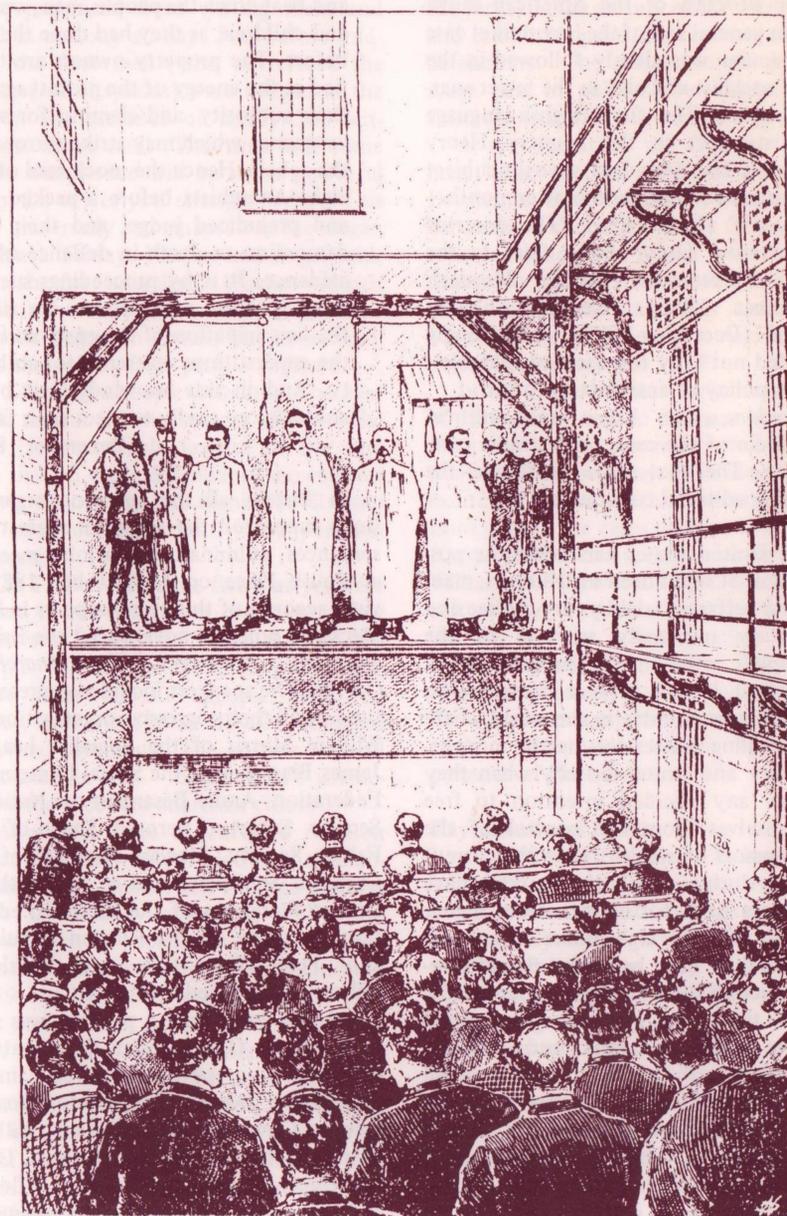
Your Brothers.

