

The History of May Day

In 1886, the American Federation of Labor adopted a resolution that a full workday would be no more than 8 hours. General strikes sprung up across the country. In Chicago, the center of the 8-hour movement, 400,000 striking workers brought the city to a standstill on May 1st. That day, thousands of employees from the McCormick Harvester Co. met in front of their factory to rally.

Two days later, 6,000 lumber-shovers assembled nearby, and 500 of the McCormick workers joined them. The anarchist August Spies addressed them, at the request of the Central Labor Union. He said that the strikebreakers should remain strong and stick together. Around this time, the scabs were leaving their shifts at the McCormick plant. The strikers walked over to the plant and forced the scabs back inside the factory. Suddenly 200 policemen appeared and, without warning, brutally attacked the crowd with guns and batons. One worker was killed and many more were injured.

August Spies went that night to the anarchist paper *Arbeiter Zeitung*. He published an article calling for another rally the following evening. The protest the next night in Haymarket Square was peaceful. Spies, along with two other anarchists active in the labor movement, spoke to the gathered crowds. The mayor of Chicago was present, and concluded that the group was peaceful. He asked the police captain to take his officers back to the station since they weren't needed. Around 10 PM, only 200 workers were lingering in the square, drenched in the pouring rain. The police captain led 180 officers into the square, ordering the stragglers to disperse. The speaker protested, "we are peaceable". Suddenly, a bomb went off within the ranks of the policemen. Seven were killed and seventy others were injured. The police opened fire and it has never been determined how many workers were killed by police bullets.

In the following days, the police swept



through Chicago, raiding homes, union halls, meeting rooms, and printing presses. The media and church called for revenge, declaring communists and anarchists the culprit. The state attorney said 'raid first and then determine the law'. All known communists and anarchists were apprehended as well as many people having nothing to do with socialism. Eventually Spies, the two other speakers that evening, and five other anarchists were accused of the crime.

The "Haymarket Eight" were given a joke of a trial. The jury consisted of cops and cops' employees. No evidence was given that the eight were connected to the bomb or even approved such an action. Only three of the eight had even been in the square that evening, and one had even brought his small children to the protest. The mayor even said in his testimony that the speeches given that evening "were tame". The prosecutor's closing argument stated that the principles of the accused were on trial, that they were just as guilty as their followers, and that they needed to be convicted to preserve the social order of the United States. Authorities were convinced their conviction would destroy the movement for the 8-hour workday. The Haymarket

Eight were convicted and seven were given the death penalty.

After a massive international campaign against the convictions and sentences, two were given life sentences. The remaining five were to be hung, and one took his own life first. The other four were hung on November 11, 1887. 600,000 people attended their funeral.

In 1893 the Governor of Illinois set the remaining three free from prison and pardoned them. He said the Haymarket Eight were victims of "hysteria, a packed jury, and a biased judge", making it clear of his belief in their innocence. Later it was revealed that the bomb was actually thrown by an agent working for the police captain in a conspiracy with the steel bosses to discredit the labor movement.

Where are we today? Has anything changed? Any substantial improvements in society were made by millions of people standing together against our bosses and rulers. Nothing has ever been given to us: it has been fought for and taken. Only by fighting together can we abolish our oppression and create a truly free society.

Celebrate workers' struggles by celebrating May Day!

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

LOS ANGELES BRANCH

PO Box 91691
Pasadena, CA 91109
626-644-1973

SANTA BARBARA BRANCH

PO Box 23008
Santa Barbara, CA 93121
sbgbm@yahoo.com