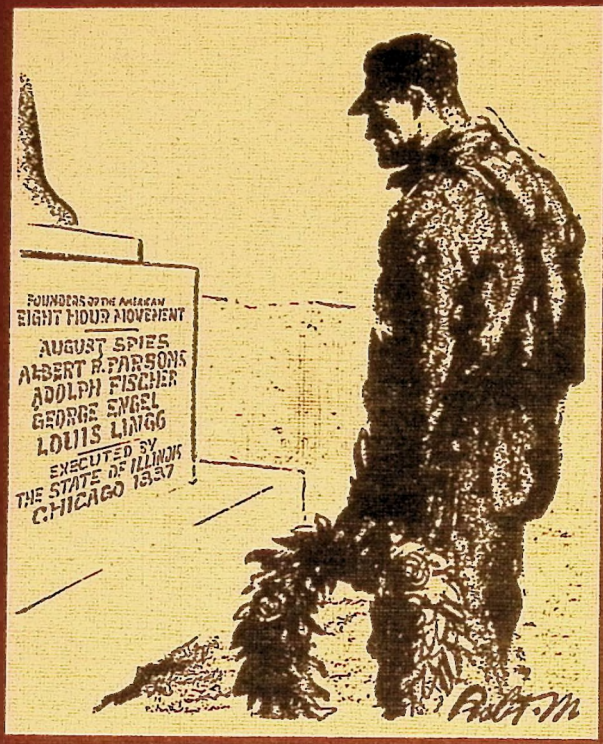
SVETLANA ASKOLDOVA

COMMEMORATING THE CENTENARY OF THE CHICAGO EVENTS

1886—MAY 1—1986



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The Great Labor Pap

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SVETLANA ASKOLDOVA

COMMEMORATING THE CENTENARY OF THE CHICAGO EVENTS 1886-1986

Novosti Press Agency Publishing House
Moscow 1986

Светлана Михайловна Аскольдова

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Contents

Foreword

This is a brief account of events that took place in Chicago 100 years ago, and of the underlying causes of those events. The story centers on the long and hard struggle of the American working class for an eight-hour working day—the main social demand of the workingmen of those days.

Bourgeois historians hardly ever recall this date, and in the rare instances where they do, they present the May events in Chicago's Haymarket Square as a local episode that had long lost its significance.

But that is not so. For almost 100 years working people all over the world have been commemorating those events. Every May 1 they have demonstrated their class solidarity as a tribute to the memory of the Chicago workers.

In fact, May Day marks three anniversaries. The first dates back to 1886 when workers in the United States were campaigning for an eight-hour working day and the campaign came to a head when workers were shot in Chicago. Another anniversary goes back to 1889 when the First Congress of the Second International decided to mark every May 1 as a day

of international workers' solidarity. And the third anniversary is traced back to 1890 when, in accordance with that decision, the first May Day celebrations were held in several countries.

Militant labor traditions have always contributed significantly to the workers' struggle for their economic, social and political rights, and they certainly play a great role now.

The centenary of the events that started the May Day tradition has aroused keen interest among millions of workingmen in the origins of this important form of the international working-class struggle. But their interest is not only historical. There are contemporary causes too. One is that in many capitalist countries, including the highly developed capitalist countries, workers' economic, social and political rights remain under attack from big business.

It goes without saying that the world has changed very much over these 100 years. The correlation of social and political forces is different now, and the class struggle is waged from different positions. Yet, much of historical experience is highly relevant today.

In what way? And what are the problems that now face the working class in the developed capitalist countries?

In the fifties, sixties and seventies workers and other sections of the working population won certain gains in their struggle to improve their material wellbeing. In most industrialized capitalist countries wages in real terms increased. Social security schemes were established or expanded to embrace old-age pensions and insurance against unemployment, sickness, disability and other adversities. The

working population consolidated its political positions and political parties representing its interests began to wield a greater influence.

The motive force of those positive changes was the struggle of hired workers for a decent life. There were other contributing factors. Despite recurring crises, most industrialized capitalist countries registered economic growth in those years. This helped create reserves and gave the ruling classes greater room for social and economic manoeuvre. From the late sixties detente began to bear fruit. It facilitated a shift to the left in the developed capitalist countries and strengthened the positions of the working class. What also contributed to working-class victories in those years was the situation on the labor market: with manpower in short supply hired workers had greater possibilities of bringing pressure to bear on the employers. The historic socio-economic achievements of real socialism were an inspiration in their everyday struggle for the satisfaction of their vital needs.

In the latter half of the seventies, however, there appeared the first disturbing signs that the bourgeoisie was no longer on the defensive in the mounting class battles. Its policy was increasingly marked by a drive for social revenge, in particular, for the defeats it had suffered in the preceding decade.

In the seventies, in anticipation of new battles ahead, big business managed to build up its strength. It became still more internationalized and consequently was in a better position to carry out manoeuvres. In several industrialized countries (including the United States, Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany) the political positions of big business were strengthened when political parties

promoting the interests of the more reactionary groups of the bourgeoisie came to power. And as international tension started growing again, big business found it easier to put pressure on the poorer sections of the population on the pretext of protecting national security.

Then there was large-scale unemployment, and the capitalist class used it to clamp down on the workers' social and economic gains. Labor "gluts" have always adversely affected hired labor and benefited capital.

Wages in real terms have been among the first victims of the capitalist policy of social revenge. Since the beginning of the eighties wages have been falling in the United States, Britain and most other developed capitalist countries. Working-class families have seen their real incomes decrease because fewer of their members have been able to work and because of soaring inflation.

Living standards have deteriorated particularly among the unemployed sections of the population and among groups that have to live on welfare. As unemployment turns from a short-term misfortune to a lengthy or permanent affliction, jobless people become increasingly dependent on social support. Consequently, cuts in unemployment benefits and other social aid hurt them much more than before. Elderly people and the incapacitated are still more hard hit.

The economic and social conditions that emerged in the second half of the seventies and persisted into the eighties have substantially altered both the general social and psychological climate and the consciousness of various social groups. The image that had been built up over the years of the "welfare

state", allegedly capable of ensuring a high and ever growing standard of living for all citizens, collapsed. And the question of what kind of changes the social organism needed and how they should be carried out became more acute than ever.

Furthermore, the worsening of the economic situation, which has made competition tougher and intensified the fight for a share of the national "pie", has laid bare class antagonisms that had previously been hidden. It has given the lie to the "social partnership" ideas so widely publicized in the preceding decades.

The crisis of employment has eroded the ideas of the previous years about the relative stability of the social positions of individuals and groups. It has intensified feelings of uncertainty, feelings that have become ingrained in the mentality of vast sections of the working population, first and foremost of the working class, throughout the zone of developed capitalism.

The demands for improving the "quality of life" that dominated the previous decades have given way to traditional demands having to do with the basic conditions for the sale of labor power, i.e. wages, the length of the working day, working conditions, etc.

In these circumstances the problem of employment is a particularly grave one affecting the future of large contingents of the working class. The ineffective employment policy pursued by the ruling circles of the bourgeoisie has made it necessary to draft and implement alternative program that can resolve the problem in the interests of the vast majority of the working population.

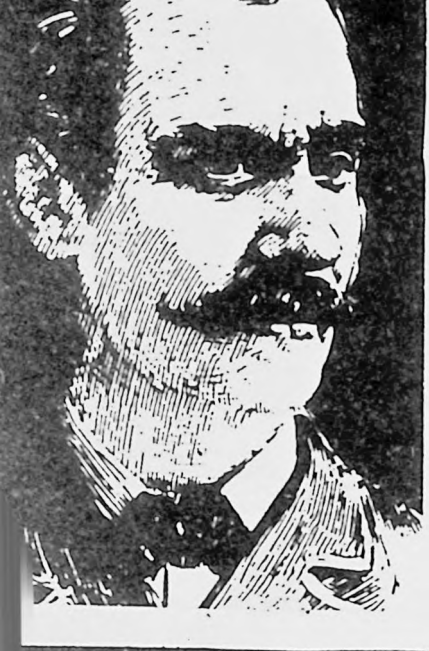
In this situation the top-priority task facing the working class is that of repulsing the capitalist

assault on its living standards and its social and political rights. All objective prerequisites for a successful fight-back are present. The history of the working-class struggle over the one hundred years that have passed since the events described in this book is convincing proof of this.

Professor Alexander GALKIN
Doctor of Science (History)

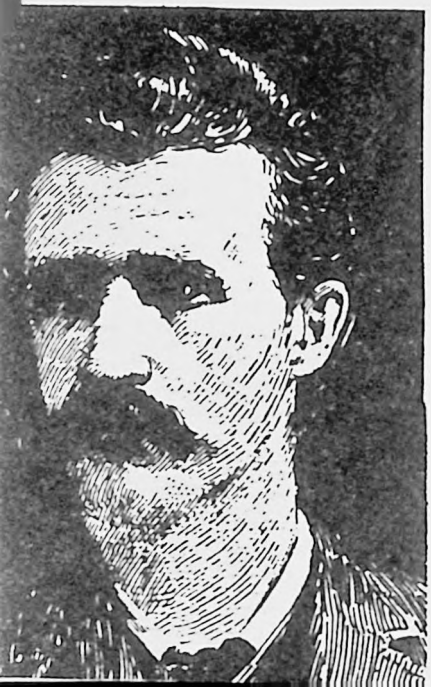
"The American people have a revolutionary tradition which has been adopted by the best representatives of the American proletariat."

V. I. LENIN



Albert Parsons:

"My enemies in the southern states consisted of those who oppressed the black slave. My enemies in the north are among those who would perpetuate the slavery of the wage workers."

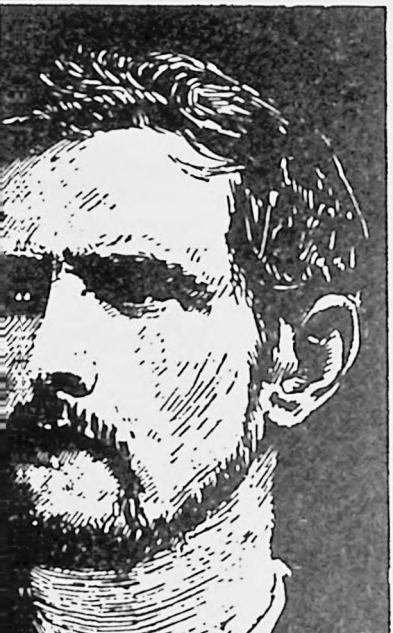


August Spies:

"In addressing this court I speak as the representative of one class to the representatives of another."

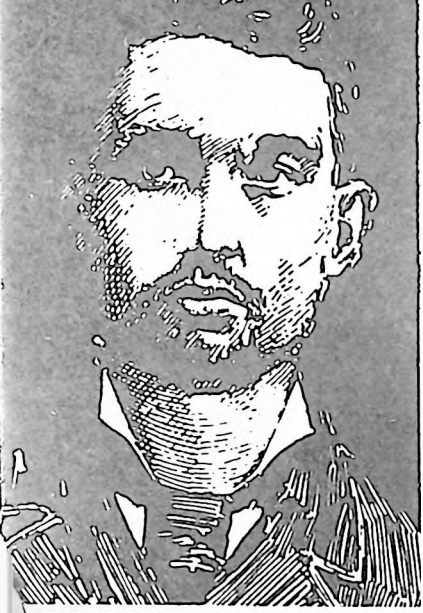
George Engel:

"Therefore all workingmen should unite and prepare for the last war, whose outcome will be the end forever of all wars, and will bring peace and happiness to all mankind."



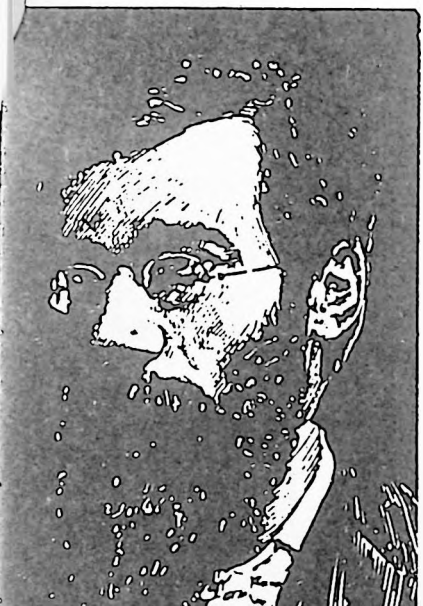
Adolph Fischer:

"I know that it is impossible to convince professional liars, such as hired editors of the capitalistic press, who are paid for crushing the truth."



Louis Lingg:

"The United States of America are nowadays simply and purely the land of capitalistic tyranny and the home of the most brutal police despotism."