# Rache! Rache!

## Arbeiter, zu den Waffen!

Arbeitendes Volk, heute Nachmittag mordeten die Bluthunde Eurer Ausbeuter 6 Eurer Brüder draußen bei McCormick's. Warum mordeten sie dieselben? Weil sie den Muth hatten, mit dem Loos unzufrieden zu sein, welches Eure Ausbeuter ihnen beschieden haben. Sie forderten Brod, man antwortete ihnen mit Blei, eingedenk der Thatsache, daß man damit das Volk am wirksamsten zum Schweigen bringen kann! Viele, viele Jahre habt Ihr alle Demuthigungen ohne Widerstand ertragen, habt Euch vom frühen Morgen bis zum späten Abend geschunden, habt Entbehrungen jeder Art ertragen, habt Eure Kinder selbst geopfert — Alles, um die Schatzkammern Eurer Herren zu füllen, Alles für die Lieb und jetzt, wo Ihr vor sie hintretet, um sie anzusehen, Eure Würde etwas zu erleichtern, da heßen sie zum Dant für Eure Opfer ihre Bluthunde, die Polizei, auf Euch, um Euch mit Bleikugeln von der Unzufriedenheit zu kuriren. Wir fragen und beschwören Euch bei Allem, was Euch heilig und werth ist, rächt diesen schrecklichen Mord, den man heute an Euren Brüdern beging, und vielleicht morgen schon an Euch begangen wird. Arbeitendes Volk, Hört auf, da bist am Scheitelpunkt angelangt. Wofür entscheidest Du Dich? Für Sklaverei und Hunger, oder für Freiheit und Brod? Entscheidet Du Dich für das Letztere, dann säume keinen Augenblick; dann, Volk, zu den Waffen! Vernichtung den menschlichen Bestien, die sich Deine Herrscher nennen! Rücksichtslose Vernichtung ihnen — das muß Deine Lösung sein! Denkt der Helden, deren Blut den Weg zum Fortschritt, zur Freiheit und zur Menschlichkeit gebahnt — und strebt, ihre würdig zu werden!

Eure Brüder.



Black Friday, 11 November 1887.

international May Day, in 1890, fell on a Thursday, and the revolutionary socialists and anarchists wished to observe it on the same day as their comrades elsewhere, so they held a march through London in the afternoon and a meeting at Clerkenwell Green in the evening on 1 May. But the reformist socialists and Marxists, and above all the trade unionists, decided not to take time off work but to observe it instead on the nearest Sunday, so they held a huge meeting in Hyde Park on 4 May.

Thus was set the pattern which has lasted ever since — the great mass of the British labour movement celebrating on Sunday, and only a tiny minority of revolutionary socialists and anarchists occasionally insisting on May Day itself, or else intervening in the main event with

radical speeches or heckling and occasionally provoking fights. (Similar difficulties arose in Germany at an early stage.)

It should be emphasised that the anarchists were never happy about May Day, and from the start resisted the concentration on the eight-hour day and the suppression of the memory of the Chicago Martyrs. *Freedom* repeatedly expressed such doubts. At the time of the first May Day, it argued for direct rather than parliamentary action, for the achievement of shorter working hours by strikes rather than laws, and as part of a revolutionary rather than reformist programme (May 1890). At the time of the second May Day it commented:

For us conscious revolutionary Anarchists, the movement, coming as it

## UNITED SOCIALIST SOCIETIES.

"Our Silence will be more Powerful than our Speech."

# CHICAGO MARTYRS And BLOODY SUNDAY.

It has been decided to keep in memory the Cruel Murders legally committed by the United States Government in Chicago last November, when five men were killed and three imprisoned (two for life, one for fifteen years), as well as those of the three men killed by our own Government in Trafalgar Square on the same date, and the many others who were then imprisoned for maintaining in both cases the right of Free Speech.

The following amongst other Meetings will be held in London:—

### On Saturday, November 10,

A Meat Tea will be provided at St. Paul's Cafe, St. Paul's Church Yard, E.C., at 7 p.m. Tickets 1s. 6d. each. Tickets will be issued at 6d. each for those who cannot attend tea, in order to hear an address to Mrs. Parsons and her reply. Cunninghame Graham, M.P., in the Chair. Songs will be sung by the Choir during the evening.

### SUNDAY, NOV. 11.

REGENT'S PARK - - - 11.30 a.m.  
HYDE PARK - - - 3 p.m.

### MONDAY, NOV. 12.

WORNUM HALL, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road, at 7.30 p.m.

### SUNDAY, NOV. 18.

VICTORIA PARK - - - 3 p.m.

