

The New York World saw it as "Labor's Emancipation Day," one of the most powerful labor demonstrations in history. The San Jose Mercury, however, said, "There was no disturbance, no strikes, no discord on May day in the whole state of California. "But more than ten thousand marched in Los Angeles, led by the Carpenters and Plumbers and in Bay Area cities accord was reached before hand for the eight-hour day in the building trades.

The May Day events won eight-hours for many thousands of workers and shortened the work day for many thousands of others. Sam Gompers wrote, "The agitation for the Eight-Hour Movement...has given courage and hope to the working people...against the encroachments of the employing classes. Every trade and labor union of the country has vastly increased its membership."

Why did it start in Chicago? Chicago's new millionaires were in control and "the dollar was king. "In the late 1800s, Chicago was the Silicon Valley of its day, a hub of new industry, great wealth and extraordinary poverty, peopled by newcomers to the country, workers desperate to survive and willing to struggle. The Eight-Hour Movement gave them a realistic cause. The'- new unions gave them a handle with which to grab that cause and militant leadership to shake the pillars of class power.

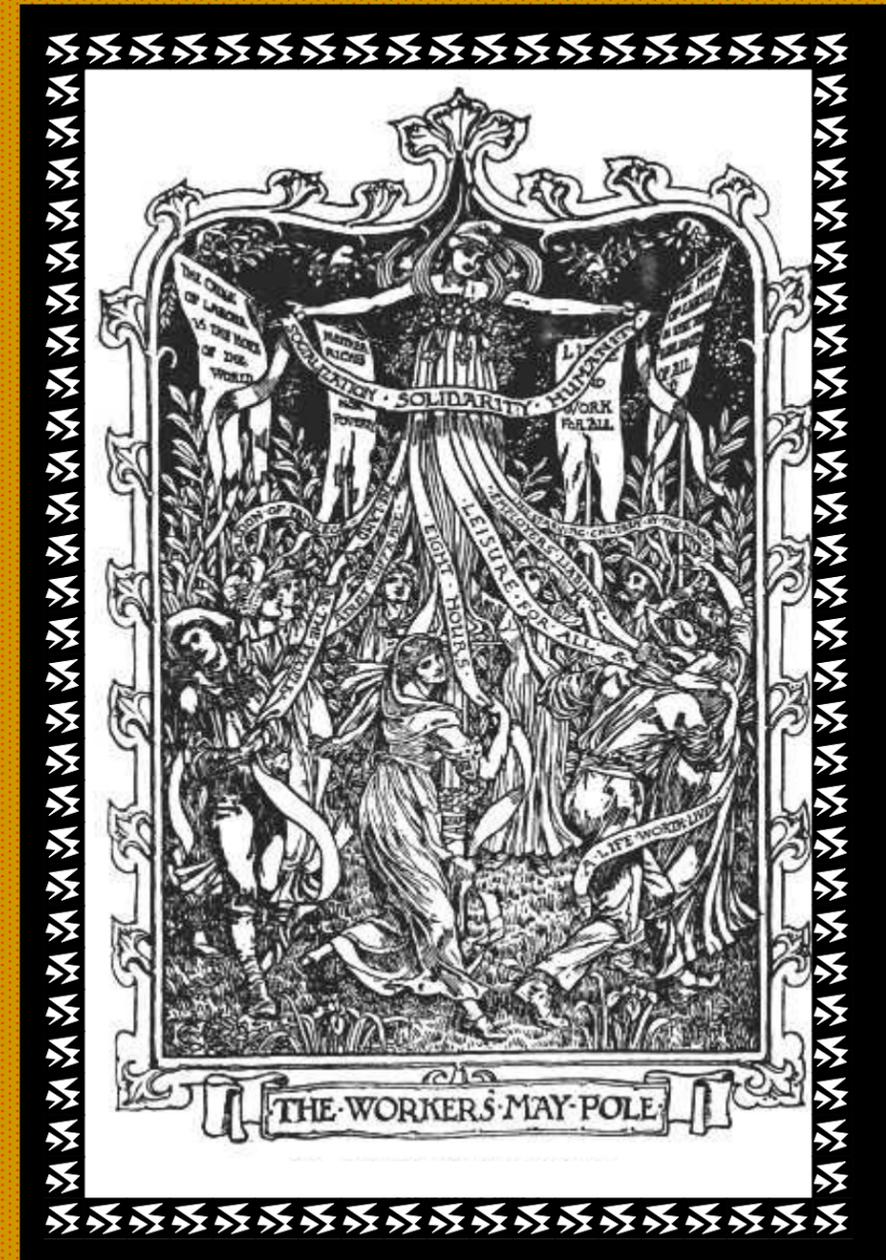
Our ruling system of education and media have stolen this militant heritage from us for more than a century. It is strong however, remembered and practiced in almost every corner of the globe. Immigrant workers from Latin America know International Workers Day well. Over a million marchers traditionally fill the May Day streets of Mexico City. Almost all work shuts down, even newspapers. A Diego Rivera mural, justly placed in Mexico's Palace of Justice depicts the Haymarket scene and the martyr's portraits.