Michael Schwab:

"Millions of workmen are starving and leading the lives of vagabonds. Even the most ignorant wage slave commences to think. The common misery makes it clear to them that they must combine and they do it."

Samuel Fielden:

"I spoke on the general question of the wrongs of labor."

Oscar Neebe:

"I have done my utmost to organize the Central Labor Union and increase its membership and today it is the best labor organization in Chicago, with over 10,000 members. That is all I have to say about my life as a workman."

On May 1, 1886, a general strike began in the largest industrial centers of the United States. It was over an eight-hour working day and better working conditions.

The strike was particularly widespread in Chicago. To break it, the authorities resorted to provocation. On May 4, a bomb was exploded during a rally in *Haymarket Square*. That was the signal for Chicago police and local garrison troops deployed nearby to open rifle fire on the strikers.

Mass reprisals against workers, especially their leaders, were unleashed not only in Chicago which was the center of the movement, but all over the country. Hundreds of workers were arrested and eight men who had led the Chicago protest were put on trial. No money was spared on anti-labor propaganda and spates of lies were poured on the ordinary people in the United States from the press for the purpose of inciting an anti-labor campaign and arousing mass hostility to the working class and its organizations.

Against that background, the Chicago "di-

pensers of justice" staged a trial, flouting the law and all the democratic traditions that had been established years back during the struggle of the American people for independence. The court ruling would have been a disgrace to any democratic country. Although the charges of involvement in the bomb blast were not proved, seven defendants—*Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Michael Schwab, Adolph Fischer, George Engel* and *Louis Lingg*—were sentenced to death; an eighth man, *Oscar Neebe*, was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Meanwhile, it had been incontrovertibly proved that only two of the condemned men had been at the rally when the explosion took place.

That disgraceful act had the sole purpose of suppressing labor unrest and intimidating those workers who had not yet roused to conscious struggle. One of the "powers that be", a rich Chicago businessman, cynically confessed: "No, I don't consider those people to have been found guilty of any offense, but they must be hanged. I'm not afraid of anarchy; oh, no; it's the utopian scheme of a few, a very few, philosophizing cranks, who are amiable withal, but I do consider that the labor movement should be crushed!"[1]

Despite numerous protests from labor organizations in the United States and Europe and from progressive Americans who demanded that the unfair sentences be quashed, little was done: only Fielden and Schwab had their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment. Lingg died in jail.

[1] Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair. A Study in the American Social-Revolutionary and Labor Movements*, New York, 1936, p. 376.

Parsons, Spies, Engel and Fischer were hanged. *The executions took place on November 11, 1887.*

A distinguished American author and advocate of humanitarian ideals, William Dean Howells (1837-1920), wrote in an article in the *New York Tribune:* "... this free Republic has killed five men for their opinions."[1] He said the killings had done the greatest harm to the nation's prestige.

The Chicago frame-up came to be called the *"Haymarket affair"*, and the convicted men went down in history as the *"Chicago* (or *Haymarket*) *martyrs"*.

The May 1886 events in the United States had repercussions throughout the world.

In July 1889 the First Congress of the Second International adopted the following historic decision:

"A great international demonstration must be organized to take place at a certain time and in such a manner that simultaneously the workers in every country and every town should demand of the public authorities the limitation of the working day to eight hours and the operation of the other decisions of the Paris International Congress."

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[1] Quoted in *College English*, Vol. 19, April 1958, p. 283.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The mass protest campaign by U.S. industrial workers in the 1880s was not an aberration of history or a spontaneous explosion touched off by irresponsible actions of some labor leaders.

The Chicago events were significant because they showed that the American workers' struggle for a better life, for an eight-hour working day and the right to create their own organizations had become truly mass-scale and that the U.S. workers had attained a certain maturity as a class. The labor movement had been joined by skilled and unskilled workers, immigrants and native-born Americans alike. About one million were united in labor organizations. The movement was the climax, as it were, of long and complicated processes of working-class formation. It ushered in a new stage of the workers' struggle against the bourgeoisie and marked the beginning of the labor movement in the United States.

The movement of the American working class for an eight-hour working day emerged from the depths of the Revolution and the Civil War of

1862-1865. It was a logical outcome of the social and economic changes that had led to those two momentous events. In his *Capital* Marx wrote: "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic... But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California."[1]

The Civil War released great forces for capitalist development in the United States. With the growth of capitalist industry, of the numerical strength and concentration of the working class and with increasing capitalist exploitation, there were more and more protests by industrial workers, as was shown by the expanding national working-class movement and the founding of big labor organizations—the *Order of the Knights of Labor* and the *Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada*, the forerunner of the *American Federation of Labor (AFL)* (1886).

After many years of ferment, the American labor movement, although it lagged behind the European movement, sprang up, in Frederick Engels' words, "so suddenly and forcefully".[2]

There were historical reasons why it was "lagging behind". Although the same basic laws and

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[1] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 284.

[2] Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 375.

trends governed the formation of capitalism in the Old and the New World, capitalist development in America had its peculiarities which could not but affect the process of the ripening of class consciousness and cohesion of the American workers.

The main reason was that America was a country *"which has never known feudalism and has grown up on a bourgeois basis from the beginning."*[1] What facilitated the development of American capitalism was the vast accumulation of capital, including a heavy influx of capital from Europe; the concentration of capital inside the country mostly through the exploitation of the nation's own resources; a most energetic population; the inflow of labor force from Europe, Asia and Central America; and the expertise of immigrant workers from Western Europe and the technical achievements of the Old World.

The wide expanses of "free" land in the American West favored the development of capitalism "horizontally". From the point of view of the social structure and dynamics of American society, such development meant a high degree of social mobility. After the Civil War a certain part of American workers took advantage of the opportunities offered by the homestead law: they bought tracts of land and became farmers, entrepreneurs or traders, and thus abandoned their status of hired workers. Although the purchase of land, farming and the move to the West involved many hardships and privations as well as considerable expenditure, the very possibility of owning property seriously hindered the formation

[1] Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 426.

of a permanent hereditary working class. All these factors had an impact on the consciousness of workers, affected their social and psychological outlook, and fostered in them individualistic and proprietary sentiments.

The situation changed in the late 1880s when there was less and less "free" land and "the great safety-valve against the formation of a permanent proletarian class has practically ceased to act".[1] As a result, a class of hired workers emerged in America. *In the last 30 years of the 19th century their number rose from 3,800,000 to 9,400,000.* A tumultuous process of class polarization of American society got under way.

A vivid description of the social structure in America was given by Edward Aveling and his wife Eleanor, Marx's daughter, after they visited the United States in 1886: "There are in America far more trenchant distinctions between the capitalist and laboring class than in the older lands ... It stands out clearly and uncompromisingly. At the one end of the scale is the millionaire, openly and remorselessly crushing out all rivals... At the other end is the helpless, starving proletarian ... The real division of society into two classes, the laborer and capitalist... in America stares one in the face ... The capitalist system came here as a ready-made article, and with all the force of its inherent, uncompromising brutality, it thrusts on the notice of everyone the fact that in society today there are only two classes, and that these are enemies."[2]

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[1] *Marx and Engels on the United States*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979, p. 282.

[2] Edward and Eleanor Marx-Aveling, *The Working-Class Movement in America*, London, 1888, pp. 13-15.

Subsequently the United States had the world's highest level of development of the productive forces, while the proportion of the working class in American society became one of the biggest among the industrialized capitalist countries.

Another peculiarity of the formation of the American working class was that the process was accompanied by a continual influx of immigrant workers from Europe and Asia. Ethnically, the working class in America was extremely mixed, with language and other barriers existing between its various contingents. Whereas for several decades the majority of native-born Americans had been tempted by the opportunity of giving up their status of hired hands and buying land so as to become property owners in the prime of their lives, for the immigrants, most of whom lacked money and desired immediate employment and who often did not speak the language of the country, buying land was a slim hope. Furthermore, they were not yet citizens of the United States and they also suffered from psychological strain for they had to adapt to a new and strange environment. Therefore, as Engels remarked, the only possibility open to an immigrant worker was "the position of a proletarian for life".[1] This established the "aristocratic" status of American-born workers and led them (and a small group of privileged immigrants from among highly skilled workers) to feel superior to others and to unite in narrow shop unions. Most immigrants and also black Americans were outside these unions.

Those were the historical factors that slowed

[1] *Marx and Engels on the United States*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979, p. 281.

down the process of class consolidation of the working class and sapped some of its collective strength. They also resulted in a certain backwardness of mass consciousness and hampered the emergence of a milieu in which a scientific working-class ideology could take root.

On the other hand, there were not enough people in the United States capable of drawing general theoretical conclusions, setting out a system of corresponding views, principles and ideals, and introducing this progressive ideology in the labor movement. There were reasons for that, too. One was that owing to the almost 40-year lag of American capitalism behind European capitalism, there were no traditions of sustained class struggle in America. Another reason was a certain inertia of American thinking, which was dominated by pragmatism, and as Engels put it, by "a frenziedly enterprising spirit".

What also hampered the spread of the ideas of scientific socialism in the United States was that the immigration wave in the last third of the 19th century brought along supporters of a number of pseudo-proletarian doctrines which had been refuted by Marxists in Europe (including anarchists led by Johann Most, and followers of Ferdinand Lassale who claimed the role of "theoreticians" though they failed to understand the conditions and peculiarities of the American labor movement).

Those were some of the reasons why the trade union leadership came to be dominated subsequently by people who expressed the interests of the working-class "elite" and who never went beyond the immediate economic problems of those narrow groups.

It is also not surprising that the American bourgeoisie, in using all the levers of economic and political power of which it was fully in control, was able to build up strong bastions for protecting its privileges and to create a broad system of ways and means of bringing its ideological influence to bear on all sections of American society, including the working class.

THE POSITION OF WORKERS

As it developed along the paths of monopoly capitalism, the US economy was from time to time shaken by crises of overproduction. One such crisis broke out in 1882. It lasted several years and led to the collapse of big banks (as its competitors were ruined, the Morgans amassed fortunes and came to lead the financial world) and railway companies, and to the fall of production in the basic industries and in construction. A great many factories, almost half of all, had either to stop production or go out of business altogether.

The crisis had the worst effect on the working population. Here is a contemporary record of those years: "To-day, throughout our whole country... are found armies of homeless wanderers that can be numbered only by hundreds of thousands, if not by millions, vainly seeking work... And among those who are now doing the work of the country, assured and constant employment is the exception".[1] According to the

[1] *The North American Review*, Vol. CXXXVIII, p. 505.

Chicago-based progressive labor newspaper *Alarm, the number of unemployed, including farmhands, reached two to three million.*

These "tramps", as they were called in the capitalist press, but in reality starving unemployed, had to move about the country in search of jobs. But at railway stations they could only read ads saying there were no jobs to be had and telling the "tramps" to move on. In his first message to Congress on December 8, 1885, President Cleveland had to admit that unemployment had become a national problem in the United States. He said: "No interest appeals to us so strongly for a safe and stable currency as the vast army of the unemployed."[1]

The deterioration of the economic conditions of the American working class during the crisis was caused not only by unemployment. There were other causes—wage cuts, bad working conditions, high rents, poor housing, unstable employment, and the unbearably long working day.

In 1883 the breadwinner of a working-class family in Massachusetts earned $559 a year on the average, which was below the subsistence level of $755. The gap between wages and the cost of living was illustrated by the plight of coal miners in Pennsylvania, the second largest industrial state in America. In the early 1880s there were about 140,000 miners in Pennsylvania, mostly employed at anthracite collieries in the east of the state. There, according to Pennsylvania's bureau of industrial statistics, the highest wages ranged from $2 to $2.7 per day.

[1] *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents. 1789-1897*, ed. James D. Richardson, Vol. VIII, (1881-1889), Washington, 1898, p. 346.

The plight of the vast majority of workers was made worse by the fact that their wages were far below the wages of the "labor aristocracy".

Industrial growth, the inflow of immigrants and overcrowding in the cities aggravated the housing conditions of the American workers as well. This was one of the chief factors in the overall deterioration of their living standards. Workers in New York, Chicago, Pittsburg and other industrial cities had to pay exorbitant rents for dark and damp lodgings. Often a whole family had to live in one small room. Only members of the "labor aristocracy" could afford good housing.

Often a worker had to rent a room in a house that belonged to his employer with the result that, besides paying heavy rent, he became still more dependent on the latter. In coal-mining areas workers used to live in congested company-owned barracks: "The employees are lodged in dreary, monotonous rows of company houses, divided by thin partitions into from two to four tenements of from two to four small rooms. These houses are of wood, built in a cheap and flimsy manner, usually unfinished..."[1]

Not surprisingly, the average life span of a worker in the 1880s was 30.

