

A high-angle, sepia-toned photograph of a massive crowd of people filling a city street. In the background, a tram is visible, and buildings line the street. The scene captures a large-scale public gathering, likely a May Day demonstration.

MAY DAY

**Made in the USA
Exported to the World**

“This is the first and only International Labor Day. It belongs to the working class and is dedicated to the Revolution.” —Eugene Debs, 1907

A Speak Out Now pamphlet

May Day – Made in the USA, Exported to the World

May Day (International Workers Day) is one of the most important working-class holidays. It originated in the United States in the 1880s with the struggle for the eight-hour day.

The expansion of capitalism in 19th century America brought new layers of the working class into existence. Many were imbued with a strong class hatred for their oppressors. The workers' movement spread from large urban centers to small towns, building new organizations and engaging in militant struggles.

The major labor organization at the time was the Knights of Labor. It was born as a secret society in 1869 and by May 1886 it had a membership of over one million. The Knights combined the idea of the need for a class approach to organizing with a moral exhortation for good works and education.

Their view was an “injury to one is the concern of all.” They also believed that wage slavery needed to be done away with and replaced by cooperatives of some kind.

This made them quite different from the American Federation of Labor (founded in 1884 as the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions). The new AFL was based on the skilled labor of white, American-born males and was quite narrow in both its approach and its tactics of winning a better life.

The AFL's philosophy was to use strikes by its skilled membership as barter to win from the capitalists “a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.” It believed in “pure and simple” trade unionism and turned away from any radical politics.

A third grouping, socialist and anarchist militants opposed to the capitalist system, believed that the overthrow of the system could be accomplished by militant labor action.

The issues of a reduced workweek or shorter daily hours had been a rallying cry for workers both in the United States and around the

industrialized world. It was a struggle against the constant attempt by the bosses to extend the working day up to as much as 16 hours, side by side with periodic unemployment.

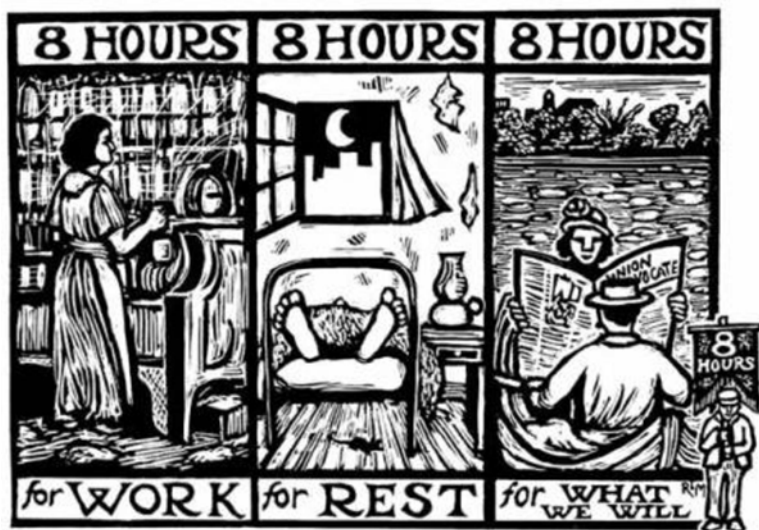
Strikes and pressure for legislation to reduce working hours became widespread in the 1880s. An economic depression with resulting unemployment and wage cuts spurred the movement forward so that in 1885 the workers began to discuss the idea of a general strike to win the eight-hour day.

While the national Knights leaders quaked in their boots, the local leaders prepared for the battle. May 1, 1886 was chosen as the date for the fight to be launched. On the job, in the neighborhoods, at the union halls and at home, the eight-hour-a-day movement was the hot topic of working-class conversation.

The workers sang the “Eight-Hour Song”:

*We meant to make things over;
We're tired of toil for naught
But bare enough to live on:
Never an hour for thought.
We want to feel the sunshine;
We want to smell the flowers;
We're sure that God has willed it,
And we mean to have eight hours.
We're summoning our forces
From shipyard, shop and mill:
Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest,
Eight hours for what we will!*

But the bosses were also preparing. The media began a huge propaganda campaign. Paramilitary groups started to form while the police and National Guard increased their numbers, with the obvious threat that they would use violence against the strikers.



