

## MAYDAY AND ANARCHISM:

Remembrance and Resistance

From Haymarket to Now

Edited by Anna Key

Mayday means more than maypoles and pagan love rites. It's a remembrance of class struggle and resistance. It commemorates the Haymarket Martyrs of Chicago who were framed – and executed – for their anarchist ideas and fighting for the eight hour day. Since the 1890s workers have marked Mayday all across the world.

Anarchists have always insisted on its revolutionary meaning – in essence that we will get nothing without fighting for it. Politicians (of one sort or another) have always tried to co-opt or sanitise it: "Follow your leaders!" "That was then, this is now."

The world has changed since the 1880s – but the more things change, the more they stay the same. We still live in a world where exploitation rules, and where the police and media are tools in the hands of the rich and powerful.

This pamphlet shows the history of Mayday, and the differing ways in which Anarchists have responded to its call. It includes pieces on:

The Haymarket affair and its aftermath

The idea of Mayday in the 1890s

Responses and appeals from America, Italy, Spain...

Mayday and Latin American Anarchism

Reclaiming Mayday in recent times...

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# MAYDAY AND ANARCHISM

REMEMBRANCE AND RESISTANCE FROM HAYMARKET TO NOW







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## Mayday and Anarchism:

### Remembrance and Resistance From Haymarket to Now

Edited by Anna Key

*Primo Maggio* by Pietro Gori (trans. Robert D'Attilio) is reprinted from *Haymarket Scrapbook* (Chicago, Charles H. Kerr, 1986)

The whole text of Altgeld's *Reasons for Pardoning the Haymarket Anarchists* is also available from Charles H. Kerr (PO Box 914, Chicago, Illinois 60690, USA)

French, Spanish & Bertoni articles translated by Paul Sharkey.

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### Introduction: looking forwards, looking backwards

Chicago, May 1886. In a city divided by bitter labour disputes and the agitation for the eight hour day, police disperse a peaceful street meeting. A bomb is thrown, killing one officer – other policemen and many workers die as the police open fire at random.

This incident was used as a pretext for a sweeping crackdown on unions and anarchists. Eight anarchists were accused, not of direct involvement, but of the catch-all of conspiracy. They were accused and convicted on the basis of their ideas alone: no credible evidence was produced to link them to the bomb. Four of the eight (George Engel, Adolf Fischer, Albert Parsons and August Spies) were judicially murdered on the 11th of November 1887. One, Louis Lingg, cheated the gallows with the aid of dynamite. The three remaining Haymarket accused (Samuel Fielden, Michael Schwab and Oscar Neebe) were given sentences of life and fifteen years. They were released in 1893 when Governor John P. Altgeld, in a move which finished his political career, exposed the state conspiracy which framed them.

The Haymarket tragedy was only one incident in the class war in America, but it was adopted as a symbol by the working class movement: anarchists, socialists, trade unionists. It gave rise to the international celebration of the First of May, always a celebration of resistance for anarchists and other working class rebels. For others it was a working-class holiday, or worse: a celebration of either the Communist Party bureaucracy after the rise of 'Red Tsarism' in Russia or the leadership of reformists who made a nice living out of demanding 'bigger cages, longer chains!'

Talk about 'reclaiming Mayday' is not new. It does not arise from nostalgia for the 1880s, nor purely from a desire to remember our fallen comrades. Mayday shows us that if we want to win meaningful reforms – let alone a free society – we must fight the power of both state and capital; we cannot expect them to fight fair, and we cannot trust leaders to win our freedom for us. Mayday has a proud heritage of propaganda, protest and revolt. This pamphlet shows a small part of that heritage. Looking at how Mayday has been marked will not solve tactical questions in the here and now. But we hope that looking at how and why it has been marked will also inspire you to look forwards.

### Speech Delivered by August Spies at the Haymarket, May 4, on the occasion of the Bomb Throwing

Friends, – The speakers of the evening not having arrived I shall entertain you a few minutes. I am told that a number of patrol wagons, carrying policemen, were sent to Desplaines street station, and I understand that the militia have been called under arms. There seems to prevail the opinion in certain quarters that this meeting has been called for the purpose of inaugurating a riot, hence these warlike preparations on the part of the so-called 'law and order.' However, let me tell you at the beginning that this meeting has not been called for any such purpose. The object of this meeting is to explain the general situation of the eight-hour Movement, and to throw light upon various incidents in connection with it.

For more than twenty years have the wage workers of this country begged and prayed their masters, the factory lords, to reduce their burdens. It has been in vain. They have pointed out the fact that over a million of willing and strong hands were in a state of enforced idleness and starvation, that to help them to obtain employment it would not only be advisable, nay, it was necessary to reduce the hours of daily toil of those who were fortunate enough in having found a buyer for their muscles, their bones, and their brain. The masters of this earth have treated them with contempt, have condemned them to vagabondage whenever they insisted. The legislatures have been called upon, one petition has succeeded the other, but with no avail.

At last the condition of the disinherited producers has become unbearable. Seeing that neither 'boss' nor law would concede anything to them, they have organized for the purpose of helping themselves – a wise and prudent resolution.

All over the land we behold vast armies of producers, no longer begging, but demanding that eight hours shall henceforth constitute a normal working day. And what say the extortionists to this? They demand their pound of flesh, like Shylock. They will not yield one iota. They have grown rich and powerful on your labor. They amass stupendous fortunes, while you, who bring them into existence, are suffering from want. In answer to your pleadings they ask for the bodies of your little children, to utilize them in their gold mines, to make dollars out of them! Look at the slaves of McCormick! When they tried to remonstrate with their master he simply called upon 'the protectors of these free and glorious institutions' – the police – to silence them.

You have no doubt heard of the killing and wounding of a number of your brothers at McCormick's yesterday. Mr. McCormick told a *Times* reporter that Spies was responsible for that massacre committed by the most noble Chicago police. I reply to this that McCormick is an infamous liar. (Cries of 'Hang him.') No, make no idle threats. There will be a time, and we are rapidly approaching it, when such men as McCormick will be hanged; there will be a time when monsters who destroy the lives and happiness of the citizens (for their own aggrandizement) will be dealt with like wild beasts. But that time has not yet come. When it has come you will no longer make threats, but you will go and 'do it.'

The capitalistic press, like the 'respectable gentleman' McCormick, howls that the Anarchists are responsible for the deeds of violence now committed all over this country. If that were true one would have to conclude that the country was full of Anarchists, yet the same press informs us that the Anarchists are very few in number. Were the 'unlawful' acts in the South-western strike committed by Anarchists? No, they were committed by Knights of Labor, men who never fail to declare, whenever there is an opportunity, that they are law-and-order-abiding citizens. The attack upon McCormick's yesterday – Was it made by Anarchists? Let us see. I



had been invited by the Central Labor Union to address a meeting of lumberyard laborers on the Black road. I went out there yesterday at the appointed time, about three o'clock in the afternoon. There were at least ten thousand persons assembled. When I was introduced to address them a few Poles or Bohemians in the crowd cried out: 'He's a Socialist.' These cries were followed by a general commotion and derision – 'We want no Socialist; down with him.' These and other exclamations I was treated to. Of course, I spoke anyway. The crowd became quiet and calm, and fifteen minutes later, elected me unanimously a delegate to see their bosses. Nevertheless, you can see that these people are not Socialists or Anarchists, but 'good, honest, law-abiding, church-going Christians and citizens.' Such were the persons who left the meeting, as I afterwards learned, to 'make the scabs at McCormick's quit work.' In my speech I never mentioned McCormick. Now you may judge for yourselves whether the Anarchists were responsible for the bloodshed yesterday or not.

Who is responsible of these many 'lawless' acts, you ask me? I have told you that they are generally committed by the most lawful and Christian citizens. In other words, the people are by necessity driven to violence, they can't carry the burden heaped upon them any longer. They try to cast it off, and in so doing break the laws. The law says they must not cast it off, for such an act would alter, yea, revolutionize the existing order of society! These acts of violence are the natural outgrowth of the present industrial system, and every one is responsible for them who supports and upholds that system.

What does it mean when the police of this city, on this evening, rattle along in their patrol wagons?

What does it mean when the militia stands warlike and ready for bloody work at our armories?

What are the gatling guns and cannons for?

Is this military display of barbarism arranged for your entertainment?

*All these preparations, my friends, ARE made in your behalf.*

Your masters have perceived your discontent.

They do not like discontented slaves.

They want to make you contented at all hazards, and if you are stubborn they will force or kill you.

Look at the killing of your brothers at McCormick's yesterday. What did they do? The police tell you that they were a most dangerous crowd, armed to their teeth. The fact is, they, like ignorant children, indulged in the harmless sport of bombarding McCormick's slaughter house with stones. They paid the penalty of this folly with their blood.

The lesson I draw from this occurrence is, that working men must arm themselves for defense, so that they may be able to cope with the government hirelings of their masters.

From *A Concise History of the Great Trial of the Chicago Anarchists in 1886*, Dyer D.

Lum. (1886)

### Trial Speech of Adolph Fischer

Your honor: You ask me why sentence of death should not be passed upon me. I will not talk much. I will only say that I protest against my being sentenced to death, because I have committed no crime. I was tried here in this room for murder, and I was convicted of Anarchy. I protest against being sentenced to death, because I have not been found guilty of murder. But, however, if I am to die on account of being an Anarchist, on account of my love for liberty, fraternity and equality, then I will not remonstrate. If death is the penalty for our love of the freedom of the human race, then I say openly I have forfeited my life; but a murderer I am not. Although being one of the parties who arranged the Haymarket meeting, I had no more to do with the throwing of that bomb, I had no more connection with it than State's Attorney Grinnell had, perhaps. I do not deny that I was present at the Haymarket meeting but that meeting...