The miserable, disastrous conditions of certain groups of laborers were even noted in Congress. Representative O'Neill of Missouri pointed to the high mortality rate in New York City where 100,000 people were living "by pauperism and beggary". Child mortality rate was especially high. Technical progress and mechanization made many industrial processes simpler, and women's and

[1] *The North American Review*, Vol. XLIII, p. 171.

child labor began to be used on a much larger scale. The low wages of a married man forced his wife and children to work and in the 1880s the latter's earnings averaged almost 33 per cent of the family income. As Marx wrote, "Previously, the workman sold his own labor-power, which he disposed of nominally as a free agent. Now he sells wife and child."[1]

Women laborers worked long hours, often 10 or even 12 hours a day, for a pittance, and they had to work in unsanitary conditions. In their book about the US working class, Edward and Eleanor Aveling said that everyone who visited factories was struck by the haggard look of woman workers. For equal work with men they would receive only half their wages.

Children from working-class families worked in equally appalling conditions.

Samuel Gompers, who in 1881 represented the cigar makers' union at the First Convention of the *Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions*, described the work of children in the cigar industry as follows: "I saw little children, six and seven and eight years of age, seated in the middle of a room on the floor, in all the dirt and dust, stripping tobacco. Little pale-faced children, with a look of care upon their faces, toiling with their tiny hands from dawn till dark... I asked them how long they worked, but they did not, could not understand... Often they would be overcome with weariness and want of sleep, and fall over upon the tobacco heap".[2]

[1] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 373.

[2] Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1888, Convention 1881, 1905, p. 18.

There was another exceptionally important factor that sharply aggravated the position of workers. This was the intensification of labor.

The high rate of economic growth led to increasing mechanization of production processes, and this opened up more opportunities to employ lower-paid unskilled workers, many of whom were immigrants.

Thus, technical progress, far from improving the condition of workers, only made their work even more strenuous. So much so that, with the working day lasting from 10 to 12 hours, the strain became physically unbearable. Not infrequently workers had to work for 15 hours a day and in some industries, on Sundays and holidays.

Therefore, the reduction of working time became a number one problem for the American workers.

Formally, all men in the United States were eligible to vote from the age of 21. But in fact the workers' participation in voting was reduced to a minimum owing to numerous limitations under the constitutions of individual states (women were totally disfranchised[1]). The educational qualification and poll tax required in the southern states left almost all blacks voteless. Then there was the residence qualification which existed in all states and applied not only to immigrants but mostly to migrant workers who represented the majority of the American working class in those days.

The American bourgeoisie also used other methods *to bar workers from politics* and bring them under its political influence. In Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maine and New Hampshire large companies would bring pressure to bear on their employees in order to make them vote for candidates that suited them. In the city of Manchester, workers' ballots used to be opened

[1] Women in the U.S. received the right to vote only in 1920—*ed.*

and checked, and men who had voted against th wishes of the employers were fired.

But it was not only the right to vote that wa infringed for the majority of American worker According to a contemporary observer, in th United States "... there is not one [law] guaran teeing to man the first and greatest of all in alienable rights, the right of the laborer to all th fruits of his toil, and protecting that right from th encroachments and robberies of tyrannous capital To-day, labor has no rights that capital is boun to respect."[1]

Although advanced industrially, the United States remained a backward and arch-conservativ country as regards labor legislation. In the 1880 there was hardly any federal legislation on labor and in particular states it had barely got off the ground. One of the reasons for this was the law-making process itself. The issuance of laws, includ ing electoral laws, was within the competence of individual states. But even if a bill favorable to workers was passed, the judicial authorities could veto it.

Trade unions were "disfranchised" as well. In the main industrial states the setting up of labor organizations was prohibited. In subservience to the Waverly Coal Company, the judicial autho rities of Pennsylvania arrested and fined David R Jones, Chairman of the United Mine Workers of America, for his trade union activities. In 1881 Indiana prohibited the organizing of strikes, an offence punishable by fines of up to $100 and imprisonment of up to six months. Court injunc tions of the 1870s banning strikes, pickets and

[1] *The North American Review*, Vol. ZXXXVIII, p. 509.

workers' assemblies were extended in the following decade to all forms of labor protest. At the courts' insistence, workers who violated the injunctions were blacklisted. A blacklist drawn up by Missouri Pacific included the names of 470 workers. Other companies had blacklists just as long.

The growth of the number of workers and their natural desire to organize and struggle for their rights caused panic among the bourgeoisie which began to search for new methods of suppressing the labor movement.

To that end *employers* in many cities *began to organize* back in the 1870s. In 1872 four hundred capitalists in New York contributed $1,000 each to a fund to combat the movement for a shorter working day. In the last third of the 19th century more than a dozen societies of this kind came into existence.

In 1877 factory owners in Chicago founded a Citizens' Association to wage an armed struggle against workers' organizations. In 1885, with the participation of members of both bourgeois parties—the Republican and the Democratic Parties—the Citizens' Association set up a Committee of Public Safety whose aim, according to the *Alarm* newspaper, was "... to make more secure the 'rights of property', and perpetuate the system which monopolizes into the hands of a few the means of life and the resources of existence."

In the spring of 1886 eighteen railway tycoons in Chicago formed a General Managers' Association. They decided not to reduce the working day on their railroads, and called on employers in all other industries to follow suit. They blacklisted strikers and all organized workers and thereby deprived them of any opportunity of finding em-

ployment in the whole Chicago area. Furthermore, they formally asked Congress to take tougher actions against the strikers.

Employers in the north of New England would convene every year to discuss their blacklist system. Workers had to fight hard against it for years.

In the 1880s many employers in New York used another method which was dubbed the "iron oath" by the workers. Every job seeker was required to take an "oath" in writing that he had never joined a labor organization and never would.

The interests of the American bourgeoisie were steadfastly protected by the government bodies, the judiciary and the police. Entrepreneurs also employed the services of Pinkerton's secret agents to subvert labor organizations, conduct surveillance, and encourage strikebreakers.

But despite all the efforts of the ruling class to suppress the labor movement, the US working class became an ever more impressive force, too impressive, in fact, to be ignored.

The first successes in the fight for labor legislation[1] *were scored by the organized working class in the early 1880s.* As is clear from a report of a government commissioner for labor, that legislation was considerably expanded in 1882 and 1883. Bills primarily concerned with labor protection were passed.

An important victory for the working class was the official recognition of its right to organize. Bills to this effect were passed in many industrial states of the country in the years 1882-1885.

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[1] The first labor protection bill was passed in Massachusetts in 1877.

That was also the time when labor inspectorates, labor bureaus and bureaus of labor statistics began to be established, following two decades of campaigning by labor organizations. Under their pressure, at the end of 1883, Congress began to discuss a bill submitted by a Pennsylvanian representative on setting up a Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The bill was approved in July 1884. From 1885 annual reports on the condition of workers were published. By the mid-1880s class contradictions had sharpened, and a Senate Committee on Education and Labor was set up.

When the U.S. Congress was considering the bill on the establishment of a bureau of labor statistics, Representative Richard Bland of Missouri proposed that a spokesman for the workers be appointed head of the bureau. Otherwise, he said, the appointment would serve the interests of capital. The Bland amendment was defeated by an overwhelming majority, and representatives of the bourgeoisie held the reins.

Nonetheless, the first labor laws, enacted as a result of the masses, marked a significant victory for the working people.

THE FIRST NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS

As the American working class grew numerically, it concentrated at larger factories where the very conditions of work promoted the growth of workers' unity, class consciousness and class solidarity.

The main qualitative change that took place in the U.S. labor movement in the 1880s was that it had been joined by unskilled and low-skilled workers who had come to play an active role in it, alongside the more skilled workers who had already had some experience of labor struggle. As a result, the movement not only expanded but became more powerful socially.

The first large national and international (the latter included Canadian, and sometimes Mexican, workers) trade unions and other labor associations came into being after the Civil War. During the economic crisis of 1882-1885 joint labor union centers appeared in the biggest industrial centers—New York, Chicago, Cincinnati and Detroit.

The Labor Press

As labor organizations grew and became more influential, many more papers and periodicals for workers began to be published. The largest trade unions (those of printers, coal miners, iron and steel workers, cigar makers, carpenters, engine mechanics and stokers) put out papers of their own; of these 17 were monthlies. Other publications included the daily *Laborer*, which came out in Haverhill (Massachusetts), the weekly *Craftsman*, published in Washington, and the weekly *Labor Tribune*, in Pittsburg. The largest labor organization—the Knights of Labor—printed the *Journal of United Labor*. Four hundred other weeklies were considered to be "sympathetic" toward labor organizations. In 1885 they formed a syndicate—the *Labor Press Association*. These papers and periodicals carried reports on the miserable condition of the American workers and their hard work. They helped to draw more members into the trade unions and gave them moral support.

A significant role was played by the militant *John Swinton's Paper*. John Swinton, a famous journalist, published it at his own expense from October 1883 to August 1887. The aim of the paper was to call attention to social issues and guide the workers toward political struggle for their rights. The paper reported on the activities of trade and labor unions and exposed the anti-labor actions of the bourgeoisie. Even though it had no close ties with the trade unions, it helped in many ways to organize a militant labor movement in the United States and rouse the working class to independent political action.

Socialist propaganda among American workers was conducted by the newspapers put out by socialist and anarchic-syndicalist groups; they included *New York Volks-Zeitung*, *Der Sozialist*, the *Alarm*, and *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Of these papers the English-language weekly *Alarm*, led by Albert Parsons, and the German-language daily *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, led by August Spies, were particularly active in propaganda work. Much popularity among workers was also enjoyed by the Sunday papers *Der Vorbote* and *Fackel*. Albert Parsons said that the aim of his paper was to help people get rid of the yoke of injustice and "to give every human being who wears the chains of monopoly an opportunity to clank those chains in the columns of the *Alarm*."[1] The *Alarm* and other Chicago papers carried factual on-the-spot reports by their correspondents. That made their reporting forceful and convincing.

The *Alarm* gave detailed coverage of rallies, assemblies, as well as of strikes and other protest actions of the workers, and supported their demands. It mostly reported on the conditions and struggles of the working class in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa and Nebraska, which are not far from Chicago, and it also printed reports from other parts of the country. It carried letters about the plight of workers in a small town in Washington and the hard life of cigar makers in North Carolina.

Many workers' organizations gave material assistance to the paper.

It is true that organized workers who openly

[1] *The Chicago Martyrs*, London, 1888, p. 56.

countered the arbitrary policies of the General Managers' Association with joint action and conscious class protest still represented an insignificant minority of the American working class. On the whole, the working class bore the imprint of all the peculiarities and specific contradictions of American life; it was heterogeneous and beset by serious problems. Nevertheless, this was a real working-class movement, and it should be appraised as such nowadays.

The Knights of Labor

The Order of the Knights of Labor was certainly the leader among the largest organizations of American workers in the 1880s. It was founded in 1868 by a group of garment workers headed by Uriah Stephens. Soon afterwards it was joined by workers in other trades. By 1886 its membership had reached nearly 703,000. Its influence among the working masses was tremendous. *"An injury to one is the concern of all"* was its motto.

The association was truly representative: its full-fledged members included workers of various skill grades (it was the only organization that admitted unskilled workers), trades, and age groups (from 1884 workers were eligible for membership from the age of 16). It also admitted women (who accounted for 8 to 9 per cent of all members in 1886). A basic principle of the Knights of Labor was internationalism. Members of that multinational workers' organization staunchly called for equal rights for black Americans. And those were not mere words. In 1886 blacks accounted for about 10 per cent of all members of the

Knights of Labor. Black members in the South were in a particularly difficult situation. They were harassed both as blacks and as members of a labor organization.

The Knights of Labor often came out in defense of blacks in black-populated areas. *John Swinton's Paper* noted that white and colored mechanics and laborers were working in great harmony and that this was a great stride forward. The Knights of Labor had done this much for the South, the paper said.

That was why Engels described the Knights of Labor as "the *first national organization created by the American working class as a whole*". What rallied them together, he said, was "... the instinctive feeling that the very fact of their clubbing together for their common aspiration makes them a great power in the country..."[1]

In the preamble to their program the Knights of Labor formulated their main task as that of opposing the unjust accumulation of wealth and the might of wealth and of securing to the people all the rights that would enable them to receive a fair share of the values they created.

The program pointed to the need to repeal laws that presupposed legal inequality between labor and capital. It called for remunerating women equally with men, for prohibiting the exploitation of child labor, and for instituting an eight-hour working day.

In short, the biggest labor organization had put forward a truly radical program for its time. The

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[1] *Marx and Engels on the United States*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979, p. 287.

demands it outlined were fair and were dictated by the real interests and needs of the toilers.

