

THE BLAST

The First of May and the General Strike

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Extract from the article in Alexander Berkman's
Anarchist-Communist newspaper *The Blast*,
published 1916-17: vol. 1:12, 1 May 1916
(reproduction edited by Barry Pateman, 2005,
Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press) pp. 99-106.

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THE MAY IDEA – in relation of its revolutionary spirit to Labour struggles – first manifested itself in the economic battles of the Knights of Labour. 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 class by means of direct action. Its first practical demand was the eight-hour day, and agitation to that end was an unusually strenuous one. Several strikes of the Knights of Labour were practically general strikes.

The various economic battles of that period, supported by the by the American Federation of Labour 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 favour of the eight-hour day. They thus served notice on their plutocratic masters that henceforth they would not be submissively exploited by the unlimited greed of the capitalists, who had appropriated the means of production created by many generations of Labour, thus usurping the position of masters – the good masters who kindly leave the workers the alternative of either prostituting their brawn or dying with their families of starvation.

The manly attitude of Labour in 1886 supported the resolution passed by the Labour Congress held in 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 the case in 1886...Nothing would satisfy the cannibalistic master but human sacrifices: the most devoted and advanced representatives of the movement – Parsons, Spies, Engel, Fischer and Lingg – were the victims...Let it be forever remembered by the workers that it was Anarchists who bore the brunt of those economic battles...

In December, 1888, the American Federation of Labour decided to make another attempt to win the eight hour day...The strike was to be initiated by a gigantic demonstration on the First of May, 1890.

In the meantime there assembled in Paris (1889) an International Labour Congress...and the day which three years earlier 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 parliamentarians, believers in indirect action, they purposefully ignored the essential import of the first of May...they decided that henceforth the First of May was to be "consecrated to the dignity of Labour", thus perverting the revolutionary significance of the great day into a mere appeal to the powers that be to grant the favour of the eight-hour day. By these means the parliamentarians degraded the noble meaning of the historic day.

The First of May "consecrated to the dignity of labour!@ As if slavery could be dignified by anything save revolutionary action. As long as Labour remains mere prostitution, selling its producing power for money...the First of May must remain the revolutionary battle cry of Labour's economic emancipation.