These Meetings will be addressed by MRS. PARSONS, of Chicago, U.S.A. (Wife of one of the Murdered Men), Cunninghame Graham, M.P., Prince Kropotkin, Dr. Merlino, William Morris, F. Kitz, J. Blackwell, John Burns, C. A. V. Conybeare, M.P., Rev. S. D. Headlam, several of the Trafalgar Square Victims, in addition to many other speakers.

All communications and information can be obtained from the Secretary, Commemoration Committee, 13 Farringdon Rd., E.C.

does from the midst of the workers, endeared to us by the blood of some of our best and bravest at Chicago, must have a peculiar interest. But for that reason we have to be all the more careful we do not permit ourselves to be led away by the movement into the paths of reaction, following the footsteps of the Social Democrats. We must not let the movement use us, we must use the movement. For us it can be nothing more than an opportunity. We have no desire to create another workers' annual holiday. On the contrary we wish to do away with the system of holidays and working days altogether and make men free and equal so that they may take their holidays when they will, just as the exploiting classes do today. The first of

May will lose all its significance and degenerate into a sort of universal Bank Holiday if it is to be established as a regular thing. It is only valuable to the workers now because it is a revolutionary menace against the capitalists. When the capitalists no longer make elaborate preparations to put down insurrections on the first of May, it will no longer be worth the while of the workers to celebrate the day.

(May 1891)

And at the time of the third May Day it commented: 'We may yet see the May Day of the Anarchist, no master over men, no government of man over man, but freedom and individual liberty for all' (June 1892). But in practice the anarchists of Britain as of most other countries were swept along by the tide of support

for May Day as a holiday rather than as a battle, and have managed only occasional protests or separate demonstrations.

During the subsequent century there have been significant developments in the nature and function of May Day. In Russia it became an important symbol of the growing revolutionary movement. Maxim Gorky's political novel *The Mother* (1906) contains a central episode based on real events at the May Day demonstration in 1902 at Sormovo, near Nizhni Novgorod (later renamed Gorky). Following the successful February Revolution in 1917, May Day officially became a national rather than a class festival; and then, following the successful October Revolution the same year, it became a state ritual.

The same pattern was followed by subsequent Communist regimes, so that what began as a demonstration of working-class solidarity became a display of military strength. The first known celebration of May Day in Asia was among sailors at Canton in 1917, and two years later a great left-wing nationalist youth movement in China took its name from its beginning on 4 May 1919; thirty years later the successful Maoist regime turned May Day into a state ritual. If genuine working-class demonstrations are held on May Day in a Communist country nowadays — as in Poland during the early 1980s — it is in opposition to the official celebrations and in defiance of the Party dictatorship.

During the First World War the celebration of May Day became an anti-militarist gesture on both sides. The last Soviet Republic in Bavaria was deliberately suppressed on 1 May 1919. After the First World War May Day became an act of defiance against the new Fascist regimes. It was suppressed by Mussolini in Italy from 1923 and by Salazar in Portugal from 1924. But it was co-opted by later such regimes. In Nazi Germany, Hitler (who had campaigned to ban it in 1922) made May Day a national holiday in 1933 to prevent any demonstrations of working-class resistance to the regime, and in Vichy France Pétain took the same precaution in 1941 for the same reason. The practice of co-opting May Day was eventually sanctified by the Roman Catholic Church in 1955, when 1 May was made the Feast of Joseph the Worker in a glorious act of political hypocrisy. May Day was suppressed by Franco in Spain from 1939, but its celebration from 1947 marked the growing resistance to the regime. The same is now the case in South Africa.

May Day sometimes regains its revolutionary significance. It was chosen as the beginning of the British General Strike in 1926, but the humiliating defeat in less than two weeks rather spoiled the point. But it was no coincidence that the French

'events' in 1968 began two days after May Day, or that the Fascist regime in Portugal fell in 1974 a week before May Day. But in general May Day has almost completely lost its sting. In most Western countries with strong parliamentary socialist movements it has been absorbed into the state system in various ways. This was finally done in Britain in 1978, the first Monday in May becoming a Bank Holiday in a further typical compromise, so that May Day is still on the wrong day in most years, and the labour movement continues to prefer the Sunday.