But they were never fulfilled and many of the demands later became nothing more than good intentions. The failure was due to many factors, not least to the insufficient class and ideological maturity of the workers who were members of the Knights of Labor, and to their territorial disunity. But mainly it was the failure of *the leaders of the organization*, who, for a number of ideological, social, psychological and political reasons, *failed to arm the rank-and-file with a consistent and realistic program* of how to work toward their declared goals. Gradually the organization lost its militancy and revolutionary spirit, and after Terence Powderly took over as its head in 1879, it became conservative and increasingly departed from the working-class approach in the choice of the ways and means of struggle.

The reformist leadership often met with resistance, especially in Chicago where the movement was headed by the opposition leader, Albert Parsons, a socialist who was highly respected and trusted by the workers for his consistent and uncompromising stand in the struggle for their class interests.

The contradictions inside the Knights of Labor weakened not only this biggest labor organization itself, but the movement as a whole, for other associations and unions of workers too lacked a common understanding of the goals of labor protest and of how to fight for their vital economic and political rights. This was bound to affect the subsequent development of the American labor movement.

Trade unionism became truly widespread in America in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Structurally, the unions were built on a principle which was a far cry from that which guided the Knights of Labor. From the very beginning it was composed mostly of *highly skilled workers*, predominantly shop-stewards—"the cream" of the American working class. They included both American-born workers and immigrants who had arrived back in the mid-1800s (the "old" immigrants), and who brought to the New World the valuable skills they had learned at capitalist enterprises in Northern and Central Europe. Naturally, they immediately secured a firm foothold in the midst of the working class which was just beginning to shape up in America. Their social status was superior to the "new" immigrants who, as a rule, came from Eastern Europe and about whom Samuel Gompers, a long-standing leader of American trade unionism, once said that they were unable to comprehend "American life and purposes."[1]

Understandably enough, even the less-skilled American-born workers had an advantage over the "new" immigrants, since the American mode of life was their own, English was their native tongue, and consequently they stood a much better chance of finding jobs than their "newly-arrived" class brothers. It was also easier for them to master new types of skilled work which was needed more and more as technical progress con-

[1] Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, Vol. II, New York, 1925, p. 151.

tinued. The "paralyzing influence" which a higher standard of living had on American-born workers, its effect of slowing down the process of their awakening to their class tasks, was noted with bitterness and anxiety by internationalist-minded socialists in America.

In 1881 American trade unions united to form the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada. In 1886 they founded the *American Federation of Labor* (*AFL*). At the time shop unions were still fighting for a practical improvement of the condition of their members. The same purpose *guided all the AFL's activities in those years.* The AFL began to lose its militant traditions and slide into reformism about ten years later. The militancy of the newly formed trade unions was seen in their program, which said in clear-cut terms: "A struggle is going on in the nations of the civilized 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."[1]

The daily struggle of the American trade unions attracted ever more workers into their ranks.

This does not mean that there was unity of purpose and action inside the AFL. Unfortunately, from the very outset the AFL showed a certain ambivalence in its activity, which reflected the progressive and conservative trends inherent in the U.S. labor movement. The situ-

[1] *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1888, Convention 1881*, p. 3.

ation was made still worse by a growing conflic between the AFL, in which a militant spirit stil prevailed in those years, and the Knights of Labo leaders, who usually acted in opposition to the aspirations and practical actions of the organization's local assemblies.

Not surprisingly, the Pittsburg Convention o American labor organizations in November 188 witnessed a bitter clash as regards the objectives o the labor movement. Essentially, it was a clash between two principles: the principle of mass organization of workers of all skills and their broad representation in the decision-making bodies, and the principle of shop insularity and the organization of workers according to their trade and skill grade.

The convention was quite representative. Local assemblies of the Knights of Labor had played an active role in its preparation and work. Trade unions were well represented, too. There were delegates from the unions of cigar makers, printers, and iron and steel workers, including their presidents—Lyman Brandt, John Jarrett and Thomas Hennebery. Jarrett was elected chairman of the convention, and Samuel Gompers, the representative of the cigar makers' union, its vice-chairman. Gompers also headed the key committee in charge of drafting the rules of the new organization.

Fundamentally different views concerning the nature and purpose of the organization were expressed at the convention. A proposal for limiting membership to trade unions was strongly opposed, as this would leave out the mass of unskilled workers affiliated with other unions or with the "mixed" assemblies of the Knights of Labor.

The Knights of Labor emphatically called for expanding the Federation. Similar calls were made by R. E. Weber and John Kinnear, who represented the Pittsburg Printers' Assembly and the Boston Longshoremen Assembly. John Kinnear said that the organization should include all who worked. Jeremiah Grandison, a black member of the Pittsburg Assembly of the Knights of Labor, pointed out that many workers in local organizations, first of all blacks, did not have definite trades but that should not prevent them from joining the new association.

Lyman Brandt, an influential trade union leader, also said that the Federation should be broad enough to embrace the whole working class. On the other hand, Gompers, Jarrett and Hennebery made no attempt to conceal their hostile attitude to unskilled workers. They voiced apprehensions that some organizations might give the Federation "a political coloring". Indeed a demand was made at the convention, perhaps not strongly enough, calling on that workers should launch independent political action up to setting up a party of their own. The views of the reformist trade union leaders were accurately summed up two years later by Adolph Strasser who said that what was important for them was not ultimate ends, but the immediate results of everyday work.[1] Gompers particularly insisted that the new organization should be closed to unskilled workers. But he soon realized that he did not have the majority on his side. Being a demagogue, he hastened to explain that he had been misunderstood.

[1] See *U.S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor*, Vol. 1, Washington, 1885, p. 460.

He said it was not at all his intention to bar workers from the organization who had faith in it and belonged to it.

The convention voted to have the organization named the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada. This was a victory for the progressive majority, though it did not stop Gompers and other Federation leaders from doing all they could afterwards to discriminate against the unskilled workers' unions and bar them from membership.

The convention approved a program for the Federation. The introduction to the program contained a class definition of the relationship between "the oppressors and the oppressed".[1] It said, in part: "The history of the wage-workers of all countries is but the history of constant struggle and misery engendered by ignorance and disunion; whereas the history of the non-producers of all ages proves that a minority, thoroughly organized, may work wonders for good or evil... Conforming to the old adage, 'In union there is strength', the formation of a Federation embracing every trade and labor organization in North America, a union founded upon a basis as broad as the land we live in, is our only hope." The main goals of the Federation, the program said, were to encourage and form trade and labor unions, trade and labor assemblies or councils, and national and international trade unions, and to secure legislation favorable to the interests of the "industrial classes", i.e. workers.[2]

1 *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1888, Convention 1881*, p. 3.

2 See *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1888, Convention 1881*, pp. 3, 4.

The program called for the repeal of laws under which labor organizations were considered to be groups of "conspirators" and were persecuted, and for the establishment of a National Bureau of Labor Statistics and protectionist tariffs. It called on "all trades and labor organizations to secure proper representation in all law-making bodies by means of the ballot".[1]

On the whole, the program dealt with the real problems that confronted the American workers. But it proposed no actions to remove the causes that had engendered them, despite the fact that most rank-and-file delegates were quite definite. This was indicated by two resolutions adopted at the convention. One expressed sympathy for the Irish people's struggle for liberation from the British yoke. It expressed sympathy and support for all the oppressed peoples fighting for their freedom and equality. The other highly important resolution was about a bill being considered in Congress which proposed that public lands in the West should be privatized by big landlords and cattle breeders, with the result that ordinary farmers would become tenants. The convention condemned the bill as hostile to the farmers.

For several years the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions remained a fairly small organization. Until 1884 it had no more than 50,000 members, mainly because its leaders, most of whom were representatives of the larger trade unions, did nothing to expand it by incorporating "other" labor unions. Gompers, McGuire and Strasser wanted to create a "pure" trade union

1 *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1888, Convention 1881*, p. 4.

organization. Their hostility to unskilled workers kept the mass of the workers off. Another reason was the open feud between the leaders of the Federation and the Knights of Labor. It created confusion among the workers.

The situation did not change even when the 1884 Convention of the Federation adopted under rank-and-file pressure a resolution on campaigning for an eight-hour working day from May 1, 1886.

There was yet another important reason why the Federation was unable to have more influence among the mass of American workers, especially their more class-conscious contingents. It was its outright opposition to political education of working people, to any political activity on their part and to any penetration of socialist ideas into their midst. In the opinion of Frank Foster, Secretary of the Federation's Legislative Committee, the main enemies of the labor movement were those calling for the establishment of an independent workers' party, that is, the socialists. He said: "We ... do not hold with those theorists who would ignore present social conditions, and who strive to direct the labor movement in pursuit of some will-o'-the-wisp millennium, grounded neither upon the capabilities of human nature nor the dictates of common sense. We must walk before we can fly..."[1]

But Foster could not ignore the sentiments of the workers and had to admit at the 1884 Convention that appeals sent to Congress and to the President himself asking that a shorter work-

[1] *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1888, Convention 1884*, p. 10.

ing day be made into law had produced no results, and that the workers could only rely on themselves.

As the nationwide struggle of the American workers for an eight-hour working day gathered momentum, the Federation joined it. This move helped the AFL to score political points in the future.

The progressive part of the U.S. working class realized the harm that could be done to the labor movement by "pure" trade unionism, its divisive policy, its discrimination against unskilled workers, and its subservience to the bourgeois class. Many articles in the *Alarm* graphically showed what lay behind the concepts and practical recommendations of the trade union leaders and exposed their striving for harmony between labor and capital.

IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL TRENDS

The US socialist movement of the 1880s was not a homogeneous one, either ideologically or organizationally. The Socialistic Labor Party (SLP), founded in 1876, put forward a motley of theories and practical guidelines. Marxists and their revolutionary teachings were opposed by "narrow-minded" theorists who (in Engels' words) had brought to America "intellectual old clothes discarded in Europe".[1] They preached Lassalleanism, anarchism and other doctrines harmful to the labor movement. As soon as the SLP was formed as a result of a merger of several political organizations of workers, it became a battleground between Marxists and pseudo-working-class and pseudo-socialist "orthodox".

In a letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, a well-known propagandist of Marxism in America, Engels wrote: "... the *Manifesto*, like almost all the shorter works of Marx and myself, is at present still far too difficult for America. The workers

[1] *Marx and Engels on the United States*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979, p. 336.

over there are only beginning to enter the movement, they are still quite callow and in particular tremendously backward theoretically...—for them things have to be tackled from a practical point of view, and that requires an entirely new literature."[1] In a letter to K. Schmidt he said: "At present, there is little scope for theoreticians in America."[2]

Thus, all the more significant were the activities of the Marxist members of the SLP, including Friedrich A. Sorge, Hermann Schlüter, Otto Weydemeyer, and J. P. McDonnell, editor of the *Labor Standard*. Their help in organizing strikes and their work in the trade unions convinced workers of their commitment to the ideals of social justice. Much work in the trade union movement was also done by other representatives of the revolutionary wing of the party of socialists.

Among those who dedicated themselves to the labor cause was Albert Parsons, a highly popular leader of the movement in the mid-western states (he was an activist both of the Knights of Labor and of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions).

His ancestors had come to the New World as early as 1632. Both his great grandfathers were high-ranking officers who fought in Washington's revolutionary army in 1776.

In 1868, after the Civil War came to an end, 20-year-old Parsons began to publish the weekly *Spectator*, in which he consistently advocated the ideals of the republic. He printed articles in sup-

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[1] *Marx and Engels on the United States*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979, p. 318.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 322.

port of amendments to the American Constitution that would grant civil rights to blacks, and castigated the shameful actions of the Ku Klux Klan. Thus, at the very beginning of his political career he made his mark as a staunch internationalist and champion of the social, economic and democratic rights of the working people.

Parsons got a job with the government but did not give up journalism. In 1877, after moving with his family to Chicago, he joined the Typographical Union, and from then on devoted himself to the working-class cause. In his autobiography Parsons said: "My enemies in the southern states consisted of those who oppressed the black slave. My enemies in the north are among those who would perpetuate the slavery of the wage workers."[1]

At first the SLP program reflected a Marxist point of view on the key issues of the trade union movement and independent political action by the workers. Later, however, by exploiting the insufficient ideological maturity of the rank-and-file members and by manipulating pseudo-working-class slogans, the Lassalleans led by Phillip Van Patten took control of the party. The new leaders began pushing the party toward sectarianism and opportunism. On the one hand, they denied the necessity of working in the trade unions and, on the other, insisted on confining the political struggle of the working class to exclusively parliamentary activities. This left the labor movement without an efficient, scientifically-guided leadership and could only play into the hands of the bourgeoisie.