(At this point Mr. Salomon [defence lawyer] stepped up and spoke to Mr. Fischer in a low tone, but the latter waved him off and said:)

Mr. Salomon, be so kind. I know what I am talking about. Now, that Haymarket meeting was not called for the purpose of committing violence and crime. No; but the meeting was called for the purpose of protesting against the outrages and crimes committed by the police on the day previous, out at McCormick's. The State's witness, Waller, and others have testified here, and I only need to repeat it, that we had a meeting on Monday night, and in this meeting – the affair at McCormick's taking place just a few hours previous – took action and called a mass-meeting for the purpose of protesting against the brutal outrages of the police. Waller was chairman of this meeting, and he himself made the motion to hold the meeting at the Haymarket. It was he also who appointed me as a committee to have handbills printed and to provide for speakers; that I did, and nothing else. The next day I went to Wehrer & Klein, and had 25,000 handbills printed, and I invited Spies to speak at the Haymarket meeting. In the original of the 'copy' I had the line 'Workingmen, appear armed!' and I had my reason too for putting those words in, because I didn't want the workingmen to be shot down in that meeting as on other occasions. But as those circulars were printed, or as a few of them were printed and brought over to me at the Arbeiter-Zeitung office, my comrade Spies saw one of them. I had invited him to speak before that. He showed me the circular, and said: 'Well, Fischer, if those circulars are distributed, I won't speak.' I admitted it would be better to take the objectionable words out, and Mr. Spies spoke. And that is all I had to do with that meeting. Well, I went to the Haymarket about 8:15 o'clock, and stayed there until Parsons interrupted Fielden's speech. Parsons stepped up to the stand, and said that it looked like it was going to rain, and that the assembly had better adjourn to Zepf's Hall. At that moment a friend of mine who testified on the witness stand, went with me to Zepf's Hall, and we sat down at a table and had a glass of beer. At the moment I was going to sit down, my friend Parsons came in with some other persons, and after I was sitting there about five minutes the explosion occurred. I had no idea that anything of the kind would happen, because, as the State's witnesses testified, themselves, there was no agreement to defend ourselves that night. It was only a meeting called to protest.

Now, as I said before, this verdict, which was rendered by the jury in this room, is not directed against murder, but against Anarchy. I feel that I am sentenced, or that I will be sentenced, to death because of being an Anarchist, and not because I am a murderer. I have never been a murderer. I have never yet committed a crime in my life; but I know a certain man who is on the way to becoming a murderer, an assassin, and that man is Grinnell – the State's



Attorney Grinnell – because he brought men on the witness stand who he knew would swear falsely; and I publicly denounce Mr. Grinnell as being a murderer and an assassin if I should be executed. But if the ruling class thinks that by hanging us, hanging a few Anarchists, they can crush out Anarchy, they will be badly mistaken, because the Anarchist loves his principles more than his life.

An Anarchist is always ready to die for his principles; but in this case I have been charged with murder, and I am not a murderer. You will find it impossible to kill a principle, although you may take the life of men who confess these principles. The more the believers in just causes are persecuted, the quicker will their ideas be realized. For instance, in rendering such an unjust and barbarous verdict, the twelve ‘honorable men’ in the jury-box have done more for the furtherance of Anarchism than the convicted could have accomplished in a generation. This verdict is a death-blow against free speech, free press, and free thought in this country, and the people will be conscious of it, too. This is all I care to say.

### **Trial Speech of Louis Lingg**

Court of ‘Justice’! With the same irony with which you have regarded my efforts to win, in this ‘free land of America,’ a livelihood such as human kind is worthy to enjoy, do you now, after condemning me to death, concede me the liberty of making a final speech.

I accept your concession; but it is only for the purpose of exposing the injustice, the calumnies, and the outrages which have been heaped upon me.

You have accused me of murder, and convicted me: what proof have you brought that I am guilty?

In the first place, you have brought this fellow Seliger to testify against me. Him I have helped to make bombs, and you have further proven that with the assistance of another, I took those bombs to No. 58 Clybourne Avenue, but what you have not proven – even with the assistance of your bought ‘squealer,’ Seliger, who would appear to have acted such a prominent part in the affair – is that any of those bombs were taken to the Haymarket.

A couple of chemists also, have been brought here as specialists, yet they could only state that the metal of which the Haymarket bomb was made bore a certain resemblance to those bombs of mine, and your Mr. Ingham has vainly endeavored to deny that the bombs were quite different. He had to admit that there was a difference of a full half inch in their diameters, although he suppressed the fact that there was also a difference of a quarter of an inch in the thickness of the shell. This is the kind of evidence upon which you have convicted me.

It is not murder, however, of which you have convicted me. The Judge has stated that much only this morning in his resume of the case, and Grinnell has repeatedly asserted that we were being tried, not for murder, but for Anarchy, so that the condemnation is – that I am an Anarchist!

What is anarchy? This is a subject which my comrades have explained with sufficient clearness, and it is unnecessary for me to go over it again. They have told you plainly enough what our aims are. The State’s Attorney, however, has not given you that information. He has merely criticized and condemned not the doctrines of anarchy, but our methods of giving them practical effect, and even here he has maintained a discreet silence as to the fact that those methods were forced upon us by the brutality of the police. Grinnell’s own proffered remedy for our grievances is the ballot and combination of trades unions, and Ingham has even avowed the desirability of a

six-hour movement! But the fact is, that at every attempt to wield the ballot, at every endeavor to combine the efforts of workingmen, you have displayed the brutal violence of the police club, and this is why I have recommended rude force, to combat the ruder force of the police.

You have charged me with despising ‘law and order.’ What does your ‘law and order’ amount to? Its representatives are the police, and they have thieves in their ranks. Here sits Captain Schaack. He has himself admitted to me that my hat and books have been stolen from him in his office – stolen by policemen. These are your defenders of property rights!

The detectives again, who arrested me, forced their way into my room like house breakers, under false pretenses, giving the name of a carpenter, Lorenz, of Burlington Street. They have sworn that I was alone in my room, therein perjuring themselves. You have not subpoenaed this lady, Mrs. Klein, who was present, and could have sworn that the aforesaid detectives broke into my room under false pretenses, and that their testimonies are perjured.

In Schaack we have a captain of the police, and he also has perjured himself. He has sworn that I admitted to him being present at the Monday night’s meeting, whereas, I distinctly informed him that I was at a carpenter’s meeting at Zepf’s Hall. He has sworn again that I told him that I had learned how to make bombs from Herr Most’s book. That, also, is a perjury.

Let us go still a step higher among these representatives of law and order. Grinnell and his associates have permitted perjury, and I say that they have done it knowingly. The proof has been adduced by my counsel, and with my own eyes I have seen Grinnell point out to Gilmer, eight days before he came upon the stand, the persons of the men whom he was to swear against.

While I, as I have stated above, believe in force for the sake of winning for myself and fellow-workmen a livelihood such as men ought to have, Grinnell, on the other hand, through his police and other rogues, has suborned perjury in order to murder seven men, of whom I am one.

Grinnell had the pitiful courage, here in the courtroom, where I could not defend myself, to call me a coward! The scoundrel! A fellow who has leagued himself with a parcel of base, hireling knaves, to bring me to the gallows. Why? For no earthly reason save a contemptible selfishness – a desire to ‘rise in the world’ – to ‘make money,’ forsooth.

This wretch – who, by means of the perjuries of other wretches is going to murder seven men – is the fellow who calls me ‘coward!’ And yet you blame me for despising such ‘defenders of the law’ – such unspeakable hypocrites!

Anarchy means no domination or authority of one man over another, yet you call that ‘disorder.’ A system which advocates no such ‘order’ as shall require the services of rogues and thieves to defend it you call ‘disorder.’

The Judge himself was forced to admit that the State’s Attorney had not been able to connect me with the bomb throwing. The latter knows how to get around it, however. He charges me with being a ‘conspirator.’ How does he prove it? Simply by declaring the International Workingmen’s Association to be a ‘conspiracy.’ I was a member of that body, so he has the charge securely fastened on me. Excellent! Nothing is too difficult for the genius of a state’s attorney!

It is hardly incumbent upon me to review the relations which I occupy to my companions in misfortune. My friend Spies has already explained how we become acquainted with each other.







because they too are in revolt against society; salute revolt in every form...' In the evening a much more successful meeting was held at Mile End where large numbers of people were attracted by a heavy police presence – the audience being largely composed of dock workers. The anarchist paper *Commonweal* reported 'It is worth noting that the most revolutionary sentiments were the best received.' What is meant here by 'most revolutionary' can be taken to mean 'most violent'. [...]

There were disputes over the question of revolutionary violence, there were personal squabbles, but there was no doubt that revolutionary violence, particularly on the continent, established anarchists as a *serious* movement. Furthermore, when slump and unemployment combined with vicious attacks by employers it produced widespread bitterness, and perhaps for the first time a popular readiness to listen to the revolutionary anarchist message.

The May 1 demonstration in Hyde Park in 1893 did not perhaps demonstrate this conclusively. Some 700 anarchists from the English movement together with 600 Jewish anarchists and trade unionists held meetings in the park. But it was enough to start the SDF thinking that it might be a good idea to get into the act themselves. For in 1894 they decided to hold their own demonstration on May 1. The anarchists wrote offering to co-operate. The SDF refused on the grounds that 'bomb throwing was prejudicial to socialism' and began to write round to organisations who had previously co-operated with anarchists on May 1 inviting them to join the SDF demonstration instead. This, of course, caused a rare commotion in the political chicken shack and much principled indignation was shown on all sides.

On May 1, 1894 the anarchists were holding their meeting in Hyde Park in advance of the arrival of the 'legal revolutionists'. And the police, together with a mob of heavies they had recruited, attacked one of the platforms. The *Commonweal* correspondent wrote 'they deliberately struck at, and with both fists, any comrade they knew (and they know us now pretty well) ... I saw Banham punched and kicked, Tochatti brutally struck in the head and face, Leon kicked and struck in the face and his spectacles struck and smashed on his eyes ... One of our flags and a platform were destroyed by a rush of detectives who justified the criticism Leggatt had bestowed on them by knocking him down and kicking him ...' Any many other people were hurt.