In early spring 1886, strikes demanding the eight-hour day began to break out, involving almost a quarter of a million workers. The movement was strongest in the big working-class centers but it extended all over the Midwest and East Coast. In Chicago, a mix of trade unionists, socialists, and anarchists united, holding huge demonstrations in the weeks leading up to May 1.

Mass rallies, parades and demonstrations involving thousands of workers took place around the country. Brewers, bakers, furniture workers, clothing cutters, tobacco workers, shoe, lard, and packing workers won some victories and saw their hours reduced.

On May Day, tens of thousands of workers struck and tens of thousands more took to the streets to support the fight. It was a festival of the oppressed, with bands and flags and joy. Over the next days, 340,000 workers stopped work in 12,000 work places around the country. Many of the struggles were victorious.

On May 3, police in Chicago fired into a mass meeting of workers in front of the huge McCormick works, killing four people and wounding two hundred. The workers battled the police. Anarchists called on the workers to take up arms. All over the city, the workers held meetings and rallies to protest the killings and police brutality.

At a meeting in Haymarket Square on May 4, some 3000 people rallied to protest the McCormick killings. As the last speaker was finishing up, hundreds of police marched in and declared that the rally must disperse.

Suddenly, dynamite exploded where the police were standing, wounding dozens and eventually killing seven. The police fired into the crowd, wounding 200 and killing several people.

The newspapers all over the country screamed about the bombing, accusing the anarchists of murdering the police. The mayor declared a virtual martial law and the police began raiding all radical organizations, arresting hundreds of socialists, anarchists, and others.

Law and order became the watchword of the day, cheered on by the bosses and their mouthpieces in government, the press, and the police. Even the Chicago Knights of Labor applauded the witch hunt, stating: "We hope the whole gang of [anarchist] outlaws will be blotted from the face of the earth."

Eight anarchists were arrested for the Haymarket bombing. Seven were sentenced to hang and one to a long prison term, though there was not a shred of real evidence to connect them to the bombing. The governor of Illinois commuted the sentences of two of the accused, one man killed himself in jail, and four were hanged by the state.

Twenty-five thousand workers participated in a funeral march for them in Chicago. Thousands of workers made a pilgrimage yearly to the graves of the Haymarket martyrs at Waldheim cemetery in Chicago.

Mother Jones, a leader of the miners, said of Haymarket: "The workers asked only for bread and a shortening of long hours of toil. The agitators gave them visions. The police gave them clubs."

The repression following the strike wave of 1886 led to the demise of the Knights of Labor. However, the more narrowly focused AFL, whose leaders took credit for the eight-hour-day strike victories, gained ground, with over 100,000 members.

In the meantime, the principles of class struggle and labor solidarity were passed along to new generations of labor radicals and led to the

creation of the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World, many of whose militants honored and respected the Haymarket martyrs and the fighters of the 1886 movement for the eight-hour day.

There were over 1400 strikes, involving over half a million workers, in 1886, leading it to be called at the time “the year of the great uprising of labor.” The strike wave showed the potential power of the newly emerging industrial working class. It showed a high level of class solidarity, even across racial lines.