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[1] *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs*, ed. Philip S. Foner, New York, Monad Press, 1977, p. 55.

Torn from the labor and trade union movement, the SLP was doing little to educate the workers politically and foster socialist consciousness in them.

The party's program was a reiteration of outdated petty-bourgeois and opportunistic slogans and raised none of the really pressing issues.

The result of the sectarian policy of the SLP leadership, a policy divorced from the mainstream of the mass labor movement, was "the walkout of the Chicagoans, at that time the strongest and most active group of progressive workers..., this group was forced more and more into the field of anarchism..."[1]

The leaders of Chicago's social revolutionaries Albert Parsons, August Spies, Michael Schwab and Samuel Fielden were well known and enjoyed the trust of workers outside Chicago. They were brave men and fine educators, fully dedicated to the cause of the working class.

In the late 1870s they took an active part in the Chicago workers' struggle for their civil rights, calling on the local authorities to enforce democratic legislation, especially laws on labor protection and workers' rights (municipal control of utilities, an eight-hour working day, fair wages, labor safety, etc.). In 1878 and 1879 the Chicago workers put up their own candidates for the city council and for the senate and house of representatives of Illinois. Albert Parsons was elected to the city council from Chicago's 14th district. In

[1] *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States. A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890.* Westport, Connecticut-London, England, Greenwood Press, 1977, pp. 165-166.

the 1879 municipal elections, three socialists were elected to office after polling 11,800 votes. But the success was not consolidated owing to the Socialistic Labor Party's disunity. The workers' representatives failed to get any important decisions adopted that promoted the workers' interests. The bourgeois parties and employers' organizations used their unlimited material resources to bar representatives of the workers from legislative and executive bodies. In a speech August Spies cited this glaring instance of vote-rigging: the Street Car Company found the man elected from the 14th district unacceptable and told members of the electoral commission to take the urn home and "fix" the ballots.

In 1880 there was a split in the SLP. Some groups left the party. These were the groups whom the immigrant anarchists Most, Schenck and Braunschweig, to name a few, were trying to bring under their influence.

The first attempt to set up a united organization of the "social revolutionaries" was undertaken at a congress held in Chicago in October 1881. Though the delegates formally announced the founding of a Revolutionary Socialistic Party, they failed even to agree on a common platform for their movement, let alone form a party. There were bitter factional differences, which became even more pronounced at the Pittsburgh Congress of the "social revolutionaries" held in October 1883. The split was between the "social revolutionaries" of New York and Chicago. The New Yorkers had embraced the anarchism of Johann Most, an enemy of Marxism. The doctrine they subscribed to was arch-reactionary and dogmatic which could only divert the masses from steadfast

and persistent revolutionary struggle. The Chicago movement, on the other hand, was much larger in scope and had evolved under the influence of Parsons and Spies into a kind of anarchic syndicalism, which in many respects came close to socialism. Those were the two main trends at the Pittsburgh Congress in 1883.

Unlike the New Yorkers, the Chicagoans insisted that it was necessary to work in trade unions. They even put forward the idea of a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. Although the congress refused to incorporate "the Chicago idea" in its program, it had to pass a special resolution in which that issue was raised. The resolution was proposed by Spies.

A well-educated man, August Spies came closer than others to a scientific understanding of socialism. He defined it as a transformation of society on the basis of scientific principles and the eradication of causes that engender vice and crime. He wrote: "At the time when the anarchic groups were founded ... a real socialist movement did not exist. But there were socialists of all shades. To mold these into *one* organization was the task we had given ourselves..."[1] Sorge said about Spies that his "anarchism appears as the ethical side of socialism", and quoted Spies as saying that "the Pittsburgh program [i.e. the Manifesto of the Pittsburgh Congress] is secondary, our program is the *Communist Manifesto!*"[2]

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[1] *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States. A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890*, Westport, Connecticut-London, England, Greenwood Press, 1977, p. 211.

[2] *Ibid.*

The views of Albert Parsons were set out in his book *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis*. He wrote it in the last year of his life, finishing it on October 27, 1887, when he was already in prison. The first part of the book contains a brief history of the United States from the War of Independence till 1887. Parsons examines the development of capitalism and the growth of the industrial working class in America from the point of view of dialectic materialism. In one of the chapters he quotes from the first volume of Marx's *Capital*, and later from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

This is how the working-class leaders of Chicago were appraised by Friedrich Sorge, a veteran of the European labor movement: they "stayed in close touch with the trade unions and other labor organizations, and secured themselves great respect and importance among the working population of the city. This they took advantage of on various occasions and made the bourgeois authorities very uncomfortable. Without a doubt the anarchists represented a respectable power during the years 1882-1885 in Chicago. *They had a number of intelligent, energetic leaders and possessed several newspapers with a large readership...*"[1] Sorge thought highly of their internationalist platform which gave unity and purpose to the entire movement of Chicago's multilingual proletariat.

The ideals of international working-class solidarity permeated the speeches of Albert Parsons

[1] *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States. A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890*, Westport, Connecticut-London, England, Greenwood Press, 1977, p. 204.

and his closest friends and associates—Thomas J. Morgan, a well-known socialist leader in Chicago, and John Swinton, a trade union organizer and journalist. They spoke at rallies in New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and other cities. John Swinton, in particular, gave unflagging support to German immigrants, victims of the "Exception Laws" of Bismarck's Germany.

Parsons, Spies, Schwab and Fielden were indefatigable organizers of workers' rallies and demonstrations. Parsons later told the court: "I have come in personal contact with thousands of workingmen from Nebraska in the West to New York in the East, and from Maryland to Wisconsin and Minnesota. I have traversed the states for the past ten years".[1]

In June 1885 Parsons visited Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri. His sincerity and deep belief in the righteousness of the workers' cause earned him tremendous respect among the working class. During his trip 20,000 workers heard the ardent socialist leader for the first time.

On Sundays workers used to hold rallies out of town under the slogans *"Wages Are Slavery"*, *"Exploitation Is Legalized Robbery"*, *"Workers, Organize!"*, *"Workers of All Lands, Unite!"*, *"Freedom Without Equality Is a Lie!"*, etc. The workers would come with their families. After listening to the speakers (in English and German), many would join the anarchic-syndicalist groups. In Chicago alone these groups had 5,000 to 6,000 members in 1886.

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1 *The Chicago Martyrs*, London, 1888, p. 56.

The Parsons-Spies group played a decisive role in the progressive Central Labor Union (CLU) of Chicago, which was formed in the spring of 1884 by 13 trade unions that broke away from the conservative Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. By 1886 as many as 20 trade unions had joined the CLU.

The CLU was the main trade union center in Chicago. It exposed the subservient policies of "pure" trade unionism. In October 1885 it declared that the working class should act independently in the political sphere, renounce the support of the bourgeois parties and with the help of the trade unions beat off the attack of the ruling class on the working people's rights.

The mass labor movement was gaining momentum. The deepening economic crisis aggravated the position of the working class. So basically what the workers were demanding was higher wages, an end to layoffs, and the recognition of their organizations by the employers. The campaign for a shorter working day, which was a central issue in the movement of the 1880s, ended with a general strike in 1886. It fully confirmed Marx's observation that in "the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working-day, presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e., the class of capitalists, and collective labor, i.e. the working-class."[1]

Whereas in the first half of the 19th century the most that the workers in Britain, France and other European countries could dream of and fight for

1 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 225.

was a working day of 12 or 10 hours, in the second half of the century the working class insisted on eight hours, which was quite in conformity with the new technological, social and psychological conditions of work.

In the early 1880s mass actions by the American workers in support of this demand developed into a nationwide struggle. A report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics said that never before had the workers shown such enthusiasm and determination in pressing for a reduction of the working hours.

In 1886, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of workers participating in the campaign had increased almost 12 times. As many as 320,000 joined a general eight-hour strike in May 1886. They included organized and unorganized workers, skilled and unskilled or low-skilled workers, native-born Americans and immigrants.

In U.S. history this was the first mass protest by industrial workers as a class held on a national scale.

The general strike of 1886 followed an upsurge of strike movement. In 1881 there were 130,000 strikers, and in 1886, over 610,000.

Most of the strikes took place in the largest industrial states—New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Ohio and Illinois. The absolute majority of them were led by labor organizations.

One of the first big strikes was organized by smelting workers in the western states in the middle of 1882. It was called by the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers.

There followed more strikes by smelting workers and miners, railwaymen and freight workers,

telegraph operators and textile workers. In 1884-1885 all railways owned by Jay Gould were affected by industrial action. The strikes brought victory to the workers who had acted mostly through the local organizations of the Knights of Labor.

At the beginning of 1886, however, Gould launched a counteroffensive, exploiting the inconsistency and lack of determination of the Knights of Labor Executive Committee. In January 1886 he shut down many car-repair shops on the Wabash Railroad. From then on till spring he took a series of similar steps. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the company's plan was to fire workers whom it considered troublemakers.

The workers retaliated by going on a strike on March 1, 1886. *It was the biggest strike in U.S. history.*

The success of railwaymen's struggle depended on their unity and on the support they could get from the Knights of Labor leaders. But the latter acted against the workers' interests, and Powderly was even praised by the capitalists. The *Chicago Tribune* remarked that he played one role for the employers and another for members of the Knights of Labor.

At about the same time there was another big strike. It was not only over economic issues, but over the workers' right to organize and the right to collective bargaining. The strike took place at the Chicago factory of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company which employed some 2,000 workers and produced 18,000 to 20,000 machines a year. It clearly irked the management that most workers were members of the Iron Molders' Union, the Machinists' Union and the Knights of

Labor Assemblies, and took part in organized protest against low wages, long working hours (10 to 12 hours a day), and the employer's arbitrary actions.

Back in January 1885 the company carried out yet another wages cut but promised a raise from March 1. The promise was not kept and in late March the molders, who had been particularly affected by the cut, went on strike. They were joined by the machinists and men in other trades, and by April 7 by all the remaining workers. The men were well organized and got their instructions from a strike committee.

McCormick hired strikebreakers. They were taken to the factory by boats at night and were kept there even after work to avoid the strikers' wrath. Pinkertons were called in. They clashed with the workers, seriously injuring one of them, but were disarmed by the strikers.

Tension mounted. On April 10 Superintendent Averill urged the workers to go back to work, but in vain. The same day the Switchmen's Union refused to handle goods traffic from the McCormick factory, and gave $1,000 in aid to the strikers. The *Alarm* newspaper commented: "This act ... had a powerful effect upon the McCormick Company." On April 11 the superintendent was forced to accept the workers' demands regarding wages, the recognition of their unions, and an end to discrimination against trade union activists.

But the management did not keep its promises for long. A few months later there were again frequent cases when workers who belonged to trade unions were fired. At the beginning of 1886 the workers repeatedly protested against the dismissals. McCormick then announced a lockout,

and on February 16 fired 1,400 men. He rejected outright their demands to end immediately the lockout and establish fixed wages.

That same day the workers went on strike. On February 22 they elected a committee from among members of all labor organizations, and the next day approved its plan of action and the key demands to the company. The program envisaged united and concerted action by the workers of all trades and organizations—the Knights of Labor, the Molders' and Metalworkers' Union; an end to the lockout as a precondition for negotiations with the company; and guarantees from the company that it would not harass workers who took part in the workers' movement.

McCormick, however, brusquely refused to negotiate with the strike committee. He kept the works closed until the end of the month and then announced that 300 men would resume work on March 1. He was reported as saying: "We have at all times the right to employ or discharge whom and as many as we please."

On March 1 the company hired scabs and many Pinkertons, and called in 400 police. The same day the police dispersed a large rally addressed by Parsons and Schwab. The crackdown angered the strikers still more. It seemed that they might openly confront the police, which led the *Chicago Tribune* to ask: "Will Blood Be Shed?"

The protest by workers of the McCormick plant was part of the general struggle of the American working class.

Now what was the behavior and role of the leaders of the Knights of Labor, the trade unions and the Socialistic Labor Party in the mounting labor protest?

Within the trade unions there were those who supported strong mass-scale action, or at least took a loyal stand on this question. The leaders of the Knights of Labor, on the other hand, utterly opposed organized working class protests, including the workers' eight-hour campaign. On March 13, 1886, Powderly issued a special circular which contained a directive telling the Knights of Labor Assemblies not to get involved in the eight-hour struggle. At the end of the month the directive appeared in the bourgeois press, which thought it a good "pacifier" for the workers.

Those among the SLP leaders—unfortunately, they were quite influential—who had been instilling in the workers a spirit of sectarianism and disregard for the practical, everyday needs of the workers, also distanced themselves from this struggle. The move severed what tenuous ties they had had with the mass of the workers.