This incident was not alone. In August 1894 two anarchist speakers were arrested and sent to gaol on trumped up charges. A free-speech fight by anarchists in Manchester was lost in the Autumn of 1894. Scandal and suspicion were spreading in the movement over the activities of police spies and provocateurs. Nevertheless, the anarchist insistence on May 1 had appeared to prove a contagious example. In reply to a snotty leader in a newspaper, a writer in the anarchist journal *Liberty* wrote of the 1895 May Day:

'...we anarchists are always saying that the exploiters and profit-mongers are not a bit afraid of plenty of empty show and brass bands on a legitimate law and *ordered* holiday; because it don't mean nothing significant done *that* way. No we are not going to "dwindle into insignificance" as you put it. No fear! Significance don't lie in numbers or show but in spirit and proof of a determination to do things independent ... Look here; in '93 only us held a May Day meeting in the Park and preached the *meaning* of it. In '94 the SDF didn't like to be left behind because the people are taking to the idea of "no politics" too fast for them, so they turned out too. In 1895 there's us and SDF and ILP and Unions; that's "dwindling" ain't it? And what puts you out worst of all is the obstinate fact that the rain washed away all the *parliamentary*

demonstrators and left us an our attentive crowd with the field to ourselves ... And as the people walked away they were heard saying "it was plainer every year which lot was in earnest and which was only playing at it." ...'

Yet for all their protestations the anarchists were to dwindle into insignificance with horrifying rapidity. In 1896 they held a May 1 meeting alone. In 1897 no meeting was held. This sudden decline was linked with a period of resignation and apathy after the labour storms of the early '90's, a rise in jingoism and royalism and a steady growth of influence of reformist and electoral socialist tendencies. [...]

John Quail  
from *Zero* 6 (May/June 1978)

#### Extracts from Altgeld's *Reasons for Pardoning the Haymarket Anarchists*

[On the jury]

A great many said they had been pointed out to the bailiff by their employers to be summoned as jurors. Many stated frankly that they believed the defendants to be guilty, and would convict unless their opinions were overcome by strong proofs; and almost every one, after having made these statements, was examined by the court in a manner to force him to say that he would try the case fairly upon the evidence produced in court, and whenever he was brought to this point he was held to be a competent juror, and the defendants were obliged to exhaust their challenges on men who declared in open court that they were prejudiced and believed the defendants to be guilty.

*The Twelve who Tried the Case.*

The twelve jurors whom the defendants were finally forced to accept, after the challenges were exhausted, were of the same general character as the others, and a number of them stated candidly that they were so prejudiced that they could not try the case fairly, but each, when examined by the court, was finally induced to say that he believed he could try the case fairly upon the evidence that was produced in court alone. [...]

Upon the whole, therefore, considering the facts brought to light since the trial, as well as the record of the trial and the answers of the jurors as given therein, it is clearly shown that while the counsel for defendants agreed to it, Ryce was appointed special bailiff at the suggestion of the state's attorney, and that he did summon a prejudiced jury which he believed would hang the defendants, and further, that the fact that Ryce was summoning only that kind of men was brought to the attention of the court before the panel was full, and it was asked to stop it, but refused to pay any attention to the matter, but permitted Ryce to go on and then forced the defendants to go to trial before this jury. [...]

It is very apparent that most of the jurors were incompetent because they were not impartial, for nearly all of them candidly stated that they were prejudiced against the defendants and believed them guilty before hearing the evidence, and the mere fact that the judge succeeded, by a singularly suggestive examination, in getting them to state that they believed they could try the case fairly on the evidence, did not make them competent. [...]

No matter what the defendants were charged with, they were entitled to a fair trial, and no greater danger could possibly threaten our institutions than to have the courts of justice run wild or give way to popular clamor, and when the trial judge in this case ruled that a relative of one of the men who was killed was a competent juror, and this after the man had candidly stated



that he was deeply prejudiced and that his relationship caused him to feel more strongly than he otherwise might, and when in scores of instances he ruled that men who candidly declared that they believed the defendants to be guilty; that this was a deep conviction and would influence their verdict, and that it would require strong evidence to convince them that the defendants were innocent, when in all these instances the trial judge ruled that these men were competent jurors, simply because they had, under his adroit manipulation, been led to say that they believed they could try the case fairly on the evidence, then the proceedings lost all semblance of a fair trial.

[On the evidence]

The state has never discovered who it was that threw the bomb which killed the policemen, and the evidence does not show any connection whatever between the defendants and the man who did throw it. The trial judge in overruling the motion for a new hearing, and again, recently in a magazine article, used this language:

*'The conviction has not gone on the ground that they did have actually any personal participation in the particular act which caused the death of Degan, but the conviction proceeds upon the ground that they had generally, by speech and print, advised large classes of the people, not particular individuals, but large classes, to commit murder, and had left the commission, the time and place and when, to the individual will and whim, or caprice, or whatever it may be, of each individual man who listened to their advice, and that in consequence of that advice, in pursuance of that advice, and influenced by that advice, somebody not known did throw the bomb that caused Degan's death. Now, if this is not a correct principle of the law, then the defendants of course are entitled to a new trial. This case is without precedent; there is no example in the law books of a case of this sort.'*

The judge certainly told the truth when he stated that this case was without a precedent, and that no example could be found in the law books to sustain the law as above laid down. For, in all the centuries during which government has been maintained among men, and crime has been punished, no judge in a civilized country has ever laid down such a rule before.

[On the situation in Chicago]

Various attempts were made to bring to justice the men who wore the uniform of the law while violating it, but all to no avail; that the laboring people found the prisons always open to receive them, but the courts of justice were practically closed to them; that the prosecuting officers vied with each other in hunting them down, but were deaf to their appeals; that in the spring of 1886 there were more labor disturbances in the city and particularly at the McCormick factory; that under the leadership of Capt. Bonfield the brutalities of the previous year were even exceeded. Some affidavits and other evidence is offered on this point which I can not give for want of space. It appears that this was the year of the eight hour agitation and efforts were made to secure an eight hour day about May 1, and that a number of laboring men standing, not on the street, but on a vacant lot, were quietly discussing the situation in regard to the movement, when suddenly a large body of police under orders from Bonfield charged on them and began to club them; that some of the men, angered at the unprovoked assault, at first resisted, but were soon dispersed; that some of the police fired on the men while they were running and wounded a large number who were already 100 feet or more away and were running as fast as they could; that at least four of the number so shot down died, that this was wanton and unprovoked murder, but there was not even so much as an investigation.

*Was it an Act of Personal Revenge?*

While some men may tamely submit to being clubbed and seeing their brothers shot down, there are some who will resent it and will nurture a spirit of hatred and seek revenge for themselves, and the occurrences that preceded the Haymarket tragedy indicate that the bomb was thrown by some one who, instead of acting on the advice of anybody, was simply seeking personal revenge for having been clubbed, and that Capt. Bonfield is the man who is really responsible for the death of the police officers.

It is also shown that the character of the Haymarket meeting sustains this view. The evidence shows there were only 800 to 1,000 people present, and that it was a peaceable and orderly meeting; that the mayor of the city was present and saw nothing out of the way and that he remained until the crowd began to disperse, the meeting being practically over, and the crowd engaged in dispersing when he left; that had the police remained away for twenty minutes more there would have been nobody left there, but that as soon as Bonfield learned that the mayor had left he could not resist the temptation to have some more people clubbed and went up with a detachment of police to disperse the meeting, and that on the appearance of the police the bomb was thrown by some unknown person and several innocent and faithful officers, who were simply obeying an uncalled for order of their superior, were killed; all of these facts tend to show the improbability of the theory of the prosecution that the bomb was thrown as the result of a conspiracy on the part of the defendants to commit murder; if the theory of the prosecution were correct there would have been many bombs thrown; and the fact that only one was thrown shows that it was an act of personal revenge.

It is further shown here that much of the evidence given at the trial was a pure fabrication; that some of the prominent police officials in their zeal, not only terrorized ignorant men by throwing them into prison and threatening them with torture if they refused to swear to anything desired, but that they offered money and employment to those who would consent to do this. Further, that they deliberately planned to have fictitious conspiracies formed in order that they might get the glory of discovering them. [...]

I will simply say in conclusion on this branch of the case that the facts tend to show that the bomb was thrown as an act of personal revenge, and that the prosecution has never discovered who threw it, and the evidence utterly fails to show that the man who did throw it ever heard or read a word coming from the defendants; consequently it fails to show that he acted on any advice given by them. And if he did not act on or hear any advice coming from the defendants, either in speeches or through the press, then there was no case against them even under the law as laid down by Judge Gary.

[On Judge Gary]

It is further charged with much bitterness by those who speak for the prisoners that the record of the case shows that the judge conducted the trial with malicious ferocity and forced eight men to be tried together; that in cross-examining the state's witnesses he confined counsel for the defense to the specific points touched on by the state, while in the cross-examination of the defendants' witnesses he permitted the state's attorney to go into all manner of subjects entirely foreign to the matters on which the witnesses were examined in chief; also that every ruling throughout the long trial on any contested point was in favor of the state, and further, that page after page of the record contains insinuating remarks of the judge, made in the hearing of the jury, and with the evident intent of bringing the jury to his way of thinking; that these speeches,



coming from the court, were much more damaging than any speeches from the state's attorney could possibly have been; that the state's attorney often took his cue from the judge's remarks; that the judge's magazine article recently published, although written nearly six years after the trial, is yet full of venom; that, pretending to simply review the case, he had to drag into his article a letter written by an excited woman to a newspaper after the trial was over, and which therefore had nothing whatever to do with the case and was put into the articles simply to create a prejudice against the woman, as well as against the dead and the living, and that, not content with this, he in the same article makes an insinuating attack on one of the lawyers for the defense, not for anything done at the trial, but because more than a year after the trial when some of the defendants had been hung, he ventured to express a few kind, if erroneous, sentiments over the graves of his dead clients, whom he at least believed to be innocent. It is urged that such ferocity or subserviency is without a parallel in all history; that even Jeffries in England contented himself with hanging his victims, and did not stop to berate them after they were dead

These charges are of a personal character, and while they seem to be sustained by the record of the trial and the papers before me and tend to show that the trial was not fair, I do not care to discuss this feature of the case any farther, because it is not necessary. I am convinced that it is clearly my duty to act in this case for the reasons already given, and I, therefore, grant an absolute pardon to Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe and Michael Schwab this 26th day of June, 1893.