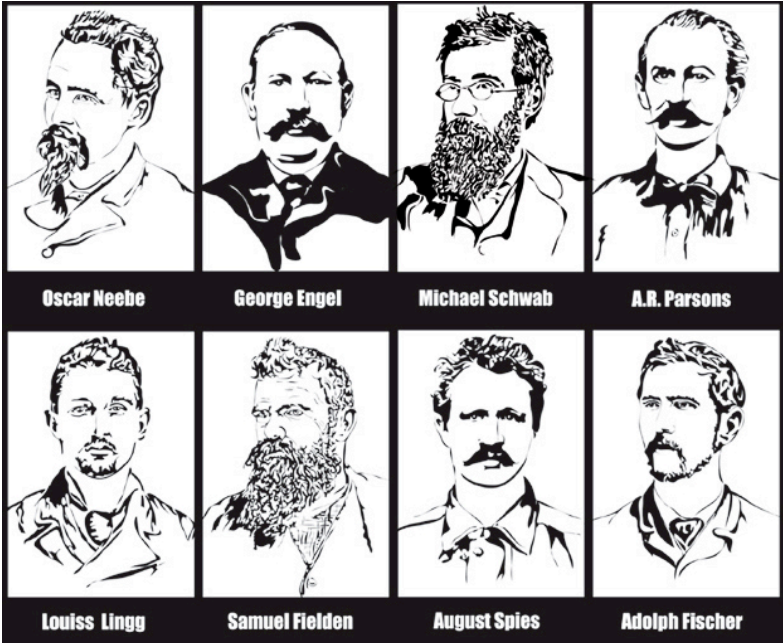
In 1888 the AFL continued the eight-hour-day movement. In 1889, the Second Socialist International and workers’ organizations around the world voted to designate May 1st, 1890, as an international day of solidarity to continue the fight for the eight-hour day and to honor workers’ struggles.

In the United States, however, while left-wing groups tried to keep May Day alive, the conservative and later anti-communist trade union leadership, with the support of U.S. politicians, tried to shift attention to the first Monday in September that they called “Labor Day.”

Although the September date had been celebrated by trade unionists in New York as early as 1882, in subsequent years it became associated with flag-waving patriotism, parades, and picnics as opposed to the more militant May Day celebrations. Congress recognized Labor Day as a national holiday in 1894, while ignoring May Day.

As the workers’ movement in the United States unfolds in the future, it will be up to us to reclaim May Day as our holiday and bring its celebration back to the U.S. working-class centers where the holiday was born.

The Haymarket Martyrs



Samuel Fielden – Age 29 – Occupation: Teamster

Louis Lingg – Age 23 – Occupation: Carpenter

Albert Parsons – Age 39 – Occupation: Journalist

August Spies – Age 32 - Occupation : Upholsterer

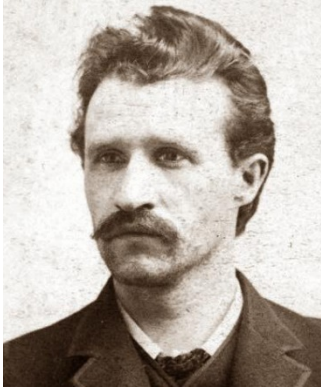
Michael Schwab – Age 33 – Occupation: Bookbinder

George Engel – Age 51 – Occupation: Toy Shop Owner

Adolph Fischer – Age – 29 Occupation: Printer

Oscar Neebe - Age 36 – Occupation: Tinsmith

What follows are some excerpts from speeches by two Haymarket Martyrs, and Lucy Parsons.



August Spies (1855-1887)

August Spies was born in Landeck, Germany in 1855. Spies emigrated to the U.S. in 1872 and settled in Chicago, where he became an upholsterer. He became involved in trade union activities and joined the revolutionary movement in 1877. Three years later he began contributing to the anarchist journal, Arbeiter Zeitung, and became editor in 1880.

YOUR HONOR: In addressing this court I speak as the representative of one class to the representative of another. I say to you: "My defense is your accusation."

I have been indicted on the charge of murder. Upon this indictment I have been convicted. There was no evidence produced by the State to show or even indicate that I had any knowledge of the man who threw the bomb, or that I myself had anything to do with the throwing of the missile...

If there was no evidence to show that I was legally responsible for the deed, then my conviction and the execution of the sentence is nothing less than willful, malicious, and deliberate murder, as foul a murder as may be found in the annals of religious, political, or any other sort of persecution.

There have been many judicial murders committed where the representatives of the State were acting in good faith, believing their victims to be guilty of the charge accused of. In this case the representatives of the State cannot shield themselves with a similar excuse. For they themselves have fabricated most of the testimony which was used as a pretense to convict us; to convict us by a jury picked out to convict!

This contemplated murder of eight men, whose only crime is that they have dared to speak the truth, may open the eyes of suffering millions; may wake them up. Indeed, I have noticed that our conviction has worked miracles in this direction already.