No people have had greater impact on the labor movement than the workers in the streets and the martyrs of the Haymarket Affair. We still fight for a living wage, shorter hours and against corporations which seek cheap labor by exploiting immigrants and pitting workers of different nations against one another. The Haymarket struggle was, and ours still is, for democracy in the workplace, for freedom of speech and assembly and for social justice. It is for us to carry the spirit of the May Day martyrs into our struggles today. Yes, we can do it! ¡si se puede!

By Fred Hirsch 5/1/2001
V.P. Plumbers & Fitters 393



MAY DAY



BORN IN THE U.S.A!

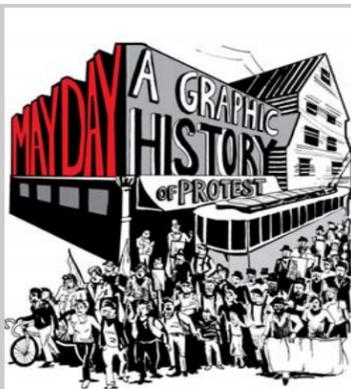
MAY DAY, BORN IN THE USA

Generations of U.S. workers have been kept in the dark about May Day. We've been told it was a Russian holiday or a communist holiday. Simply observing it was considered "un-American." In the Cold War '50s it was renamed "Loyalty Day," "Law Day," even Children's Health Day. Friday (4/27/01) the FBI referred to May Day 2001 as a "Chinese Holiday," warning the public of a "Labor Day Strike" by Chinese internet hackers.

In fact, May Day was born in the USA in the movement for the eight-hour day. It was brought to life by mostly immigrant workers, who suffering intolerable hours, took their demands to the streets of Chicago and were met by deadly police state repression.

Right after the Civil War, in 1866, the National Labor Union made the first national demand for an eight-hour day. It was immediately picked up in Geneva by Karl Marx's International Workingmen's Association as a demand of the "Workers of the World." With workdays of 10, 12, 14 and 16 hours, the eight-hour day was seen as basic to all progress in working class organizing.

It was eighteen years before the shorter day demand took organizational hold. In 1884 the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor, forerunner of the AFL, targeted May 1, 1886 as the start of the eight-hour day. In the ensuing two years workers swelled the ranks of the Federation. which reorganized itself to become the AFL with its preamble: "A struggle is going on in the nations of the world between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between capital and labor which must grow in intensity from year to year and work disastrous results to the toiling millions of all nations if not combined for mutual protection and benefit." And a song rang out across the country:



*We mean to make things over
We're tired of toil for naught
But bare enough to live on; never
An hour for thought
We want to feel the sunshine: we
Want to smell the flowers
We're sure that God has willed it
And we mean to have eight-hours
We're summoning our forces from
Shipyard, shop and mill
8-hours for work, 8-hours for rest,*

Nationwide, about half a million workers came out marching and striking on May 1, 1886. With over 80,000 in Chicago, they won the eight-hour day for 45,000 packinghouse, construction and clerical workers and reduced hours for 90,000 others. The Chicago Tribune threatened, "A communist carcass for every lamppost."