John P. Altgeld,  
Governor of Illinois.

#### A Crime and its Results

'We are birds of the coming storm!' These memorable words of our martyred comrade, August Spies, uttered at a meeting of Congregational ministers held in Chicago nearly a year before the Haymarket tragedy – a meeting at which I was also present – were the keynote of the then general revolutionary spirit prevailing in this country.

The active revolutionary propaganda, more active perhaps in Chicago than elsewhere in the United States, was given a new impetus as a result of the Pittsburg Congress of the International Working People's Association, held in October 1883. Both Parsons and Spies were delegates to the Congress, and both assisted in the famous manifesto issued by that body, Not only these two comrades, but all active members of the various International groups which were then and afterwards organized, based their revolutionary teachings chiefly upon that manifesto. To wage 'energetic, relentless, revolutionary' warfare against the existing class rule; to warn the tyrants of the world of the 'scarlet and sable lights of the judgment day'; to urge the workers everywhere to unite against their oppressors – these were the tenets and this the spirit of revolutionary agitation which gave to our cause its martyrs.

A few ardent souls there were, like Louis Lingg and Adolph Fisher, who construing but a single meaning from the manifesto openly proclaimed the propaganda by deed, and there were not wanting those who waited but the opportunity to carry out desperate projects already conceived; but the great majority of our revolutionary comrades interpreted it more liberally, and were content, for the time being to speak and write in prophetic warning of the wrath to come, and to urge their hearers and readers to make thorough preparation for the revolution.

Thus, comrade Parsons, in his famous lake front speeches, would point to the palaces which adorn that vicinity, and in his wonderfully persuasive and eloquent way would explain to the thousands of working people there assembled how their labor, their skill and their intelligence had planned, fashioned and built the costly edifices, and exhort them, as they loved liberty and justice, to prepare to wrest them from the hand of the exploiters. That Parsons was an earnest revolutionist there can be no doubt, and yet he comprehended in its full meaning the significant words of St. Just: 'They who make half revolutions simply dig their own graves.' On one occasion after a particularly successful meeting, he said to me with much feeling, 'I earnestly hope the revolution will not come too soon; we have had enough failures.'

At the time of the Haymarket outbreak there were probably in Chicago alone fully three thousand enrolled members in the various International groups. The American group, of which Parsons, Fisher and Spies were all members had in January 1886 fully one hundred and fifty enrolled members. Some of the German groups had as many as four to six hundred. These (except the few spies, who were generally known) were all revolutionary Socialists and Anarchists.

Such, then, was the condition of the revolutionary movement and feeling on the first of May 1886. Thousands who had listened to the burning speeches of our martyred comrades, had become imbued with their spirit, their natural timidity mainly preventing their actual affiliation with us as group members. On the occasion of a demonstration held, I think, in November 1884, fully four thousand men and women were in line of march, every individual of them wearing a red badge. Walking eight abreast there was at least one red flag or banner to each file of marchers. Many think it was this imposing, and to the capitalists alarming demonstration which decided them upon that course of action which the daily press of Chicago foreshadowed in these words: 'Force the leaders into a violation of the law and then make examples of them.'

But the influence of the revolutionary teachings of our dead heroes and their living comrades was far more fully shown by the innumerable multitudes of sobbing, wailing mourners who filed one by one past the biers of the dead, and lined the streets along which moved the solemn funeral procession. I stood by the coffin of comrade Parsons on that gloomy Sunday morning (November 13, 1887) from seven o'clock until past ten, waiting for a cessation of the stream of weeping humanity, but when we finally closed the doors the line still reached far down the street, and this scene was repeated at the homes of each of the five victims of plutocratic hate. Thousands of the spectators who lined the streets were in tears. Cries and lamentations came from the windows and doorways. I noted even many police officers were weeping.

'Hang these men and you kill Anarchy in this country!', shouted Grinnell in his closing speech to the jury. When the capitalistic conspiracy had reached its climax the daily press took up the refrain and cried 'Anarchy is dead.' But the judicial murder of our comrades neither 'killed' anarchy nor abated in the least the revolutionary sentiment. On the contrary, the feeling which theretofore had concentrated mainly in Chicago was by that act diffused more broadly throughout the land, nay, throughout the world. For some time after the hanging I was in a position to feel the changing radical pulse of the country. Dozens of letters were received from former enemies of the movement, and all breathed the same spirit: sympathy for the martyrs and condemnation of their murderers. From Dakota a young lady wrote that her only source of information of the trial was a Chicago daily paper, yet from the published reports she was satisfied that our comrades were innocent. Tens of thousands of copies of the speeches in court were



distributed, a Chicago weekly journal published autobiographical sketches of the victims, from sales of which a handsome revenue was collected. There is no attempt to claim that a great number of those who were brought under the influence of the speeches or writings of our comrades were forthwith converted to anarchistic or revolutionary doctrines; but the influence of radical thought was sown broadcast, and added to the general feeling of unrest which already pervaded the country. Here in the West, among the middle and laboring classes there has been a tremendous revolution of feeling, and it is now difficult to find a man or woman who unreservedly approves the judicial murder of our friends. Many condemn the act outright. Samuel Fielden, now a resident of this locality, finds no difficulty in making friends, and there are those hereabout who make no secret of their revolutionary tendencies. It is true, most of them still call themselves 'silverites' and 'populists', and vent their epithets against the politicians of the two old parties, but while they charge their immediate wrongs to the 'crime against silver', they more or less feel that our comrades were foully dealt with for championing the cause of the oppressed, which is their cause. Thus one cause helps another of a similar tendency with the final result of bringing all victims of capitalistic oppression to feel that their wrongs are identical.

Many of our most intelligent and earnest workers were brought to us as a result of the Chicago judicial murder. Who that reads these lines has not gained a near friend and comrade by that crime? So while the revolutionary cause may not now be drawn in such specific lines in this country as during the active existence of the International groups, the work goes bravely on, and the cause does not fail or drop. One valuable lesson it seems to me may be learned from the past: the citadel of the enemy can be attacked and demolished better by the modern method of secret tunnelling and undermining than by the ancient one of the battering ram. A word to the wise is sufficient.

It has been charged by the enemies of our cause that the reason for revolutionary inaction at the climax of the tragedy of 1886-7 was the cowardice and lack of preparation of the revolutionists. It is time they were undeceived. They owe the tragic culmination of their savage conspiracy and their own security not to any deficiency or lack of courage of the revolutionists of this country, but to the expressed wish of their victims while calmly awaiting the scaffold. Their united thought was well expressed by him who said with his dying breath:

'There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today.'

William Holmes

From *The Rebel* [Boston, Mass.], v.1, n.3 (November 20th, 1895)

### The First of May and the General Strike

With the Spring awakening of Nature the dormant energies of the people are revived – the oppressed feel their self-consciousness and the joy of combat stirring within them. Stormy March – the red month of revolution; stirring May – the fighting month of the proletariat striving for independence.

The basic revolutionary idea of the first of May has characterized all the battles of labor in modern times, and the historic origin and development of that idea prove its great significance for the labor movement.

The May idea – in the relation of its revolutionary spirit to labor struggles – first manifested itself in the economic battles of the Knights of Labor. The final theoretical aim of that organization – founded by Uriah S. Stephens and fellow workers in 1869, and bearing a pronounced radical character in the beginning of its history – was the emancipation of the working classes by means of direct economic action. Its first practical demand was the eight-hour day, and the agitation to that end was an unusually strenuous one. Several strikes of the Knights of Labor were practically General Strikes. The various economic battles of that period, supported by the American Federation of Labor during its young days, culminated, on the first of May, 1886, in a great strike, which gradually assumed almost national proportions. The workmen of a number of large cities, especially those of Chicago, ceased their work on that day and proclaimed a strike in favor of the eight-hour day. They thus served notice on their capitalistic masters that henceforth they will not be submissively exploited by the unlimited greed of the capitalists, who had appropriated the means of production created by the many generations of labor, thus usurping the position of masters – the kind masters who had cordially leave labor the alternative of either prostituting their brawn or dying with their families of starvation.

The manly attitude of labor in 1886 was the result of a resolution passed by the Labor Congress held at St. Louis, one year previously. Great demonstrations of a pronounced social revolutionary character took place all over the country, culminating in the strike of two hundred thousand workmen, the majority of whom were successful in winning the eight-hour day.

But great principles of historic significance never triumph without a blood baptism. Such was also the case in 1886. The determination of the workmen to decide for themselves how much of their time they were willing to sell to the purchasers of labor was looked upon by the exploiters as the height of assumption, and condemned accordingly. Individual capitalists, though unwilling, were nevertheless forced to submit to the demands of organized labor; perceiving, however, in the self-respecting attitude of the working masses a peril threatening the very foundations of the capitalistic economic system, they thirsted for revenge; nothing less would satisfy the cannibalistic masters but human sacrifices: the most devoted and advanced representatives of the movement – Parsons, Spies, Engel, Fischer and Lingg – were the victims.

The names of our murdered brothers, sacrificed to propitiate an enraged Moloch, will forever remain indivisibly linked with the idea of the first of May. It was the Anarchists that bore the brunt of those economic battles.

In vain, however, did organized capital hope to strangle the labor movement on the scaffold; a bitter disappointment awaited the exploiters. True, the movement had suffered an eclipse, but only a temporary one. Quickly rallying its forces, it grew with renewed vigor and energy.



In December, 1888, the American Federation of Labor decided to make another attempt to win the eight-hour day, and again by means of direct economic action. The strike was to be initiated by a gigantic demonstration on the first of May, 1890.

In the meantime there assembled at Paris (1889) an International Labor Congress. A resolution was offered to join the demonstration, and the day which three years previously initiated the eight-hour movement became the slogan of the international proletariat, awakened to the realization of the revolutionary character of its final emancipation. Chicago was to serve as an example.