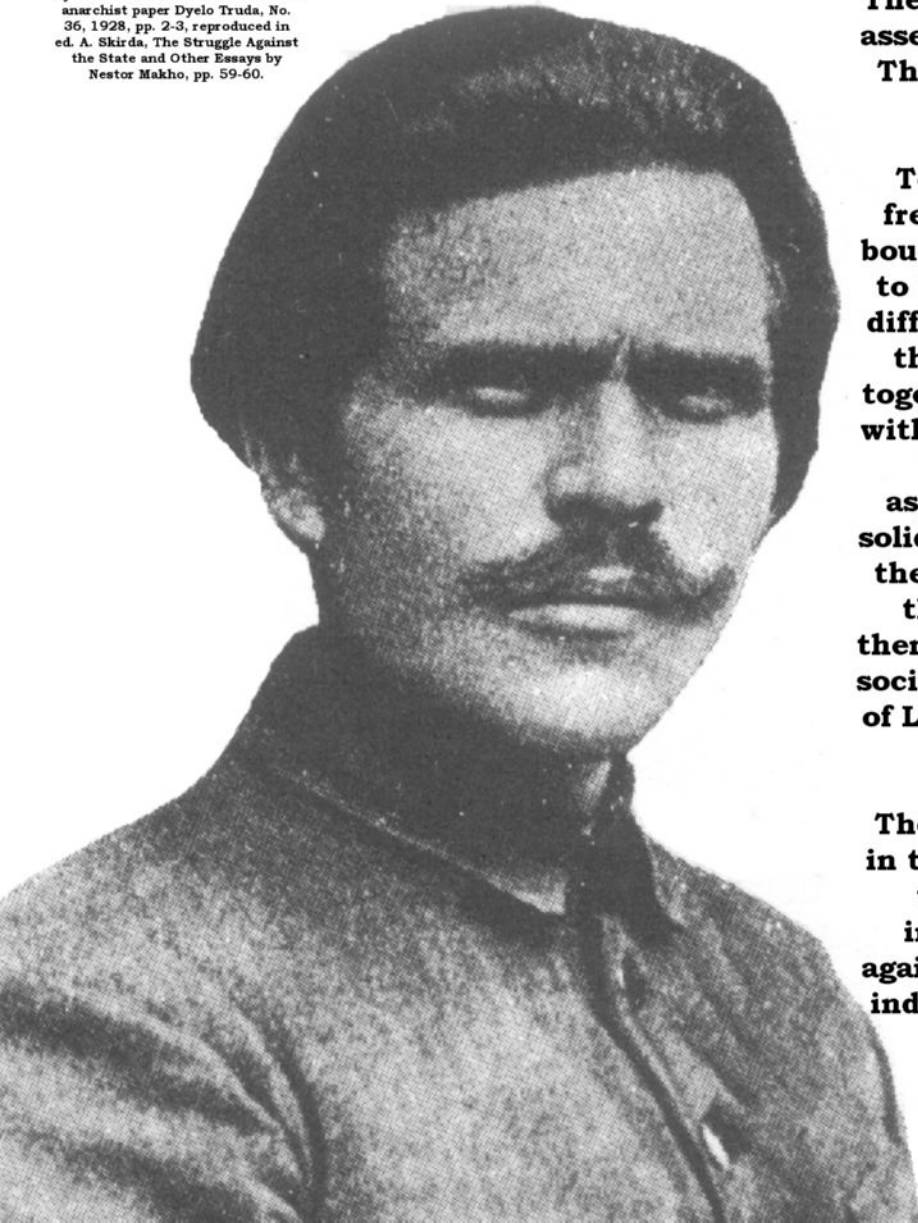
The First of May: Symbol of a New Era In the Life and Struggle of the Toilers

In the socialist world, the first of May is considered the Labour 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 day 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 their 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 ended with the massacre of unarmed workers, followed by the arrest of Spies, Parsons and the other comrades.

By Nestor Ivanovich Makhno in the anarchist paper *Dyelo Truda*, No. 36, 1928, pp. 2-3, reproduced in ed. A. Skirda, *The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays* by Nestor Makhno, pp. 59-60.



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 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 Labour, 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 this 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.

The Syndicalist

and Amalgamation News.

Edited under the auspices
of the Industrial Syndicalist
Education League.

PRESIDENT :
TOM MANN.
SECRETARY :
GUY BOWMAN.

VOL. III. NO. 3.

LONDON, JUNE, 1914.

MONTHLY, ONE PENNY.

“SOLIDARITY.”

May Day and Other Demonstrations.

Tramps and Super Tramps

Tramp! Tramp!! Tramp!!! Hark to the ragged battalions marching! It is May Day, once the joyfulest festival in Merrie England; today, the most drab, dismal, depressing, and damnable “holiday” in the calendar. Yet our Socialist and Labour papers yawp as though it were evidence that “the good time coming” is at hand! What is the matter with them? Are they sardonically humorous, or merely stupid?

Every year this fantastic parade takes place, and nothing happens. . . The banners alone give some semblance of purpose to the business. Is it not a most dreadful exposure of the weakness, the impotence, of the Socialist and Labour Movements?

Arrived in Hyde Park, shepherded by those hired bullies of the master class, the police, the super tramps make the usual speeches.... Deeds not words are necessary to stir the master class from its cynical inactivity in the matter of promises made to the workers.

The afflicted atmosphere having been agitated for the whole of one afternoon, the tramps sing “The Red Flag”, cheer for the Social Revolution, and trudge back to their kennels with another year of hopeless toil and penury before them.

