The **Haymarket Affair** (also known as the **Haymarket Riot** or **Haymarket Massacre**) was a significant event in U.S. labor history that occurred on **May 4, 1886**, in **Chicago, Illinois**. It was a turning point in the labor movement, symbolizing both the fight for workers’ rights and the tensions between labor activists and authorities.

**Background**

1. **Labor Conditions in the 1880s**:
   * During the late 19th century, industrial workers faced harsh conditions: long hours (typically 10–16 hours a day), low wages, and unsafe workplaces.
   * Workers and unions, such as the **Knights of Labor**, began demanding better conditions, particularly an **eight-hour workday**.
2. **The Labor Movement and Strikes**:
   * By 1886, the push for an eight-hour workday had gained national momentum, culminating in a series of strikes across the country on **May 1, 1886** (International Workers' Day).
   * In Chicago, a stronghold of labor activism, tensions ran high between workers, employers, and law enforcement.

**The Incident**

1. **Prelude: May 3, 1886**:
   * On May 3, police fired into a crowd of striking workers at the **McCormick Harvesting Machine Company**, killing several people.
   * This violence intensified the call for protests against police brutality.
2. **The Haymarket Rally: May 4, 1886**:
   * A peaceful rally was organized at **Haymarket Square** to protest the killings and support the eight-hour workday.
   * About 1,500–2,000 people gathered, listening to speeches by labor leaders and anarchists.
3. **The Bombing**:
   * As police arrived to disperse the rally, an unknown person threw a **dynamite bomb** into their ranks.
   * The explosion killed one officer instantly and wounded others, some fatally.
   * Police responded by firing into the crowd, killing several and wounding dozens.

**Aftermath**

1. **Public Reaction**:
   * The bombing shocked the nation and turned public opinion against the labor movement, associating it with violence and anarchism.
   * Newspapers and business leaders denounced labor activists as radicals.
2. **Trial of the Haymarket Eight**:
   * Eight anarchists were arrested and accused of conspiracy, despite little evidence linking them to the bombing.
   * The trial was widely criticized as biased and unfair:
     + Four were hanged.
     + One committed suicide in jail.
     + Three were later pardoned by Illinois Governor **John Peter Altgeld** in 1893, citing a lack of evidence and the influence of public prejudice.

**Impact on the Labor Movement**

1. **Repression of Unions**:
   * The incident led to a crackdown on labor organizations, particularly anarchists and socialists.
   * Employers strengthened opposition to unionization, and many unions distanced themselves from radical elements.
2. **Global Recognition**:
   * Despite the immediate backlash, the Haymarket Affair became a symbol of workers' struggles worldwide.
   * In 1889, labor groups designated **May 1 (May Day)** as an annual day of labor solidarity and protest, commemorating the events of Haymarket.
3. **Legacy**:
   * The Haymarket Affair underscored the challenges of achieving workers’ rights in a deeply divided society.
   * It remains a landmark event in the history of labor, anarchism, and free speech.