The capitalist class that clamors for our lives have attempted in every way, through their newspapers and otherwise, to conceal the true and only issue in this case.

By simply designating the defendants as “Anarchists,” picturing them as a newly discovered tribe or species of cannibals, and by inventing shocking and horrifying stories of dark conspiracies, the capitalists have sought to keep the naked fact from the working people and other righteous parties, namely: That on the evening of May 4, 200 armed men – the police – attacked a meeting of peaceable citizens.

With what intention? With the intention of murdering as they could.

The wage-workers of this city began to object to being fleeced too much; they began to say some very true things. They put forth some very modest demands. They thought eight hours hard toil a day for scarcely two hours’ pay was enough.

“But,” says the State, “you anarchists have published articles on the manufacture of dynamite and bombs.” Therefore, you are guilty of supporting murderers.

Well then, show me a daily paper owned by the rich in this city that has not published similar articles! I remember one in which the use of dynamite bombs against striking workmen is advocated as the most effective weapon against them.

May I learn why the editors of these papers have not been indicted and convicted for murder?

My efforts on behalf of the disinherited and disenfranchised millions, my agitation in this direction, the popularization of economic teachings – in short, the education of the wage-workers – is declared “a conspiracy against society.”

The word “society” is here wisely substituted for “the State,” as represented by the politicians of today. It has always been the opinion

of the ruling classes that the people must be kept in ignorance, for they lose their servility, their modesty and their obedience to the powers that be, as their intelligence increases.

The education of a black slave a quarter of a century ago was a criminal offense. Why? Because the intelligent slave would throw off his shackles at whatever cost. Why is the education of the working people of today looked upon by a certain class as an offense against the State? For the same reason!

What have we said in our speeches and publications?

We have interpreted to the people their conditions and relations in society. We have, by way of scientific investigation, incontrovertibly proved and brought to their knowledge that the system of wage labor is the root of the present social iniquities, iniquities so monstrous that they cry to Heaven.

We have further said that the wage system must prepare the way and furnish the foundation for a social system of cooperation – that is, Socialism.

It is not likely that the honorable judge and the state's attorney can conceive of a social order not held intact by the policeman's club and pistol, nor of a free society without prisons, gallows, and State's attorneys. In such a society they probably fail to find a place for themselves.

And is this the reason why Socialism is such a "pernicious and damnable doctrine?"

You may pronounce the sentence upon me, honorable judge, but let the world know that in 1886, in the State of Illinois, eight men were sentenced to death, because they believed in a better future!



Michael Schwab (1853-1887)

Michael Schwab was born in Mannheim, Germany, on August 9th, 1853. He worked as a bookbinder before emigrating to the United States in 1879. He settled in Chicago where he joined the Socialist Labor Party and became active in trade union activities.

It is not much I have to say. And I would say nothing at all if keeping silent did not look like a cowardly approval of what has been done here. To term the proceedings during the trial “justice”, would be a sneer.

If one class is arrayed against the other, it is idle and hypocritical to think about justice. Anarchy was on trial, as the State’s Attorney put it in his closing speech. A doctrine, an opinion hostile to brute force, hostile to our present murderous system of production and distribution – I am condemned to die for writing newspaper articles and making speeches.

Anarchy was on trial. Little did it matter who the accused were, to be honored by the prosecution. It was the movement the blow was aimed at. It was directed against the labor movement, against Socialism.

A movement is not a conspiracy. All we did was done in open daylight. There were no secrets. We prophesied in word and writing the coming of a great revolution, a change in the system of production in all industrial countries of the globe. And the change will come, and must come.

Is it not absurd, as the State’s Attorney and his associates have done, to suppose that this social revolution – a change of such immense proportions – was to be inaugurated on the first of May in the city of Chicago by making war on the police?!

The police searched hundreds of issues of our papers, of the Arbeiter-Zeitung and the Alarm, and so the prosecution must have known very well what we understood when we talked about the

coming revolution. And we do not deny that the working class will defend its revolution, even if it comes to violence.