Unfortunately, however, the direction was not followed. The majority of the congress consisting of political parliamentarists, believers in indirect action, they purposely ignored the essential import of the first of May, so dearly bought on the battlefield; they decided that henceforth the first of May was to be 'consecrated to the dignity of labor,' thus perverting the revolutionary significance of the great day into a mere appeal to the powers that be to grant the favor of an eight-hour day. Thus the parliamentarists degraded the noble meaning of the historic day.

The First of May 'consecrated to the dignity of labor!' As if slavery could be dignified by anything save revolutionary action. As long as labor remains mere prostitution, selling its producing power for money, and as long as the majority of mankind are excluded from the blessings of civilization, the first of May must remain the revolutionary battle cry of labor's economic emancipation.

The effect of the Paris resolution soon manifested itself: the revolutionary energy of the masses became dormant; the wage slaves limited their activity to mere appeals to their masters for alleviation and to political action, either independent of, or in fusion with, the bourgeois parties, as is the case in England and America. They quietly suffered their representatives in Parliament and Congress to defend and strengthen their enemy, the government. They remained passive while their alleged leaders made deals with the exploiters, hobnobbed with the bourgeois, and were banqueted by the exploiters, while oppression steadily grew in proportion and intensity, and all attempts of the wage slaves to throw off their yoke were suppressed in the most merciless manner.

Only a small minority of the working class, especially in the Latin countries, remained true to the revolutionary spirit of the first of May; but the effect of their noble efforts was materially minimized by their international isolation, repressed as they were by the constantly growing power of the governments, strengthened by the reactionary political activity of the labor bodies.

But the disastrous defeats suffered by labor on the field of parliamentarism and pure-and-simple unionism have radically changed the situation in recent years. To-day we stand on the threshold of a new era in the emancipation of labor: the dissatisfaction with the former tactics is constantly growing, and the demand is being voiced for the most energetic weapon at the command of labor – the General Strike

It is quite explicable that the more progressive workingmen of the world should hail with enthusiasm the idea of the General Strike. The latter is the truest reflex of the crisis of economic contrasts and the most decisive expression of the intelligent dissatisfaction of the proletariat.

Bitter experience has gradually forced upon organized labor the realization that it is difficult, if not impossible, for isolated unions and trades to successfully wage war against organized capital; for capital is organized, into national as well as international bodies, co-operating in their exploitation and oppression of labor. To be successful, therefore, modern strikes must

constantly assume ever larger proportions, involving the solidaric co-operation of all the branches of an affected industry – an idea gradually gaining recognition in the trades unions. This explains the occurrence of sympathetic strikes, in which men in related industries cease work in brotherly co-operation with their striking brothers – evidences of solidarity so terrifying to the capitalistic class.

Solidaric strikes do not represent the battle of an isolated union or trade with an individual capitalist or group of capitalists; they are the war of the proletariat class with its organized enemy, the capitalist regime. The solidaric strike is the prologue of the General Strike.

The modern worker has ceased to be the slave of the individual capitalist; to-day, the capitalist class is his master. However great his occasional victories on the economic field, he still remains a wage slave. It is, therefore, not sufficient for labor unions to strive to merely lessen the pressure of the capitalistic heel; progressive workingmen's organizations can have but one worthy object – to achieve their full economic stature by complete emancipation from wage slavery.

That is the true mission of trades unions. They bear the germs of a potential social revolution; aye, more – they are the factors that will fashion the system of production and distribution in the coming free society.

The proletariat of Europe has already awakened to a realization of his great mission; it remains for the American workers to decide whether they will continue, as before, to be satisfied with the crumbs off the board of the wealthy. Let us hope that they will soon awaken to the full perception of their great historic mission, bearing in mind the battle scars of former years. Especially at this time, when organized capital of America – the most powerful and greedy of the world – is again attempting to repeat the tragedy of 1887, American labor must warn the overbearing masters with a decisive 'Thus far and no further!'

*Mother Earth* v.2, n.3 (May 1907)

### **The First of May: Symbol of a New Era in the Life and Struggle of the Toilers**

In the socialist world, the first of May is considered the Labor holiday. This is a mistaken description that has so penetrated the lives of the toilers that in many countries that day is indeed celebrated as such. In fact, the first of May is not at all a holiday for the toilers. No, the toilers should not stay in their workshops or in the fields on that date. On that date, toilers all over the world should come together in every village, every town, and organize mass rallies, not to mark that date as statist socialists and especially the Bolsheviks conceive it, but rather to gauge the measure of their strength and assess the possibilities for direct armed struggle against a rotten, cowardly, slave-holding order rooted in violence and falsehood. It is easiest for all the toilers to come together on that historic date, already part of the calendar, and most convenient for them to express their collective will, as well as enter into common discussion of everything related to essential matters of the present and the future.

Over forty years ago, the American workers of Chicago and its environs assembled on the first of May. There they listened to addresses from many socialist orators, and more especially those from anarchist orators, for they fairly gobbled up libertarian ideas and openly sided with the anarchists.



That day those American workers attempted, by organizing themselves, to give expression to their protest against the iniquitous order of the State and Capital of the propertied. That was what the American libertarians Spies, Parsons and others spoke about. It was at this point that this protest rally was interrupted by provocations by the hirelings of Capital and it ended with the massacre of unarmed workers, followed by the arrest and murder of Spies, Parsons and other comrades.

The workers of Chicago and district had not assembled to celebrate the May Day holiday. They had gathered to resolve, in common, the problems of their lives and their struggles.

Today too, wheresoever the toilers have freed themselves from the tutelage of the bourgeoisie and the social democracy linked to it (Menshevik or Bolshevik, it makes no difference) or even try to do so, they regard the first of May as the occasion of a get-together when they will concern themselves with their own affairs and consider the matter of their emancipation. Through these aspirations, they give expression to their solidarity with and regard for the memory of the Chicago martyrs. Thus they sense that the first of May cannot be a holiday for them. So, despite the claims of 'professional socialists,' tending to portray it as the Feast of Labor, the first of May can be nothing of the sort for conscious workers.

The first of May is the symbol of a new era in the life and struggle of the toilers, an era that each year offers the toilers fresh, increasingly tough and decisive battles against the bourgeoisie, for the freedom and independence wrested from them, for their social ideal.

Nestor Makhno

*Dyelo Truda* n.36, (1928.)

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### May First

May First is dead, dead like the revolutionary mind-set of nearly a half a century ago: and dead like the reformist notion of the 'three 8s', since the 8 hour day became law, albeit not always honoured. It was Napoleon who said once that an idea achieved is an idea deceased. May First survives these days only as the single feast day that the proletariat has managed to impose upon its masters, which, not to put too fine a point on it, adds up to very little.

Is May First going to undergo a revival? We do not think so nor, to be honest, can we see that there is any need, even for the sake of a day of less than eight hours.

Kropotkin's phrase – that eight hours spent working for an employer are eight hours too many! – applies equally to a six or seven hour day, especially since experience has taught us that a reduction in the number of working hours is accompanied by a stepping-up of their intensity. May First will continue to be celebrated in commemoration of a time of expectation and proletarian struggles, a period disrupted by the two biggest wars the world had ever witnessed.

However we should not over-indulge in invocations of the past and should look instead to the future. The focus of our action, which should also to be the action of any who call themselves socialists, lies in the affirmation that there is no solution in the context of a bourgeois society to the contradictions of capitalism itself, unless we agree with reversion to forced slave labour as currently practised in Germany. We want to see all human rights retained and built upon and if these are not suited to a system of private ownership of the means of production and of products themselves, that is the very *raison d'être* of the social revolution to

which we aspire. All schemes for state intervention to help the victims of capitalist exploitation are obviously based upon its retention. Instead of doing away with injustice, the aim is to make it more bearable and therefore more durable. No matter who may sign up to this crude deception and dismisses us as demagogues, we will not embrace the maxim according to which there is no justice in this world, especially as we do not believe in the next. All this stress upon spiritual values is an attempt to offer them instead of the material ones which are stubbornly withheld. Speculator, therefore, rather than speculative spiritualism.

'Come, O May, the people are waiting for you', our Gori sang once: but these days no more is expected of it than of any other feast day. Faith, the great fulcrum without which the world cannot be shifted, has died out. Faith, that is, in human capabilities alone rather than in some unforthcoming divine assistance. Without a great faith only the trivial is possible and the way is opened for the success of the direst fanaticisms. In Italy those who lacked belief in the possibility of revolution unwittingly abetted the fascist State which sought to describe itself as 'revolution', almost in answer to the Italian people's vague yearning for a regime of justice and freedom, when it was merely its most brutal negation.

By dint of socialism's coming to be regarded as some distant ideal, sight of it has been lost entirely: as a result of minimum programmes, we in turn have been minimised; as a result of bourgeois practice, everything socialist has come to be regarded as unfeasible. These are tough findings that we are not making out of any excessive fondness for criticism: but rather because we must first denounce evil, evil in its entirety, if we want to seek out a proper remedy and act upon it.

We anarchists, especially the French anarchists, have made our share of mistakes. The first was assessing the situation post-fascism as being the same as the situation that preceded it: the second was our failure to see that the pacifism of the direst reactionaries was mere paci-fascism, designed to leave absolutism in peace to exercise its influence and prevail in Europe: the third was subscribing to a wholesale defeatism that is tantamount to anti-revolutionary in that it means submitting to all violence. Our principles remained immutable but we must take care not to apply them in a wrong-headed fashion.

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May First was a great idea of direct insurgent action that the politicians hijacked in order to rein in its means and its ends. Upwards of forty years ago in a pamphlet reviewing its origins and bloody history, we concluded: 'Among socialism's moderates May First is going to wind up as a laughable petition or untimely festival.' We prophesied wisely. Since then there has been nothing but petitions and celebrations, the former laughable because someone who knows only how to beg deserves, not his rights, but only petty alms: and the latter untimely, especially now that the war has taken a savage turn and celebration has become a ghastly irony. We will not be accused of being unfair if we say that official socialism and official trade unionism, having equipped themselves bureaucratically with omnipotent centrals and functionaries, seek chiefly to strike fear into their members by overstating risks and supposed impossibilities and end up condemning the very notion of struggle, the very word, at the very time when, around the world, a vast movement of preemptive counter-revolution was hatching that was to culminate in the Second World War.