On May 3 police attacked an eight-hour strike at McCormick Reaper Company killing six workers. The next day 4000 met in protest at Haymarket Square. About ten p.m., with the crowd down to two hundred workers, the police, 170 strong, marched on them. A bomb was thrown, killing one cop and fatally wounding others. The cops shot into the crowd, killing six workers and wounding an uncounted number.

A police reign of terror was unleashed against known trade unionists, radicals and "foreigners" (the majority of workers were immigrants). Homes were broken into, meetings invaded and presses smashed. The Illinois Attorney General said: "Make the raids first and look up the law afterwards." One courageous

editor wrote: "Corrupt judges and police who are slaves of monopoly are now dragging citizens to prison by the wholesale." The Albany Law Journal called for, "a check upon immigration, a power of deportation and better equipment for the police" to prevent "immunity of property" from being "at the mercy of a few long-haired, wild eyed, bad smelling... reckless foreign wretches." Those picked up by the police suffered beatings, torture and some were bribed to build evidence for an indictment.

A militant preacher and seven members of the Central Labor Union were charged with conspiracy and murder. The jury was openly and unashamedly stacked and headlines screamed for hanging. A judge, later governor, John P. Altgeld said, "The evidence was pure fabrication (by)...terrorized innocent men (facing) torture if they refused to swear to anything desired. "The ideas and writings of the defendants were on trial. None were shown to be connected to the bomb or any violence and only two were present at the Haymarket, yet seven were condemned to the gallows. The prosecutor's summation said it all: "These men have been selected and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousands who follow them gentlemen of the jury; convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and you save our institutions and our society."

Lucy Gonzalez Parsons, wife of defendant Albert Parsons, campaigned feverishly for the defense. In international solidarity, millions worldwide demonstrated, calling out for justice and mercy. Sam Gompers founder of the AFL said, "Labor must do its best to maintain justice for the radicals or find itself denied the rights of free men. "After Gompers' final appeal the governor commuted two sentences to life imprisonment, one man was killed in prison and four were to be executed on November 11, 1887.

Lucy Gonzalez Parsons, part Native American and part African American, brought her two young children to see their father before he was hanged. His ideas being his crime, Parsons was to die standing for, as he stated it, "the right of toilers to the free and equal use of the tools of production and the right of the producers to their product. That is socialism. "Lucy and the children's visit was denied. They were stripped of their clothing and thrown naked into a jail cell until the gallows trap was sprung.

Before the men were murdered by the state, the words of August Spies, one of the four, rang out from the gallows to make a permanent echo for all time: "You may strangle this voice but there will be a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today. "So it has been and so it will ever be.

Not a single major paper spoke out against the trial or verdict. Burial sites were refused. The city denied funeral marchers the right to have flags, speeches or music, yet half a million paid tribute as thousands of workers marched to honor the Martyrs of Chicago - more than half the residents of the city of Chicago!

The repression, fear and immigrant hysteria that followed the Haymarket Affair was said to have set back the movement for the eight-hour day. Actually, the bomb, likely thrown by a police provocateur, the repression, the trial and the hanging set off a chain of worldwide events. It is seen as the birth of the modern labor movement.

In 1888, the AFL commemorated Haymarket by setting May 1, 1890 as the day for actions to win the eight-hour day. Gompers had the AFL send a delegate to the International Workingmen's Congress in Paris to request worldwide solidarity and simultaneous May Day actions for the eight-hour day. The Congress gave vigorous approval, adding better working conditions and peace between workers of all nations to the demand.

On May Day (also called International Workers' Day) 1890, marches and strikes took place across the USA and Europe. Chicago saw over 30,000 marchers from more than 100 unions, led by the Carpenters Union and the Socialist Labor Party. Two of the Carpenters signs were "We Live by Labor Not By War" and "Abolish Wage Slavery. "The largest demonstration was in London where 250,000 workers took part, organized by Evelyn Aveling Marx, daughter of Karl.