But it is not only we who called for violence! The president of the Citizens' Association, Edwin Lee Brown, made a speech in North Side Turner Hall in which he called on all good citizens to take possession of the courthouse by force so that they might lynch us! It seems to me that the most violent speakers are not to be found in the ranks of the Anarchists.

Murder is committed day by day. Children are slain, women worked to death, men killed inch by inch, and these crimes are never punished by law. The great principle underlying the present system is unpaid labor.

Those who amass fortunes, build palaces, and live in luxury, are doing that by virtue of unpaid labor. Being the possessors of land and machinery, they dictate their terms to the workingman. He is compelled to sell his labor cheap, or to starve. The price paid him is always far below the real value. He acts under compulsion, and they call it a free contract.

I know what life has in store for the masses. I was one of them. I slept in their apartments, and lived in their cellars. I saw them work and die. I worked with girls in the same factory – prostitutes they were because they could not earn enough wages for their living.

I saw families starving and able-bodied men worked to death. Thousands of laborers in the city of Chicago live in rooms without sufficient protection from the weather, without proper ventilation, where never a stream of sunlight flows in. There are hovels where two, three and four families live in one room.

Improved machinery that ought to be a blessing for the workingman under the existing conditions turns for him to a curse. Machinery multiplies the army of unskilled laborers, makes the laborer more dependent upon the men who own the land and the machines.

The outcry that Socialism, Communism and Anarchism are the creed of foreigners is a big mistake. There are more Socialists of American birth in this country than foreigners, and that is much, if we

consider that nearly half of all industrial workingmen are not native-born Americans. There are Socialistic papers in a great many States edited by Americans for Americans. The capitalistic newspapers conceal that fact very carefully.

Socialism, as we understand it, means that land and machinery shall be held in common by the people. The production of goods shall be carried on by producing groups which shall supply the demands of the people. Under such a system, every human being would have an opportunity to do useful work, and no doubt would work. Some hours' work every day would suffice to produce all that, according to statistics, is necessary for a comfortable living. Time would be left to cultivate the mind.

That is what the Socialists propose. Some say it is un-American! Well, then, is it American to let people starve and die in ignorance? Is exploitation and robbery of the poor, American? What have the great political parties done for the poor? Promised much; done nothing, except corrupting them by buying their votes on election day. A poverty-stricken man has no interest in the welfare of the community. It is only natural that in a society where women are driven to sell their honor, men should sell their votes.

In the present state of society violence is used on all sides, and, therefore, we advocated the use of violence against violence, but against violence only, as a necessary means of defense. I have not the slightest idea who threw the bomb on the Haymarket, and had no knowledge of any conspiracy to use violence on that or any other night.

I have nothing to regret in the actions of myself and my comrades. We stood for our ideals, nothing more. If we had kept silent, stones would have cried out.



Lucy Parsons (1853-1942)

Lucy Parsons was the wife of Haymarket Martyr, Albert Parsons. She was also a revolutionary activist and anarchist from the 1880s till her death in 1942. In 1907 she delivered this speech at a memorial service for the Haymarket Martyrs.

As these years speed by, our comrades' lives will be better understood; their great work for the uplifting of humanity understood and appreciated. This has been the case of the martyrs of all ages...

The great strike of May 1886 was an historical event of great importance. It was the first time that the workers themselves had attempted to get a shorter workday by united, simultaneous action... This strike was the first in the nature of Direct Action on a large scale...

Of course the eight-hour day is an old story. Today we should be agitating for a five-hour workday.

The Eleventh of November has become a day of international importance, cherished in the hearts of all true lovers of liberty as a day of martyrdom. On that day was offered to the gallows-tree martyrs as true to their ideal as ever were sacrificed in any age....

Our comrades were not murdered by the state because they had any connection with the bomb throwing but because they were active in organizing the wage-slaves. The capitalist class didn't want to find the bomb thrower; this class foolishly believed that by putting to death the active spirits of the labor movement of the time, it could frighten the working class back to slavery.

Parsons, Spies, Lingg, Fischer and Engel: Although all that is mortal of you is laid beneath that beautiful monument in Waldheim Cemetery, you are not dead. You are just beginning to live in the hearts of all true lovers of liberty. As the years lengthen the brighter will shine your names, and the more you will come to be appreciated and loved.