It had gone unnoticed by their leaders that the totalitarians feted and favoured for their radical reaction, (an example that could be cited in order to follow suit when the time came)



were serious totalitarians who did not mean to be fobbed off with concessions (no matter how significant) but demanded their right to dispose of at least four fifths of the world as they deemed fit. America would be left to last. And lo and behold, Capitalism, having thought that it had found its salvation, risked its death. And what about the proletariat in all this? Absentees during the rest of the year, they reckon they need only demonstrate passively on May First. Meanwhile, however, they answer every mobilisation order. Until such time as they wage their own war, to wit, the revolution, they are doomed to fight the wars of 'others'.

Luigi Bertoni

Written in 1945 (probably during World War Two),

published in *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* [New York] (April 29, 1967)

### A Cry in the Dark

#### May Day in Unredeemed Spain

The rapid passage of time has brought us once again to the symbolic, evocative date of 1 May. Again we come to the evocation of the selfless sacrifices of the Chicago martyrs, as thousands and millions of Spanish workers serenely defy death itself from behind bars in the jails jam-packed with antifascists or in the streets of cities where the hundred-eyed fascist reaction is on the lookout for proletarian flesh into which to plunge its leaden talons. Around the globe, this will be a day of joyous celebration now that the dismal memories of Hitlerite repression have dissipated and the road is wide open to the better world of which we all dream. In Spain it will be a day of memories and sadness when, thoughts turning to our fallen comrades and ears cocked for the firing squads' volleys, we forge yet again a solid determination to win back, whenever and however we can, even should it cost us a lot of blood, the freedom wrested from us through violence and treachery.

But when the workers of the world joyously celebrate their day, and massive victory parades wend their way through the streets of Paris, London, Brussels, Rome, New York, Moscow, etc., we should like them to pause for a moment in their riotous celebrations and think of those condemned to the slow agony of a living death, and remember that in various places around Spain, the feast of labour may well be marked by volleys of gunfire and the earth watered again by the blood of revolutionary workers.

Prior to 1936, before German aircraft and Italian divisions briefly put paid to our freedom as the world looked on in indifference, the whole of Spain was a cry of triumph on May Day. For a day, the workers quit the factories and left their labours in the fields, the fishermen left behind the grey waters of the Cantabrian Sea, of the blue waters of the Mediterranean and everywhere, from the tiniest hamlet in remotest Andalusia through to the great cities like Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Bilbao or Zaragoza, the producers showed off their potential and resolve, their might and their expectation that through their own exertions they might gather in the harvest whose seed had been watered by the blood of the five anarchists lynched in Chicago.

Since 1939 and the fascist victory, the working class feast of 1 May has continued to be marked. But marked in two different ways, two ways utterly different from the style of celebration throughout the entire civilised world. On the workers' part, in defiance of the wrath of the police and the Falangists, with a few minutes of downed tools and silence in factory and

workshop, with the distribution of underground manifestos, with posters and graffiti boldly daubed everywhere, reiterating that the spirit that moved Spies, Engels, Fichte [sic] and other comrades neither has perished nor will it perish in us. On our enemies' part, in the bloodthirsty, brutal manner of which their German Gestapo teachers were so fond, in strict obedience to the guidelines laid down for them on his frequent visits to Spain by the monstrous Himmler, the inventor of the most refined tortures, gas chambers and mass extermination camps.

From the moment of its victory, Spanish fascism has been careful to mark every feast day, its own, ours and other people's. During the World War it also marked Germany's successes. And even the Allied successes, in order to mar our delight at these and hammer the point home that, regardless of the victories scored by freedom's armies, they were still in charge in our country. Because inevitably the means of commemoration was always the same: firing squads.

Not a 1 May, 14 April [Proclamation of the Spanish Republic, 1931], 18 July [military rising, 1936] or 7 November – the last being the date of the glorious defence of Madrid – went by without the firing squads springing into action in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville or some other Spanish village or city. Fascism still takes care to ensure that its jails are stocked with thousands of liberal-minded men under sentence of death from one of those sham courts martial where the accused is denied any defence and the basic norms of due process are ignored. They languish under a death sentence for days, weeks, months, years on end. Whole years with nerves eroded by the uncertainty of an execution that could be carried out at any moment: subjected to the most refined torture, to which the Spanish Inquisition owed its ghastliness: the torture of hope. They are victims stockpiled for the commemoration of feast days: hostages to serve as burnt offerings to the greater glory of their ideals.

The condemned know when a date draws near what their fate will be. As do those on the outside familiar with the bestial methods of Spanish fascism. As that day breaks and the light of dawn joins battle against the shades of night, a number of volleys break through the silent dawn – and lead silences cries of 'Long live freedom!' forever.

This is how the Spanish regime has marked May Day since 1936: and how it will mark it this year. In our memory and in our hearts we hold the cherished names of the hundreds of comrades sacrificed on that date in preceding years: and there will be a number of others to add in 1947.

On this day of triumph for workers around the world, we should like free men everywhere to remember the dramatic reality in Spain. We should like them not to think of it as some dim and distant past, but as a current reality, as a tragedy replayed daily and claiming fresh, pained victims.

And reflect too that none of this is enough to break our morale or shake our determination. The blood of martyrs is a seed that blossoms in a harvest of heroism for those who are left behind. If our resolve was unbreakable in 1936, it is a hundred times more so now in 1947. The firing squads may keep up their efforts and water the generous soil of Spain with blood. Calmly, determinedly, vigorously, we embrace as our own the words uttered by Spies on the scaffold and, with him, we say:

'A day is coming when the words that you seek to silence through death will ring out louder than any shout.'



In Spain that day draws close. Because, like Seneca, we can look the killer in the eye and on this May Day spit with contempt into his face: Go on, kill. But no matter how much you kill, you will never kill that which will see you dead.

Spain, 16 April 1947

The National Committee of the CNT

From Enrique Marco Nadal, *Todos contra Franco* (Madrid 1982)

### 1886 – First Of May – 1973

#### A Day of Protest And Social Awareness

Today marks the passing of another year since the ghastly judicial and social crime committed against a group of workers who, having unfurled the flag of struggle for the principles of social and revolutionary justice, sought better and more humane working conditions in the face of the grasping cruelty of a capitalist society made rotten by the hunger for gain and greed. The winning of the 8-hour day was meant to open up a shining path and hope in a regime that had turned men, women and children into legions of victims and hopeless outcasts.

The infamous legal farce that put paid to the lives of 5 anarchist workers on 11 November 1887 found in bourgeois 'justice' and the bought press the means of fabricating a contemptible yarn about a terrorist outrage. Later it was established clearly and with documentation that this had been a scheme cooked up by police informers and intellectuals in the hire of the capitalist class and the State ... YES! today we see another anniversary of the awful slaughter of the CHICAGO MARTYRS, by the most cruel means – THE GALLOWES. Today we also complete yet another year of lies and calumnies rehearsed year after year by the hypocrites of politics as they deny the truth of that unforgettable date. They never say – and never will – that the HAYMARKET HANGED WERE ANARCHISTS. In their speeches and newspaper articles, our comrades are dismissed as a band of workers hanged for being in the forefront of the campaign for the 8-hour day, at a time when people toiled for 14 or 16...

But the political hacks have nothing to say about their having been ANARCHIST FIGHTERS. Our comrades PARSONS, LINGG, FISCHER, SPIES and ENGELS were not hanged for the 8-hour day that all the world's workers now enjoy. NO! They were murdered for their revolutionary consciousness, for believing in and spreading the ideas of HUMAN LIBERATION.

They were persuaded that the employer system had to be torn down, though not in order to raise up NEW MASTERS. They believed that it was up to workers themselves to carry out the social revolution rather than the Shepherds who speak in their name and profess to represent them ... They believed that social gains had to be demanded directly and without intermediaries.

They went to their deaths convinced that the workers need NEITHER MASTERS NOR BOSSES, that THE STATE CANNOT MAKE THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION that society needs: because the State is above all else ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY. They died for MAN, for his capacity to organise and create, for their belief in freely associated workers, for advocating direct action as a weapon of struggle and the GENERAL STRIKE as the proper weapon of the workers. For their ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN and ANTI-STATE principles!

For that and for that alone they perished on the gallows! They climbed the scaffold, faithful to their Ideals, and those who today disguise their true revolutionary status and the ideas for which they died, are accomplices of those who put them to death 87 years ago.

### THE FIRST OF MAY IS NOT A PARTY!

It is a time for calling to mind a painful event in the history of workers' social struggles, in their striving for economic liberation and dignity as free men. The First of May is a day of combat and revolutionary awareness.

It is the only decent way of paying tribute to our comrades murdered in Chicago. COMRADES! Your ideas are today the seed germinating in the hearts of the oppressed and exploited the whole world over. It symbolises all the social struggles of any who ever were oppressed, as much as the revolts of SPARTACUS, THE PARIS COMMUNE, THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF THE SPANISH REVOLUTION.

All the proletarian blood spilled by true anarchists and revolutionaries is the blood of the CHICAGO MARTYRS. Like many others, they cared nothing for the State and less for the capitalist class. As in the days of May 1968 in Paris.

They wanted a society of FREE men, with neither exploited nor exploiters. That was what they sought and that is what the CHICAGO MARTYRS died for. They wanted the Earth to be man's homeland, with no borders or tyrants, no bosses or butchers.

FELLOW WORKER

YOU WHO PRODUCE THE FRUITS AND WEALTH FOR OTHERS!

YOU WHO BUILD PALACES AND LIVE IN HOVELS!

WAKE UP AND LIFT YOUR EYES! COMRADE PEASANT, WAKE FROM YOUR LONG SLUMBER OF EXPLOITATION! COMRADE STUDENT, DO NOT LET YOURSELF BE MANIPULATED BY THE POLITICIANS, BUT SEARCH OUT THE TRUTH!