From the very start, therefore, the struggle for an eight-hour working day did not have a united leadership. In each particular case, and in each town or district it depended on the initiative of local organizations. Needless to say, this was its great weakness, even though initially the workers had achieved quite promising results.

The working class waged a determined campaign in the biggest industrial centers—Chicago, Milwaukee, New York, Cincinnati and Baltimore. The protests were followed, as a rule, by the spontaneous emergence of more and more labor organizations. In early 1885 there were 140 trade unions in Illinois, and in the next 18 months another 140 unions sprang up.

This process reached its peak on the eve of a

general campaign for an eight-hour working day, scheduled for May 1, 1886.

In a matter of days assemblies of coopers, craftsmen and can makers were set up in Chicago. The general meetings of these unions unanimously decided to participate in the eight-hour struggle. Under the same slogan organizations of auxiliary construction workers (an English and a German one) were set up in mid-April, along with similar organizations of boiler workers, grocer shop assistants, beer cask makers and upholsterers. The unions of tin workers and bricklayers were greatly expanded. The man who most inspired the workers in those days was Albert Parsons.

The local authorities were formally asked to reduce the working day by the unions and assemblies of Detroit, the Central Labor Union of Evansville (Indiana), and the miners of Pennsylvania, whose powerful and numerically strong Benevolent and Protective Association insisted on the introduction of an eight-hour working day without cuts in wages. To press for an eight-hour working day, 1,500 teamsters in Baltimore set up Knights of Labor Assemblies of their own. The same demand was put forward by all Baltimore's assemblies and labor unions of mechanics.

The workers often had to go on strike to win concessions from their employers. Almost everywhere the cigar makers won an eight-hour working day for themselves through organized action in all the major centers of the industry, and first of all in New York. Back in January 1886 two thousand stonecutters in Chicago won the right to an eight-hour working day. In February the Street Railway Company in Minneapolis agreed to

reduce the working day and increase wages. The workers' demands were also met at the shoe factories of Milwaukee and at the Studebaker works in South Bend, Indiana.

Another success was a big strike by the teamsters of New York, which brought city traffic almost to a standstill for several days. With the strikers staying inside their cars, the employers knew better than to hire scabs. They held an urgent meeting, and after they failed to agree on ways of dealing with the strike, the biggest company, the Atlantic-Avenue Railroad Company of Brooklyn, accepted the workers' demand to reduce their working day from 16-18 hours to 12 hours and to raise their wages. Concessions were then made by other companies.

The New Yorkers' victory inspired workers in other cities. The teamsters of Baltimore made their own bid for a shorter working day and their demand was met.

The *New York Times* expressed the employers' anger and frustration when it said that such outbreaks of labor protest must be put down quickly and effectively.

Far from all entrepreneurs, however, gave in to the strikers' demands. By the end of April only about 30,000 workers had succeeded in having their working day reduced, and of these just a limited number had won eight hours.

The decisive campaign to press for a shorter working day for all workers was scheduled for May 1, 1886. *The working class of the country was bracing itself for the day.* On April 12 the Central Labor Union of New York passed a resolution urging all organized and unorganized workers to take part in the eight-hour campaign on May 1.

The announcement about a workers' meeting in Chicago's Haymarket Square, in English and German. April 1886.

Attention Workingmen!

GREAT

MASS-MEETING

TO-NIGHT, at 7.30 o'clock,

AT THE

HAYMARKET, Randolph St, Bet. Desplaines and Halsted.

Good Speakers will be present to denounce the latest atrocious act of the police, the shooting of our fellow-workmen yesterday afternoon

Workingmen Arm Yourselves and Appear in Full Force!

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Achtung, Arbeiter!

Große

Massen-Versammlung

Heute Abend, 8 Uhr, auf dem

Haymarkt, Randolph-Straße, zwischen Desplaines- u. Halsted-Str.

Eure Brüder wurden heute früh durch Schüsse in's Herz der Polizei kaltblütig ermordet.

Arbeiter, bewaffnet Euch und erscheint massenhaft!

Das Executiv-Comité

REVENGE!

Workingmen, to Arms!!!

Your masters sent out their bloodhounds — the police —; they killed six of your brothers at McCormicks this afternoon. They killed the poor wretches, because they, like you, had the courage to disobey the supreme will of your bosses. They killed them, because they dared ask for the shortening of the hours of toil. They killed them to show you, "Free American Citizens" that you must be satisfied and contended with whatever your bosses condescend to allow you, or you will get killed!

You have for years endured the most abject humiliations; you have for years suffered unmentionable iniquities; you have worked yourself to death; you have endured the pangs of want and hunger, your Children you have sacrificed to the factory-lords — in short: You have been miserable and obedient slave all these years: Why? To satisfy the insatiable greed, to fill the coffers of your lazy thieving master? When you ask them now to lessen your burden, he sends his bloodhounds out to shoot you, kill you!

If you are men, if you are the sons of your grand sires, who have shed their blood to free you, then you will rise! your might, Hercules, and destroy the hideous monster that seeks to destroy you. To arms we call you, to arms!

Your Brothers.

Rache! Rache!

Arbeiter, zu den Waffen!

Preparations for the campaign were conducted on the largest scale in Chicago, under the direction of the anarchic syndicalist leaders. Although they had to wage a struggle on three fronts (against the employers, the Most anarchists who had refused to join the movement, and the opportunistic leaders of the Chicago Trades and Labor Assembly), they were able to provide effective leadership and gave much assistance to the Chicago workers. The Parsons group joined the eight-hour struggle *"first, because it was a class movement against domination, therefore historical, and evolutionary, and necessary; and secondly, because we did not choose to stand aloof and be misunderstood by our fellow workers."*[1]

The Central Labor Union of Chicago adopted a resolution, submitted by Spies, on participation in the nationwide movement. The *Alarm* announced the decision on October 17 and became a militant forum for the campaign.

In the process of enlisting mass support for the movement, Chicago's anarchic syndicalists dramatically changed their own attitude to the eight-hour struggle. They went to extremes, obviously exaggerating the importance of the campaign. On April 3, 1886 Parsons, for instance, declared that the attempt to establish an eight-hour working day would destroy the capitalist system.

But despite the theoretical exaggerations, the historical role played by the Chicago revolutionaries in those tumultuous days cannot be denied. *They became real leaders of the workers*

[1] Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. 2, New York, International Publishers, 1955, p. 102.

and energetic organizers of the movement. Toward the end of 1885 and the beginning of 1886 Parsons, Spies, Schwab and Fielden addressed dozens of rallies in the mid-western states, explaining the importance of the participation of all workers in the May 1 campaign.

Back in early January 1886 the Parsons group had persuaded the Illinois Assembly of the Knights of Labor to draw up a plan for a campaign for a shorter working day. In late March Spies organized a meeting of the watchmakers' union, one of the largest unions, and addressed the meeting in German and English. Another speaker addressed the audience in Russian. The meeting worked out a concrete plan of action. About this time Parsons and Neebe had helped the slaughter-house workers of Chicago, who were working 14 to 16 hours a day for low wages, to set up a trade union, which also voiced readiness to campaign for a shorter working day.

Under the anarchic syndicalists' influence, the Central Labor Union of Chicago insisted that there should be no compromises. It criticized the inconsistent policy of the leaders of the Trades and Labor Assembly and Labor Unions of Chicago who, making concessions to the capitalists, agreed to give up part of the pay if an eight-hour working day was introduced, saying that this readiness to sacrifice would be appreciated by the employers. In connection with this Spies and Parsons called on the workers to be vigilant, warning them against any such illusions.

The sharp difference between these two positions was noted in the official press, which described the views of the trade unions as "moderate", and the views of Spies, Parsons, Schwab

and other labor leaders as "communist". The latter were accused of wanting to take strong action against the employers.

The first general demonstration of the Chicago workers, which the *Chicago Tribune* termed "the opening gun in the workingmen's campaign", took place on March 15, 1886. The workers headed for the West Side Turner Hall with streamers calling for a ban on child labor, for universal equality and an eight-hour working day. The hall, which could seat 2,000, was packed by twice as many workers, and 2,000 or 3,000 who could not get in organized a rally in the adjacent streets.

On April 10 the Chicago workers held an even larger demonstration. This time 7,000 were accommodated indoors, with several thousand remaining in the street. As at the previous demonstration, members of the trade unions had arrived in an orderly manner. The meeting demanded the end to McCormick's arbitrary actions, expressed support for the striking freight workers, and passed a resolution condemning Gould for his anti-labor actions.

Meanwhile, the employers were making thorough preparations to counter the protest campaign. They had newspapers at their disposal; Pinkerton's organization and scabs were at their beck and call; and they had the support of the authorities, the army and the police. It was decided to deploy or reinforce army garrisons in a number of cities and states. In Chicago this move was made as early as January 1886. By May the police in the city had been fully alerted, and almost 1,500 garrison troops were ready to deal with possible street disturbances. The so-called

Citizens' Association held urgent meetings at which Chicago's business tycoons drew up contingency plans.

The threat of a general strike forced the entrepreneurs to forget their rivalry and other differences, at least for the time being. In New England the owners of 49 big textile mills formed an association for the purpose of preventing a strike and depriving the workers of their right to organize. In late April the owners of 175 furniture factories founded a similar association which at once rejected the demand for an eight-hour working day and higher wages. With utter cynicism it told the furniture workers of Chicago and its environs that their employers were ready to respond with a lockout and would have no objection if the workers left the factories. The owners of steel mills, coal mines and breweries also got together. Toward the end of April the bourgeoisie stepped up its "pre-emptive" offensive against the workers, but failed to achieve its goals. For example, the association of shoe factory owners in the West announced that it had considered the matter and found the workers' wages to be "high enough". The association's president urged the workers to drop their demands for an eight-hour working day with ten-hour pay, but 15,000 workers refused to back down. The association of the slaughter-house owners of Chicago, too, failed in its attempt to persuade the trade union to pull out of the Central Labor Union of Chicago as a precondition for negotiations.

A noisy anti-labor campaign was whipped up in the press. Whereas in the previous months the papers had at times carried demagogic assurances by employers about their "appreciation" of the

workmen's problems and their "sympathy" for them, they increasingly took the capitalists' side as things were coming to a head.

The press spoke about the workers' "excessive" demands, attacked the "socialists, anarchists and communists", and called for repressions against the eight-hour campaigners. The *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Tribune* were bitterly opposed to strikes or just any action by labor organizations.

By the end of April class contradictions had become so acute that the US ruling elite was seriously worried.

On April 22, 1886 President Cleveland addressed a message to Congress *specially devoted to the labor problem*. It was the first of its kind in U.S. history. In it the president voiced anxiety over the conflicts between workers and employers and tried hard to appear impartial, saying that the discontent of the workers was due largely to the "grasping and heedless exactions of employers".

The president even assumed the role of the workingmen's defender, saying that the workers were making an "indispensable" contribution to the nation's growth and progress and were therefore entitled to the same recognition from the lawmakers as was accorded to all other citizens...

The true position of the authorities, however, was revealed in full measure during the events that soon followed. .

CHICAGO, MAY 1886

By the end of April a large number of labor organizations had put forward demands for an eight-hour working day or a reduction of the working day in general. Many also insisted on higher wages, the recognition of their trade unions and so on. The movement was most widespread, as has already been mentioned, in the key industrial centers—Chicago, New York, Milwaukee, Cincinnati and Baltimore, where the workers had strong organizations. By the beginning of May 340,000 workers had joined the struggle. Of them 150,000 made their employers agree to shorter working hours without having to down tools again, and the remaining 190,000 went on strike. In one of its editorials, the *New York Tribune* complained that strikes were following one after another.

May 1 marked the beginning of the general campaign of the American working class. Despite the absence of a single leadership it was immediately clear that it was of a massive character and that the workers were determined.

In New York, the Central Labour Union called a demonstration on May 1 in support of a shorter working day. From 6 p.m. thousands began to converge on Union Square. Workers were arriving in an orderly way, carrying flags, slogans and streamers. In all, more than 20,000 gathered in the square. As a token of solidarity, workers who had already won eight-hour working day showed up for the demonstration.

A succession of speakers expressed support for the shorter-day campaign on behalf of their organizations. They included trade union leaders and socialists. The meeting was peaceful. Some anxiety was caused by the appearance of the police. At first there were more than 1,000 of them, and later reinforcements were sent in. The police had had special training in dealing with "emergencies", but even their presence did not prevent the workers from ending their rally in an orderly fashion. Several more meetings took place there in the next few days. Since the majority of employers refused to meet their demands, 45,000 workers in New York went on strike, and most of them won reduced hours.