### May Day lives!

Few of the millions of people all over the world and in this country who vote for socialist parties or belong to trade unions ever consider that such organisations derive from revolutionary conspiracies whose members were once imprisoned and exiled or murdered for making seditious speeches and leading violent demonstrations or for administering secret oaths and smashing new machines. Even fewer of the millions of people who observe May Day ever realise what the day really means.

For anarchists May Day is not just an innocent festival of renewal or a comfortable celebration of the way the leaders of the labour movement have betrayed their origins and their followers for another year. For us it is a commemoration of the victims and martyrs who fell in the long and bitter struggle for a decent working life and a militant demand for a better working life in the future — starting now. To put the matter on the simplest level, there still isn't even a genuine eight-hour day, when so many people have to work extra hours and days of overtime and extra shifts and rosters to earn enough to live on, and there still isn't a proper understanding of work, when between a fifth and a quarter of the working population can't get jobs at all and when most of the jobs people do get aren't worth doing anyway.

So we still observe the real May Day for the real reasons, especially remembering our American comrades a century ago, and we shall do so every year



Lucy Parsons.

until we can celebrate a real victory of the future rather than the harsh defeats of the past or the empty triumphs of parliamentary socialism and reformist trade unionism of the present. That will be a day worth remembering and a holiday worth having, a May Day to enjoy like the May Day at the dawn of the world. And that is something worth working for during the other 364 days of the year, year after year until we at last win our freedom.

NW

### Bibliographical note

The documentation of and literature on the Haymarket affair and May Day are very extensive, but have been conveniently digested in a few useful books. Two

# LABOUR DAY

MAY 1st, 1890.

Workers of the World, Unite!

Travailleurs du Monde, Unissez-vous!

Arbeiter der Welt, Vereinigt euch!

On Thursday, May 1st,

A DEMONSTRATION

WILL TAKE PLACE IN

HYDE PARK

at 4 p.m.

TO BE FOLLOWED BY

a TORCHLIGHT MEETING on

CLERKENWELL GREEN

at 7.30 p.m.

WORKERS OF LONDON, MEN AND WOMEN, EMPLOYED AND UNEMPLOYED,

These meetings are to be held for the purpose of demonstrating the International Solidarity of Labour, and in sympathy with the gatherings of our Continental and American comrades to take place on the same day.

The following Resolution will be submitted to the meetings in London and Provinces:

"That this meeting hails with joy the awakening of Labour which is taking place throughout the civilised world; declares the necessity for the union of workers in all countries to obtain complete freedom from the monopoly of capitalists; asserts that the only possible remedy for the poverty and misery of the workers is the free access to the resources of nature, and the management by the workers of the organisation of Labour; and calls on all workers to accept the task of bringing about this freedom as a necessary duty paramount over all others."

The Procession will assemble on the Thames Embankment at 2.30, and will proceed by way of Fleet Street, Wellington Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, to Oxford Street and Hyde Park.

Read the COMMONWEAL, organ of International Revolutionary Socialism, 24 GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

collections of material on the Chicago Martyrs are *The Famous Speeches of the Eight Chicago Anarchists in Court* (1886) edited by Lucy Parsons, and *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* (1969) edited by Philip S. Foner. Two collections of material on the case are *The Chicago Haymarket Riot* (1959) edited by Bernard R. Kogan, and *Haymarket Revisited* (1976) edited by William J. Adelman. Two historical studies of the case are *The History of the Haymarket Affair* (1936, 1958) by Henry David, and *The Haymarket Tragedy* (1984) by Paul Avrich. Two historical studies of May Day are *Histoire du premier mai* (1953, 1972) by Maurice Dommanget, and *1er mai* (1977) by André Rossel. (Thanks are due to Heiner Becker.)