IF YOU WANT THE FACTORIES TO BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY AND THE WORKERS THEMSELVES, REJECT THE POLITICIANS AND BOSSES, NO MATTER WHAT NAME THEY MAY GO BY! IF YOU RECKON THAT THE EARTH SHOULD BE COLLECTIVELY OWNED AND FARMING RUN BY THE WORKERS THEMSELVES, WITH THE BENEFITS GOING DIRECTLY TO THE COMMUNITY, SHUN THE BUREAUCRATS AND POLITICAL COMMISSARS!

THE FIRST OF MAY ... A DAY OF PROTEST AGAINST EXPLOITATION!

'THE ANARCHIST GROUPS OF CHILE'

Santiago, Chile, 1973

From *America Latina Libertaria*, No 2 (Paris) 1979

### To Latin American Comrades

#### 1886 – First of May – 1978

Exiles, refugees, scatterlings. Far from the lands where we made our first friends. Our first loves, our first struggles. Under a different sky, a different State, different police. Alongside different men and women. But always it is the same yearning that stirs in us, the same determination that we harbour, the same revolutionary passion that sustains us. Here or wherever, our borders are the borders of our class and our scattered homelands we share with every victim of persecution, every victim of oppression, every rebel.

In 1887 five anarchists died in Chicago. They came from different parts of the world. Workers, they strove with their class brothers for better working conditions, but they knew that the 8-hour day was merely a moment in the social warfare and that their aim could be nothing less than the abolition of wage slavery, the abolition of private property and of the State.

May Days have come and gone and capitalism and the State have changed form, but oppression and exploitation have not altered for those who feel the weariness in their arms and in their



children's eyes. The development of multi-national corporations and the rise of technobureaucratic leadership have united the ruling class, whilst an attempt has been made to pit the interests of the proletarians of the industrialised nations against those of the workers and peasants of the developing nations. But the repression, murder and torture visited upon those of the latter who are to protest are evidence of the exploiting classes' fear of the resurgence of the workers' autonomous struggle.

The military juntas of Latin America, by imposing State terror, are defending the interests of the propertied classes, backed and led by US imperialism. But the worker on the Baltic or in Prague is also fired upon by his 'own' police or the tanks of the ruling power if his rebellion catches on and insurrection spreads to the streets. The very same 'reason of State' covers the killers, whether in Chicago, Trelew, Malville or Carabanchel.

The First of May was a symbol of the international proletariat's struggle for its emancipation. Neither military parades nor the 'good little boy' marches of the reformist union federations can blind us to the deep-seated international solidarity of the struggle. Worker autonomy, direct action – with no chiefs, guides, Great Leaders or Grand Helmsmen, but organised into our own rank-and-file agencies – will turn the revolutionary movement into a tool for liberation.

LATIN AMERICANS, FELLOW ANARCHISTS:

SOLIDARITY AND STRUGGLE RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW!

CLLA – Libertarian Latin American Coordination (Paris) 1 May 1978

### May Day Leaflet

Comrades – welcome once again to the May Day march and festival of alienation. You have been enrolled as a private in the stage army of the Left, so eyes front, back straight, and follow your leaders! There are lots of different leaders for you follow, and choosing together can be fun!

For a start, there's the Labour Party, who advocate the gradual approach to social change (really good value if you plan to live for ever), and spend a lot of their time propping up the capitalist system. Ask about their nationalisation scheme, where capitalist conditions of exploitation have been so faithfully reproduced that neither workers in the industry nor the consumers are able to distinguish between 'nationalisation'<sup>TM</sup> and the real thing.

More accomplished performers are the Communist Party, who, with a flourish (the swiftness of the hand deceives the eye), can turn the 'Capitalist State' into 'State Capitalism', and nobody can spot the difference.

The empty space in between is occupied by the various Bronsteinist factions such as the Swerps, Werps, and Twerps – more usually known as 'Trots', after their mentor Leon Trotsky, the Butcher of Kronstadt.

Organised labour will be represented by the Trades Union Congress – even they tried to organise a revolution once, but talks broke down when they couldn't get management to agree.

All these groups agree that work is exploitation. Most work is about following orders, humiliation, and boredom. If you're lucky, you won't get an industrial disease. Yet, at the drop of a hat, any one of these organisations will whip you into the ranks of a 'Right to Work' march. In a farcical re-run of *Spartacus*, the slaves hammer on the gates of the slave-camp and demand to be let back in.

But seriously, folks – all the groups on this march today consider themselves to be part of the 'progressive' movement. The problem is that there is no more progress. Fights about health and safety at work, pay and conditions, trade union rights, the rights of the unemployed, cruise missiles, etc, have become, despite their very real importance, *rearguard actions*.

In the near future, you may get the chance to vote for one of these 'progressive' candidates. Your vote could make a difference – if your idea of 'making a difference' is a friendly nod and a few extra quid for your favourite good cause. But voting never *really* changes anything (if it did they'd make it illegal) – not one of these candidates will give you back your life. They have all fallen into the trap of reasonable demands and responsible negotiations. Negotiation is a ruse; we are going to take back everything – what is there to discuss?

By their 'reasonableness' and 'responsibility' the progressive parties have been rendered incapable of making any real social change. At the same time, more and more ordinary people are starting to comprehend the enormous confidence trick which has been played on us all; more and more people wish the social system would go to hell. In the summer of 1981, 'riot-type' situations occurred in over sixty British towns. Over 4,000 people were arrested; over 700 were sent to prison. Can you imagine the bleatings of our elected representatives if this had happened in Gdansk or Chile?

The only person worth voting for is yourself. The only way we can each get what we want is to cooperate with each other. Stuff leaders, stuff saviours of the world, and stuff ideology – together we can create new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships. We can provide for ourselves (we do already – who do you think keeps things running now?). We need to show that there are other ways of doing things.

It is not a matter of transforming private or state property, but of abolishing it; not of mitigating class difference, but of abolishing classes; not of 'improving' the present society, but of creating a new society; not of some partial success that would give rise to a new division, but of a thorough rejection of every new disguise of the old world.

If this kind of life looks interesting to you, then why not do something about it? It is amazing how much time you'll have to really rebuild your world when you give up all the time-wasting token gestures like marches, petitions, and elections. This could be our last chance to unmake history.

'This is the text of a leaflet written by some Reading anarchists which was handed out at the May Day march in London' – *Freedom*, v.44, n. 10, 21st May 1983



## A Mayday over MayDay [2000]

### *Third wave vs. third way*

Despite the Terrorism Bill, despite the boom and Blair's continuing poll-surfing, many of us have seen the last few years as something of an up. Since June 18th and a few other events it's even become possible to talk of a third wave. Those of us old enough to remember the early 80s, let alone the real oldies who were around in the late 60s/ early 70s, are heartened to see so many of today's youngsters following our bad example. Three or four years ago people's main focus was on this or that tentacle of the beast while the terrain they fought on was largely moralistic ('roads are bad', 'CJA is wrong' etc.). Now many thousands will regularly turn up for events which do not ask for permission or reforms but simply contest capital itself. Seeing that the system can offer them at best lives of stifling mediocrity, they turn instead to the adventure of challenging it in its entirety.

However, let's not ruin our carefully cultivated image of bitter old cynics too quickly but look to the peculiarities of our situation. Not all waves, after all, are of the same shape and size. This wave may well be smaller than its predecessors, but that isn't necessarily an insurmountable problem. It's proven itself big enough to go tidal before, and besides we're not exactly asking for a public referendum on the future of capitalism anyway. But while we've been reinventing ourselves into smaller sizes the State hasn't stood still. Witness increased surveillance or the steady ratcheting-up of repressive laws which would have provoked mass outrage in the Seventies. In short, while we've been getting littler they've been getting stronger. It's got plain harder to do that thing we do.

Compounded to this, there's virtually no wider movements for us to link up to. Militant workers are virtually extinct, and urban rioters an endangered species, to the point they can make sentimental TV documentaries about them. What's the point of a wave with no-one to wave to? What price a catalyst without the general chemical reaction? Our new-found fixation with 'globalisation' (international conferences, days of action etc.) must be seen in this context. Like Tony Hancock we've got friends all over the world, we just don't know anyone down our own streets.

However, there's been parallel developments in the wider sphere which could cut against our isolation. Since Labour's fully-fledged embracing of neoliberalism and its almost total silencing of the old Left, 'mainstream' politics has closed up. The Third Way has taken the First and Second Ways off the menu. The new brutality is made to seem inevitable, as natural as it getting colder in the winter. Yet this strategy carries a risk for them – the globalised market is but one basket for all their eggs. Look at the recent elections where they reduced the choices on offer, then worried themselves into knots when fewer and fewer could be bothered to vote!

Faced with increasing levels of exploitation in their jobs, most people have developed an instinctive distrust of globalisation in all its endless faceless acronyms. They may not necessarily know what GATT, WTO, IMF stand for individually, but they're aware that together they spell SHIT. Yet our movement is no longer the most radical end of some liberal spectrum criticising such things, we're now the only people seen to be doing anything about it at all! When our enemies take us seriously, it's not because they love old statues or see insurgency in a smashed McDonalds window. In fact it's not because of anything that we're actually doing, but because of a potential rendezvous with the 'apathetic' mass which currently remains latent. If

there's seeds they fear growing from our good deeds, they're not the ones the hippies stuck in Parliament Square.

### *Divide and defuse*

Onto MayDay itself. Against Leftist notions that we can only be provoked into action by 'police brutality', it should be noted that the police tactics early in the day was so softly-softly as to earn them a ticking-off in the media! The laws already exist (as if they needed them!) to have prevented us meeting in Parliament Square. A few vans, some riot clobber and a bit of stripy tickertape might well have done it. Instead they opted for mere shows of force, not backed up by action until much later on. How come? As they virtually admitted afterwards, it was because they feared the consequences. Not necessarily immediately – after all they outnumbered us on the day!