The first alarming signs appeared at the beginning of May in Milwaukee. It had become clear by that time that the capitalists of the city had ignored the workers' demands. The workers reacted with mass strikes and demonstrations. As early as May 1 more than 10,000 downed tools. In the evening the streets were filled with people, mostly strikers.

Some companies made concessions, but the struggle went on. Amidst the heightening tension, the employers and the police resorted to provocation. Upon learning that a city-wide demon-

sstration had been called for May 3, they began sspreading rumors that the socialists were buying wweapons. During the demonstration the police used ffirearms, allegedly for self-defense. There were ccasualties among the workers.

The workers had to keep back their anger in order to prevent mass bloodshed. The day after the shooting they organized in groups of several hundred men each and called on all factories in the city to prepare for a general strike.

J. M. Rusk, Governor of Wisconsin, hurriedly met with his staff and the employers to discuss ways of dealing with the situation. In the meantime, the police began to disperse the workers with baton charges. The mayor and sheriff of Milwaukee wanted to have the army sent in. In a message to the governor, the sheriff pleaded: "I find it impossible with the force at my disposal to preserve the peace of the country and protect property..."[1]

The governor ordered large armed forces into the city. Special detachments took up positions in the Bay View area to protect the property of the owners of the steel mill. The workers of the mill marched across the city toward the company building. When their demand for eight-hour working day was rejected, the strike committee announced a stoppage. The company responded by saying it was dismissing all the workers. The workers then held a rally, but the police charged at them and troops opened fire, killing several men.

On May 6, 1886 the army and the police managed to suppress the protests. The leaders of the

1 *The Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 1886.

labor organizations and members of the strike committees were arrested.

But, far from subsiding, the movement spread. Chicago became its center.

There had been strikes in the city before May 1. The stoppage at the McCormick factory, which involved a lockout, lasted several weeks.

In late April the struggle was joined by the loaders of the main railways in the West. They formed their own organization and elected a strike committee, which presented to the employers their demand for an eight-hour working day without loss of pay. The railway owners, united in the General Managers' Association, rejected the demand. On April 30 the men went on strike and by May 4 their number exceeded 2,500.

As soon as the loaders of the Illinois Central learned of the company's refusal, they stopped work and held a meeting. One of the men said they ought to join the Railway Workers' Union, which was affiliated with the Knights of Labor, and challenge the employers. A company spokesman threatened them with dismissals. But the workers, accompanied by office employees, headed straight for the union office.

The company hired scabs and got white-collar employees to help with freight-handling. They were guarded by police. But most of the railway lines were brought to a standstill.

The employers came under even greater pressure when, as a token of solidarity with the strikers, the switchmen refused to work on lines where scabs were hired. Some of the owners were then inclined to grant concessions, but the majority refused to give in. They decided to fight on with all means at their disposal, they wanted to

have more police sent in and to blacklist the strikers, and to ask Congress "to take action".

At the end of April there were labor protests involving railwaymen, the workers of some timber mills and gas companies and plumbers. The eight-hour movement spread throughout Chicago's meat-canning industry.

On May 1, thirty thousand more workers employed at the biggest furniture factories and also in the copper, iron and woodworking industries *went on strike*. More and more people participated in rallies and demonstrations. That day two-thirds of Chicago's factories were not operating. The city's business life was paralyzed, shops were closed and financial operations suspended. The Central Labor Union called a rally and 25,000 turned up. The speakers included Spies, Parsons, Fielden and Schwab. They urged the workers to act boldly and be determined in their fight to uphold their interests.

From the first days of the general strike the authorities by their arbitrary actions *openly provoked the strikers to commit such actions that would provide an excuse for repressive actions on a mass scale*. In *The Chicago Martyrs* it was said about the events of those years that everywhere the privileged classes resorted to violence against the people, though they protested against the very idea of the use of violence against themselves and that the baton and the bullet were often used against the Chicago workers. The book also said that the forces of law and order, the militia and the police as well as private organizations of armed ruffians were exceptionally brutal.

The strikers behaved in an orderly manner and refused to be provoked. As a gesture of protest

against the authorities' arbitrary actions 12,000 workers gathered for a rally near the McCormick factory. The workers called for an end to police violence. They were addressed by Parsons and Schwab.

But the police continued to act in the same way. On May 3, 1886 the strikers held a meeting not far from McCormick's factory to discuss their demands to the employers. At the workers' request the CLU sent its representative, August Spies. But the socialist leader did not finish his speech. It was the end of the day shift and scabs came out of the McCormick factory to the angry jeers of the strikers. It was then that the police opened fire, killing six men and wounding many more.

That same day Spies wrote a bitter and wrathful article in which he branded the employers and police as killers. Addressing the workers, he said: "Your masters sent out their bloodhounds—the police—they killed six of your brothers at McCormick's this afternoon. They killed the poor wretches, because they, like you, had courage to disobey the supreme will of your bosses. They killed them because they dared ask for the shortening of the hours of toil. They killed them to show you 'free American citizens' that you must be satisfied and contented with whatever your bosses condescend to allow you, or you will get killed!

"You have for years endured the most abject humiliations; you have for years suffered immeasurable iniquities;

"If you are men, if you are the sons of your grandsires, who have shed their blood to free you, then you will rise in your might as Hercules, and

destroy the hideous monster that seeks to destroy you."[1]

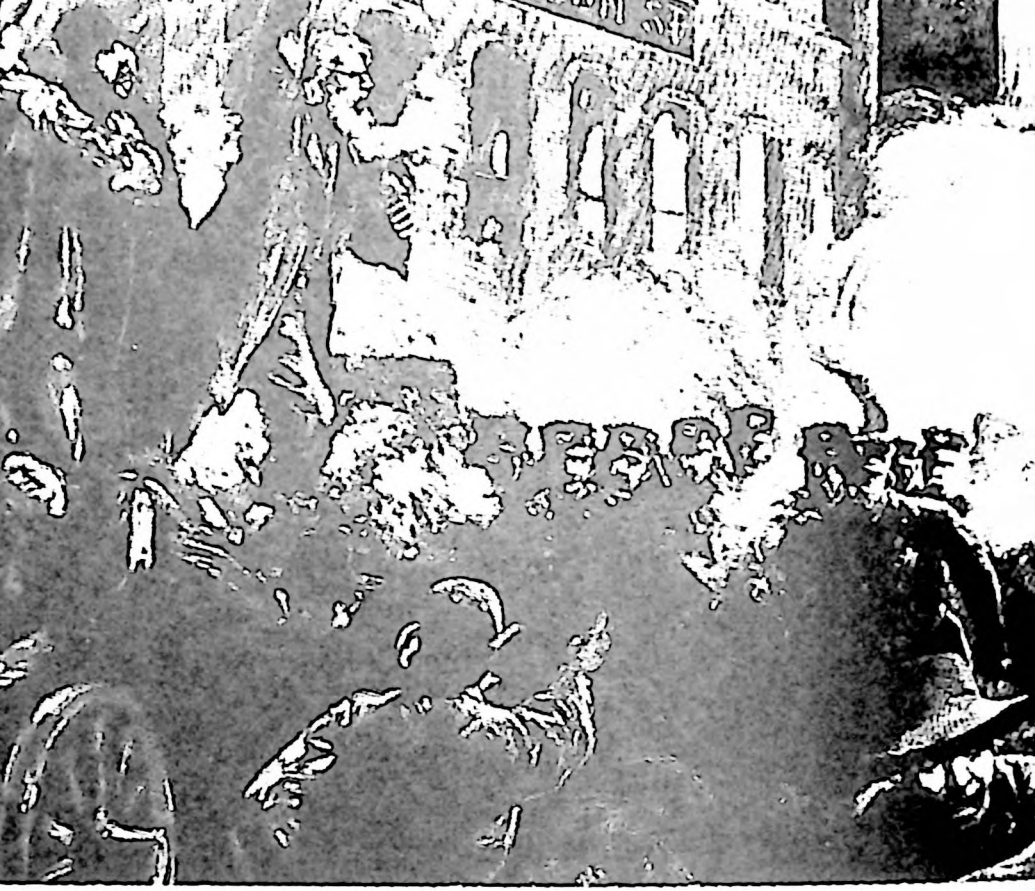
More than 1,000 copies of Spies' article were circulated at numerous meetings held by the workers on the evening of the same day. It was then suggested that a rally be held in Haymarket Square the next day to protest against the bloodshed. The idea was put forward by the Lehr und Wehr Verein group, with the participation of George Engel and Adolph Fischer. It was backed by many trade unions.

The organizers of the meeting had no intention of opposing the armed police with armed force. An announcement about the rally made the next morning in labor organizations called on the workers to voice their protest calmly and to avoid clashes with the police.

On May 4, 1886 from 2,000 to 3,000 workers gathered in Haymarket Square at 7.30 in the evening. Spies, Parsons and Fielden denounced the authorities and the employers for their actions but never urged an armed confrontation.

Speaking about the strike and the events of the past 48 hours, Spies said: "It seems to have been the opinion of the authorities that this meeting was called for the purpose of raising a little row and disturbance... Blame for violence which sometimes accompanied strikes was to be laid primarily at the door of the employers and the police... McCormick is the man who created the row on Monday, and he must be held responsible for the murder of our brothers... There are in the city today between forty and fifty thousand men locked out

1 Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1958, pp. 191-192.



because they refuse to obey the supreme will... of a small number of men. The families of twenty-five or thirty thousand men are starving because their husbands and fathers are not men enough to withstand and resist the dictation of few thieves on a grand scale..."[1]

Spies lashed out against the Chicago bourgeois press for distorting facts in order to whitewash the capitalists and vilify the workers. And Spies did not exaggerate. *The Chicago Tribune*, for example, called the workers' meeting a wild crowd. It

[1] Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1958, pp. 199-200.

Chicago, May 4, 1886. The police launch a campaign of violence. A lithograph of those years.

openly defended McCormick and praised the police for shooting the workers. When it reported the Haymarket incident the next day, it said the whole of American society was under threat unless anarchism and communism were "quickly and thoroughly crushed."

Parsons spoke mostly of the workers' hard lot. Citing statistics, he pointed out that the workers were getting only 15 per cent of the values they created, while the rest was pocketed by a small group of capitalists. Carter H. Harrison, Mayor of Chicago, who was at the meeting, later said that it was a bold speech against capital.

Parsons accused the capitalists of hypocrisy in

alleging that the eight-hour movement posed a threat to society, which was merely their excuse for abusing the workers. "Whenever you make a demand for... an increase in pay, the militia and the deputy sheriff and the Pinkerton men are called out and you are shot and clubbed and murdered in the streets. I am not here for the purpose of inciting anybody, but to speak out, to tell the facts as they exist, even though it shall cost me my life before morning..."[1]

The last to speak was Fielden. He told the meeting about capitalist exploitation and the employers' atrocities against the workers: "...The laborer can get nothing from legislation... The law is only framed for those that are your enslavers."[2]

It began to rain, and half of those present had to leave. The meeting was coming to an end when a large police force arrived and took up positions near the rostrum. It became known later that the police, numbering some 200 men, had been ready "to restore order" well in advance.

But even the mayor realized that there was no need to call out the police. He was at the meeting almost to the end, and from there he went to the police station and told Captain John Bonfield that nobody had called for the use of force, that nothing had happened or was likely to happen that would require police intervention, and it would be a good thing if Captain Bonfield told his men to stay away. The captain replied that on the basis of his own information he had come to the same conclusion.

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[1] Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1958, p. 201.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 202.

And yet the police appeared at the meeting. They, and those who stood behind them, did not want the meeting to end peacefully. They had no doubt worked out a plan for provoking a serious incident and then using it as a pretext for clamping down on the workers, and especially their leaders. The plan succeeded.

It all happened within a few minutes. A police officer told those who remained at the meeting to disperse at once. Fielden was forced to step down from the rostrum and had only time to say: "We are peaceable". At that moment a bomb swished through the air and landed between two groups of the police, throwing many to the ground and killing one. Immediately, the police opened fire indiscriminately. Pursued by the police, people fled in panic.

A few seconds later the square was empty but for those who were clubbed or hit by bullets. *That was the end of the "Haymarket riot", as the peaceful meeting was labelled by the authorities, and the beginning of the "Haymarket affair".*

"THE HAYMARKET AFFAIR"

The bomb blast and the death of one of their men sent the Chicago police berserk. As Friedrich A. Sorge put it, "a deafening cry of rage and revenge from the authorities and citizens, from the cudgel law-and-order heroes rang out. All constitutional and legal guarantees of personal freedom and security were trampled upon, every individual safeguard was thrown aside, and the naked arbitrary despotism of the police, the brutal Chicago police, reigned over the city."[1]

Wholesale arrests and searches began in the city. All leading activists of the trade union and labor movement were detained, all organizations of anarchic syndicalists were banned, and all their papers closed. The editors and publishers of *Arbeiter-Zeitung* were jailed. Whoever spoke out for the arrested were listed by the police as suspects. All workers' assemblies were prohibited. On the pretext of preventing possible assassination attempts the army put an infantry regiment on the

[1] *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States, A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890*, Westport, Connecticut-London, England, Greenwood Press, pp. 214-215.

alert. Employers set up special groups "to protect order and property".