Those who so foully murdered you, under the forms of law – lynch
law – in a court of supposed justice, are forgotten.
Rest, comrades, rest. All the tomorrows are yours!



The Haymarket Martyrs' Monument at Forest Home Cemetery in
Forest Park, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago)



Speak Out Now

Revolutionary Workers Group

Where We Stand

The world we live in today has enormous possibilities: the potential to open up the most challenging epoch of humanity's existence. We have the prospect of living in a conscious fashion, using all the advances of human knowledge and engaging the creative potential of each person on the planet. Instead we see the world moving in the opposite direction – increasingly ruled by prejudice and fear, a world of widespread violence and war, where exploitation and oppression are the rule, with the many dominated by the few.

The Force for Change Exists Today

Everywhere, working people's labor makes society run. The exploitation of labor is what generates profits, which are at the heart of capitalism. Working people have the power to bring this system to a halt and bring about the changes needed to transform our lives. Like slavery, feudalism and other systems that enriched the minority at the expense of the majority, capitalism's removal is long overdue. The time for socialism has come.

We Stand for Socialism

A world based on peaceful collaboration and international cooperation of working class people – not the exploiters who rule today.

- The common ownership and sharing of the world's resources and productive capacity under the democratic control of the world's peoples.

- An egalitarian and democratic government, organized and controlled from the bottom up, which facilitates people's active participation in making decisions about how society is run.
- Protection of the world's ecological systems, putting science to work to sustain life, not destroy it.
- A society where human relations are based on respect, equality and dignity of all peoples, not racism, sexism or homophobia.

Our Political Heritage

We base ourselves on the ideas and actions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the model of the Russian Revolution of 1917 when the working class showed its capacity to take over and exert its power, and on the revolutionary ideas of the Fourth International in its struggles against Stalinism.

We Must Go Beyond Reforms

We support the struggles of those who are fighting against the oppression of capitalism, even if the goals of those struggles are not aimed at replacing the capitalist order. We support the right of people to determine how they will live and to throw off the forces of imperialism – be it the domination of the corporations, the World Bank, the IMF, military forces or other agents of imperialism. We support the fight against racial and sexual discrimination. We fight against attacks on the standard of living of working people — wage and benefit cuts, attacks on health care, education, housing and other basic rights.

Socialism cannot come through a modification of the existing system. It is not replacing corrupt politicians or union officials with those who are more honest or who are willing to see more of society's resources shared with the poor. It is not getting better contracts or laws. These systems based on privilege and exploitation must be removed and replaced by one that can guarantee the reorganization of society for the benefit of all.

What Is Needed to Bring This Change About?

It will take a massive social struggle, a revolution, by the majority, the workers and poor of the world, with the working class at its head, taking power in its name and reorganizing society.

It will take the construction of an international revolutionary leadership actively engaged in these struggles.

It will take the development of a party, based in the working class, in the U.S., the richest country of the world, as part of this international leadership. The fate of the world depends on building such an organization, though today it is represented only by individuals or small groups, scattered and marginalized, who share those goals.

The decisions made by a few individuals today, who are ready to start acting on these ideas and who are willing to collaborate with other groups who agree with this program and who are ready to work to implement it, could play a role in determining the future of the world.

Who We Are

Speak Out Now/Revolutionary Workers Group is a revolutionary group. We believe that a socialist world is possible and can be brought into being by the active struggles of the majority of the people of the world. We believe the international working class is the social force that can transform society and create a new world. But to do so, revolutionary organizations must be built in the working class. For this reason, our group aims its activity primarily at large workplaces. Our newsletters are distributed at several workplaces every two weeks.

We think it is important to both analyze the current world situation as well as to know and understand the history of past struggles. We have forums on current events and political topics and a yearly weekend called the Revolutionary University. We organize Marxist discussions and classes. We have pamphlets on past working class struggles, the revolutionary movements around the world and the current problems we face. We organize with others around many issues – racism, immigrant rights, climate change, police brutality, and more.

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