How long shall this wretched farce continue?

But we have Men... as the enemy will find anon. Every day we are finding them, one here and one there. By and by as they get in touch with one another, they will assert themselves. Then, we believe, the rank and file of the wage slaves who stand now, uncertain, bemuddled by the bleating chorus around them, will follow the lead of these Men of their own class, to their final emancipation.

From The Syndicalist: 1912-1914, reproduced in facsimile (Nottingham: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation for Spokesman Press , 1975), vol. 3:3 June 1914.

THE MUGWUMPS ON THE MAKE.
But it is doubtful whether the plundering classes care whether you learn or not. The pitiful display of May 1st is not one calculated to strike terror into them. Rather does it move them to shouts of derisive laughter. Half-fed, ill-clad, depressed, what could such a mob do, even if armed and knowing the use of arms? A few scores of resolute, determined men, pledged to the cause of the workers, would do more than the thousands of the thieves that are such men, and one

MURRAN FOR SOLIDARITY!
Did the rank and file of the Union members intelligently understand the economic situation, were they class-conscious and aware of the meaning of the Class War and their own power, it would be another matter; but, as things are at present, such an amalgamated industry would be a blind giant indeed.
Solidarity! Yes, we like the word. That is, if the Trade Union officials who use it really mean it in its true sense. But we know very well they do not. For them, “amalgamation” simply means a constitutional reform which will enable the Trade Union politicians, who (Liberal and Labour alike) are attached to the bosses’ political party, to thrive in comfortable security

in
Frank Rose
while
men in
prate about
and secure
jobs
Fr. Why, we are disgusted with an exhibition of humbug,
is always the
demonstrators “re-asserted,” at the outset,
to emancipate themselves from wagedom.
Magnum! Surely, now, we should bear something resolute,
something forcible. One cannot break the chains of slavery with a
butter-knife, nor even by sending a “Primitive Methodist to
the top of Comoros. Now we should hear a clarion call
was made in order that the workers should be able to
a matter of sheep pretending to be lions. Their defiance of
National schools, abolition of the living-in system, and the
By all the gods, big and little, what are we to make of these
feathers that the master class and their
No 1 is not a majority that counts. The power to be
We are against the wages system.
The wages system is the cause of all our ills. We must get rid of it.
The profit of the plunderers because the workers do what they are expected
An intelligent two or three, among a group of their
together.
If the Iron Heel of capitalist oppression is ever to be thrust
from off the breast of Labour, it will need Men to the task. These
white-headed, rabbit-like, spineless molluscs only invite
MEN VERSUS EUNUCHS
men who fear neither god, man, devil, nor death; men who will
and them
The general
run of Trade Union officials, where even among the Socialists of
to-day? The most of those who lead the forces of Labour
in the revolt against the classes of robbery and exploitation,
are emasculated things, neither men nor women. Would
women, for the women to-day have far more
virtue than the men, however useless their cause.
Events in South Africa and in Ulster have shown that there
are men, at least, among the master class. They have taught us
lessons which one would think, even a Labour Leader would not
in the
army
against
of
show
Force!
of Labour.
be
of
Members
you can contrive to send to parliament. Capitalism has no regard
for religion, for morality, for patriotism, for constitution, for
justice, or for law, if these things stand between it and its prey.
and implacable hatred; still we can respect them, in a measure,
when they stand forth, armed, ruthless but courageous men,
prepared to fight for their spoils.
Botha and Carson (types of the robber class) are Men. These
Labour demonstrators are mere Eunuchs, neither men nor women.
But we have Men, too, as the enemy will find anon. Every
day we are finding them, one here and one there. By and by,
as they get into touch with one another, they will assert them-
selves. Then, we believe, the rank and file of the Wage-slaves,
who stand now, uncertain, bemuddled by the bleating chorus
around them, will follow the lead of these Men of their own class,
to their final emancipation.