The reactionary press wanted the detained labor leaders to be executed at once. The *New York Tribune* was spreading lies that the workers had only waited for the police to come in order to attack them. Few papers reported the incident truthfully and placed the blame for the bloodshed at the right door. *John Swinton's Paper* said: "If the armed squad had not been placed upon the outskirts of the assemblage as a menace, if they had refrained from any attempt to break up the meeting as long as it was free from tumult, there is no reason to doubt that the diatribes of the speakers would have ended in silence and peace about the usual hour of ten o'clock".[1]

Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Michael Schwab, Oscar Neebe, Adolph Fischer, George Engel and Louis Lingg were thrown behind bars.

The police had failed to seize Parsons, but when he learned that he had been indicted, he joined his comrades in the dock as a gesture of solidarity. As one of Chicago's labor leaders, he felt obliged to expose the provocation and defend the workers in public. Asked why he had appeared in court, he answered: "They will kill me, but I could not bear to be at liberty, knowing that my comrades were here and were to suffer for something of which they were as innocent as I."[2]

Formally, they were all charged with incitement to murder and with killing a policeman. In reality

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1 Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1958, p. 214.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

they were to be tried for their political convictions. As Friedrich A. Sorge said: "Socialism, communism, and anarchism—even the labor movement—now sat on the defendants' bench."[1]

Not that the authorities tried to make a secret of it. Attorney-General Grinnell said bluntly that Parsons and the other men would be tried for leading the labor protests. "They are no more guilty than the thousands who follow them," he said. In the same breath, he demanded: "Convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and you save our institutions, our society".[2]

The final decision on whether the Chicago revolutionaries should be put on trial was to be made by a Grand Jury, which met on May 17, 1886. One of the lawyers for the defense said later that everyone had realized that the Grand Jury consisted of leading entrepreneurs. The ruling quarters were satisfied, and the capitalist press was sure that Spies, Parsons, Schwab and the others would be put on trial.

And indeed this was what the Grand Jury decided.

The selection of the jury was no less tendentious. Twelve men were to be chosen from among 1,000 candidates of whom only six were workers. Naturally, the workers were left out. Of the rest, anyone who had anything to do at all with labor organizations or even sympathized with them was also turned down.

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[1] *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States, A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890*. Westport, Connecticut-London, England, Greenwood Press, 1977, p. 216.

[2] Albert R. Parsons, *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis*, Chicago, 1887, p. 53.

Under the law, the jury was to be absolutely impartial, but this provision was ignored. Most of the would-be jurymen said they had a good idea of what happened in Haymarket Square. They were all employers or persons under their command, and were therefore hostile to the workers and bitterly opposed to the socialists.

The trial began on July 15, 1886. The defendants were accused of violating the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the freedom of the American people. They were also charged with conspiracy and murder.

The prosecution produced its "witnesses"—provocateurs Waller, Schrade and Seliger. But their testimony was unconvincing. Waller, as his sister disclosed later, had been heavily bribed by Police Captain Michael Schaack who wanted him to testify that the defendants had "conspired" to throw a bomb at the police in Haymarket Square. But when questioned, the man admitted that the police had appeared at the meeting unexpectedly.

Another witness for the prosecution, Harry Gilmer, claimed that the bomb had been hurled by Rudolph Schnaubelt, Adolph Fischer and August Spies. His testimony was denied by many eyewitnesses who said that at the time of the explosion Spies had been on the rostrum and everyone could see him, while Fischer had been at another meeting. As for Schnaubelt, Gilmer could not even describe what he looked like.

Those were the "witnesses" for the prosecution. Though their testimonies were patently false, no rebuttals were accepted. Yet, the evidence was so inconclusive that the prosecution produced excerpts from the defendants' public speeches and newspaper articles. It was abundantly clear that

the men were being tried for their political beliefs.

On August 20, 1886 the court announced its verdict. Though virtually proved innocent, seven men were sentenced to death, and Oscar Neebe to 15 years of servitude. The defense appealed to the Supreme Court of Illinois and to the Federal Court for a retrial. But the appeal was rejected and the sentences remained in force.

The bourgeoisie of Chicago and the rest of the country was jubilant. The *Chicago Tribune* noted "universal satisfaction" with the verdict, saying that it was a victory over "foreign assassins". It said that the verdict had "killed anarchism in Chicago... It is a warning to the whole brood of vipers in the Old World—to the Communists of France, the Socialists of Belgium, the Anarchists of Germany, the Nihilists of Russia—that they cannot come to this country and abuse its hospitality and its right of free speech..."

These comments exposed the real reason why the social revolutionaries had been prosecuted. The ruling class was in fact trying to do what its subservient politicians, philosophers and journalists had not been able to do over the decades, that is, to persuade the working class that socialism was something "alien" and had no future in "democratic" America.

What the defendants said at the trial and the way they behaved in general exemplified utmost courage and dedication. They not only refuted the charges brought against them, but laid bare the political aim of the frame-up, which was to *slander and convict the labor leaders, and then to destroy the labor movement itself.*

Spies told the court that, as the trial had shown, everyone in America could be charged with con-

spiracy and in some cases even with murder, that each member of a trade union, of the Knights of Labor or any other workers' organization could be charged with conspiracy and even murder. Further on he said that the verdict of the court was nothing else but the arbitrary action of an unlawful court. He emphasized that the accused joined the movement for the liberation of the working people from oppression and sufferings, that they indeed urged the people to be ready for the stormy times ahead and that just explained the verdict.

Addressing the American bourgeoisie, Spies said that if it thought that by hanging the leaders it would crush the working-class movement in which millions of oppressed peoples were seeking salvation, people who for their labor got nothing but misery and privations, then it could go ahead and hang the leaders. He further said that by such an act the bourgeoisie could extinguish the spark although the flame had been raging everywhere and that it would not be able to put it out. Then he added that if death was a punishment for telling the truth he was ready to pay the price with pride and without fear.

Adolph Fischer denied any involvement in the blast on May 4. He said that he, like his comrades, had been sentenced to death for his views and principles: "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."[1]

A brave speech was made in court by Louis Lingg. He said that the "conspiracy" they were

1 *The Chicago Martyrs*, London, 1888, pp. 20-21.

charged with was nothing but unity of thoughts, convictions, aspirations and attitudes to the whole ugly and unfair capitalist system. He called the prosecutor and the judges, who were trampling upon justice, to be a bunch of hired rascals. He exclaimed: "I despise your order; your laws; your force-propped authority. Hang me for it!"[1]

For Parsons to make his statement, the court had to meet twice, on October 8 and 9. He described in detail the American workers' struggle against capitalist oppression, outlined the history of socialism and anarchism in the United States, and told about the work he and his comrades had conducted among workers.

He said the reason why they had been charged with "conspiracy" was that the eight-hour movement was becoming a truly mass movement and the bourgeoisie was apprehensive lest there should be "a swift decline in values if the eight-hour strike succeeded. The wheels of industry remained paralyzed by the thousands of laborers who were outmaking the strike in favor of the eight-hour movement. Something must be done to stop this movement and it was felt that its strongest impulse was at the West, where forty thousand men were on a strike for eight hours in the city of Chicago, and in order to make such an example of them, to quote the language of the *Times*, as to scare the others into submission, I repeat that the men in New York, capable of making such a suggestion, are capable of carrying it out, of putting it into execution... Was it not worth hundreds of millions of dollars to them annually to have it done?"[2]

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1 *The Chicago Martyrs*, London, 1888, p. 23.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Parsons exposed the comedy that had been played out in court by the perjurers, the prosecutor and the judge. He showed that the whole trial was a plot against freedom financed by the millionaires of Chicago. In prison, shortly before he was executed, he finished his book in which he set out his views on the evolution of society. His wife, Lucy Parsons, a friend and comrade of the revolutionaries, later managed to have the men's statements in court and the records of the trial and investigation published. The friends and comrades of those who were executed had published Albert Parson's book in Chicago in 1887. The same year the statements the Chicago anarchic syndicalists made in court were published in London. The book also described the history of the eight-hour movement and the May 1886 events in Haymarket Square. All these books were subsequently reissued in Chicago and London.

* * *

News of the Chicago events became known throughout the world. There was widespread sympathy for "the victims of the struggle for the cause of labor and freedom". The Governor of Illinois received pleas for clemency from individuals and organizations from many countries, including George Bernard Shaw, the French Chamber of Deputies, the Municipal Council of Paris, the Council of the Department of the Seine, and workers in France, Russia, Italy and Spain.

In the United States itself, foremost legal experts and public figures spoke out in defense of the convicted men. They included Henry Demarest Lloyd, the veteran Senator Lyman Trumbull,

Stephen S. Gregory, Lyman Gage, and Robert G. Ingersoll.

The American workers could see once again what they should expect of the government and the judiciary. Although labor organizations were terrorized after the Chicago crackdown, most of the workers protested against the repression. They justly regarded the Chicago authorities' actions as an attack not only on the labor organizations but on democratic liberties in general.

At a congress in September 1887, the Socialistic Labor Party declared that, together with other labor organizations, it considered the judgement to be unjust and dictated by prejudice and class hatred. It said that this was an act of class hatred. A resolution of the congress said: "It was generally admitted that none of the condemned men threw the bomb, and... that we could find any connection between the teachings of one individual and the acts of an unknown person, for it is a fact that even to-day nobody knows who threw the bomb. We cannot understand how it is possible to know the motives of an unknown person. The meeting, at which the bomb was thrown, was, according to the evidence, a peaceable one, and would have ended peaceably, if the police had not illegally interfered to disperse the meeting. We therefore declare that the decision is an attack upon free speech and the right of the people to freely assemble, and that its execution would be judicial murder."[1]

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[1] *Socialistic Labor Party*. Report of the Proceedings of the Sixth National Convention of the Socialistic Labor Party, held at Buffalo, N.Y., Sept. 17, 19, 20 and 21, 1887, New York Labor News Company, 1887, pp. 16-17.

As for Powderly and his associates, they were openly hostile to the Chicago leaders. When a resolution protesting against the imminent execution of the labor leaders was submitted at the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor in 1887, Powderly cynically remarked that he would rather have the *seven men hanged seven times* than bring disgrace upon the Knights of Labor.

The rank-and-file, however, felt otherwise. Back in the summer of 1886 the assembly of which Parsons was a member declined to expel him, as it was instructed to do. In November of that year the Chicago District Assembly approved a resolution expressing sympathy for the condemned men and urging that funds be raised in their defense.

In October 1886 the *Knights of Labor* weekly began publishing the autobiographies of the "Haymarket martyrs".

The New York District Assembly of the Knights of Labor declared that it would give moral and material support to the condemned men. In cooperation with the Central Labor Union of New York, it backed an appeal signed by 14 leading trade unionists, calling on the labor organizations to demonstrate against the unjust verdict.

On October 20, 1886 there were workers' rallies in New York, Chicago and other cities. But the movement against the verdict and against the anti-labor offensive of the bourgeoisie in general was not large enough, for it lacked a united and militant leadership. The bourgeoisie went ahead with its revenge.

On November 11, 1887 Albert Parsons, August Spies, Adolph Fischer and George Engel were executed. The heroes addressed their last words to

the working class. Samuel Fielden and Michael Schwab had their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment.

The executed men and Louis Lingg, who died in prison, were buried at Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago. Their funeral turned into a big demonstration of working-class solidarity. Twenty-five thousand had come to pay their last respects to their class brothers and comrades.

For many years the workers and democratic-minded Americans insisted that the case be reviewed. On July 26, 1893 the newly elected Governor of Illinois, John P. Altgeld, pardoned Fielden, Schwab and Neebe. In his decree, the governor said that these men, like their comrades, were innocent and their prosecution was a gross violation of judicial procedure.

In 1893 the workers of Chicago put up an obelisk on the grave of the Haymarket heroes.

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COMMEMORATING THE CENTENARY OF THE CHICAGO EVENTS

Dr. Svetlana ASKOLDOVA is a specialist in U.S. socio-political history, in the history and ideology of the American labor movement and in American culture and education. She graduated from the Moscow Institute of International Relations and did postgraduate studies at the Institute of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

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