But anti-demonstration tactics in Britain always revolve around separating the passive mass of onlookers from the activists or hardcore troublemakers. Police will try to impose this physically at the time. Then, regardless of their actual success, this story must be kept up in the media. How many times have we heard the line 'it was a peaceful enough event until the hardcore of troublemakers turned up?', even most laughably after June 18th! Strong-arm tactics risk creating an antagonistic mob who, even if beaten at the time, may come back better-armed and more prepared. This is exactly what has happened in Germany and many other countries, and exactly what they want to avoid here. A few smashed windows and other bits of steam-letting can be fixed by the next day. It's keeping the liberal consensus which counts.

It should also be said that, contrary to June 18th, MayDay carried all the weaknesses inherent in Reclaim the Streets events at their worst. We'll leave others to describe the truly risible nature of the terrible 'Guerrilla Gardening' stunt, and to account how it came so soon after such inspiring actions. (But suffice to say even State stooge and upper class twit George Monbiot admitted 'Digging up Parliament Square to stop global capitalism is so futile, so utterly frustrating and disempowering that the more hot-headed protesters could almost be excused for wanting to do something more spectacular' G2 10/5/00).

In the spirit of positivity we'll concentrate instead on the potential moment of escape as we all left it to go up Whitehall. The whole mass of people stopped as McDonalds windows went in, whooping and cheering. It seemed inspiring. Yet over twenty minutes later the same three or four people were still smashing up the same one shop, while the same mass took snapshots for the album or clapped like they were at the theatre! Some, through not wanting to be sitting targets or just bored at all the repetition, drifted on to Trafalgar Square. This allowed the cops to step in and split the crowd in two, drastically reducing our capacity for mischief. The rest of the day was downhill.

This is saddening, but not necessarily surprising. Since the start Reclaim the Streets have been successful in bringing masses back out of doors after a very apathetic period. While some have condemned them for appealing only to bombed-out party heads, this is wide of the mark. Most attendees respond to the appeal of lawlessness, even if just the buzz of it. (Always a better place to start than boring papers.) But, brought up in an unprecedented 'apolitical' era, most respond to radicalism by consuming it. Instead of buying McDonalds they buy into opposition to it – as a spectacle, as a show. The 'activists' do things while the rest of us cheer them on. The police do other things and we boo. Same difference.



Had we continued en masse to Trafalgar Square, would we have been in time to get beyond and go on a mystery tour through central London? We can't know. But we do know that in Whitehall we obligingly demonstrated our biggest weakness to our enemies, and helpfully separated ourselves into the necessary constituent groups for them to divide and defuse us.

We've said it before and we'll say it again. Despite what some people persist in thinking, capitalism doesn't live inside McDonalds signs or police riot shields. It's a social relation, and if we reproduce that social relation in our manifestations (by separating ourselves into producers and consumers of revolt) whatever the score we ring up on our negative cash registers we're not going to go anywhere. Our wave'll be for drowning.

We suspect some will try to snatch the phantasm of victory from real-life defeat by waxing lyrical how MayDay went beyond 'the plan'. In this way they fetishise anti-planning about as much as the Stalinists do planning, and betray their essential similarity. The point is not to fixatedly plan or refuse to plan, but in our relationship to that plan. Look at what the Cops do when their plans fail. They either a) lose it and go mental or b) stand around, awaiting fresh orders. They exist as a mechanism to bring about plans they are given. Our plans are made by us and for us. We can change them in a moment if need be, but need no phobias of making them in the first place. June 18th was successful largely because it was well planned. Yes, on MayDay the plan was particularly crap but failing to spontaneously generate anything better we floundered. If we've any sense left that should take us back to the drawing board.

#### *Tearful Tony and the media deluge*

Next let's look at the media response. Not because we assume that the media reports are more important than the actual event. And we'll leave it to the Trots and other wanna-be bourgeoisie to imagine people uncritically swallow whatever they read. But neither do we think, as many seem to, that if good media isn't our aim then bad media should be and the worse the media the better the action. MayDay marks the limitations of such 'thinking'.

Truth is, the media can have an effect on people if it manages to insert itself into their already-formed perceptions. As we've already said, most people are sullenly dissatisfied by the state of things but currently see no possibility of alternatives. Mention MayDay and the like to real-life folk and you're not likely to hear the quizzical 'but what's wrong with capitalism?' or the outraged 'you should respect the rule of law!' so much as the cynical 'but what do you expect it to achieve?'

The most important feature of the media is the sheer scale of it. We're supposed to feel the width! Blair himself took time off shaking hands with mass murderers to do a photo-op condemning us. While the scale of destruction at June 18th had to be played down, it was the very lesser achievements of MayDay (i.e. a few shops done in and a bit of graffiti on some statues) which made it perfect for them to blow up. Hence there's been more furore over a tuft of grass on a dead bigot's head than the storming of the LIFFE building.

What do we want to get out of such days? We'd argue 'British' participation in anti-capitalist days needs to have a positive domestic effect, not just join in a 'virtual community' of international activists like an anti-McDonalds trying to open the same branch all over the world. MayDay didn't have to destroy capitalism to be a success (thankfully), but it had to be big enough to float the idea that capitalism isn't as immutable as we're told. It wasn't and it didn't. The point isn't that they've made us look 'bad' or 'mindless' (like they'd ever do otherwise), so much as they've succeeded in making us look weak and irrelevant. Faced with a choice between

such clear-cut winners and losers, most will remain apathetic or even actively embrace the winner for safety's sake.

This leaves us in a Catch 22 situation, unable to really achieve anything without wider participation but unable to get that participation without achieving anything. If our wave is beached from wider sympathy, it'll be harder to avoid our actions getting smaller as the passive mass stop turning up at all and the 'activists' get more insular, defensive and harder to join even if anybody wanted to. This seems like a cycle not to get into.

#### *Out of siege mentality*

Finally, let's look at the very concept of anti-capitalist days themselves. A lot of physical and emotional investment has been put in these, in fact the very 'up' people have been feeling is probably down to their tonic. After all, for a time they felt like part of a natural trajectory for us. For too long we'd been stuck in siege mentality. Whether occupying road protest camps or squatted social centres we were locked in a defensive war against the State – who are, in case you've never noticed, a superior force. They knew (pretty much) what we were up to, and had developed their rehearsed methods for dealing with it. Their main tactic was normally to wait until all the lightweights had pissed off and the rest of us had gone mad then just stroll in, and let's face it mostly it worked pretty well. (Especially the going mad part.)

The first Reclaim the Streets were a break from this. We weren't just escaping from the tunnels back into the daylight (which was welcome enough), we were reinventing the benefit of surprise for ourselves. We'd just get up and take over some shitty intersection somewhere. We would decide where. We would decide when. Short of guarding every crossroads and traffic light in the country, they were forced to wait on us! And of course we had the buzz of seeing a virus spawned in London spread across much of the world, as copycat parties happened from Finland to LA.

At first, international anti-capitalist days seemed like a step up from this. Not only did they put our politics on our sleeves, more importantly they were pushing the envelope of surprise once more. Just when the Cops were learning this new rule book of our actions we'd gleefully torn it up all over again. Trouble is we may have been too successful for our own good – or at least for our 'movement's' shaky structure to cope with. After June 18th, and particularly after Seattle, capitalism has been seen to be contested again. They're not likely to be too happy about that.

So what happens if we continue with this tactic? First, we should note we've partly stepped backwards – back into a timing no longer of our choosing. Between the IMF, WTO and European integration there's a bewildering array of conferences scheduled, dates all taunting to be put in our diaries. These dates are their dates, they don't correspond to the ebbs and flows or strengths and weakness of our movement. Neither do they bear any immediate relation to wider popular discontent. (And if you start arguing about May Day being 'workers day' you haven't been getting out much lately.) Finally, if we disregard all this and show up anyway they're likely to be waiting for us with side-handled batons and a few old grudges. We may find the ground under our feet no longer our terrain.

(Of course many go further and argue that anti-capitalist days are themselves spectacular events, stunts that keep lazy journos in headlines and only reinforce how the other 364 days of the year are business as usual. There's no little truth to this. Nevertheless we must see it in



context. There was a period where such methods did make for a progression for us, if not as the threat of a good example then as the temporary abeyance of a bad example.)

Ironically one successful action doesn't necessarily lead to another. It can even make things harder for next time, by combining a yardstick to live up to with a method that's already been used. It seems clear to us, in London at least, anti-capitalist days are numbered and new means of mobilising now required – ones which require us to again re-invent surprise and imagination. Let's set our own social agenda once more! We Kids don't have stacks of blueprints about how to do this piled up in our secret headquarters, in fact here and now we don't really have much of a clue! But that's what we need to stay one step ahead. We're not saying it'll be easy, but we've managed to reinvent ourselves before. The world will hear from us again!

Bash Street Kids

from *Reflections on Mayday* [2000]

### What is Anarchism?

Anarchism promotes mutual aid, harmony and human solidarity, to achieve a free, classless society – a cooperative commonwealth. Anarchism is both a theory and practice of life. Philosophically, it aims for perfect accord between the individual, society and nature. In an anarchist society, mutually respectful sovereign individuals would be organised in non-coercive relationships within naturally defined communities in which the means of production and distribution are held in common.

Anarchists, are not simply dreamers obsessed with abstract principles. We know that events are ruled by chance, and that people's actions depend much on long-held habits and on psychological and emotional factors that are often anti-social and usually unpredictable. We are well aware that a perfect society cannot be won tomorrow. Indeed, the struggle could last forever! However, it is the vision that provides the spur to struggle against things as they are, and for things that might be.

Whatever the immediate prospects of achieving a free society, and however remote the ideal, if we value our common humanity then we must never cease to strive to realise our vision. If we settle for anything less, then we are little more than beasts of burden at the service of the privileged few, without much to gain from life other than a lighter load, better feed and a cosier berth.

If anarchists have one article of unshakeable faith then it is that, once the habit of deferring to politicians or ideologues is lost, and that of resistance to domination and exploitation acquired, then ordinary people have a capacity to organise every aspect of their lives in their own interests, anywhere and at any time, both freely and fairly.

Extract from *Anarchy: A Definition*

[www.katesharpleylibrary.net/definition.htm](http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/definition.htm)

### Mauro de Agostini Prisoners & Partisans: Italian Anarchists in the struggle against Fascism

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