

May Day 2021

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

1 May 2021

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Chicago

Anarchist-led trade unions started a campaign for the eight hour day in Chicago in 1886, using direct action as their strategy. The bosses opposed it as both economically ruinous and politically seditious. The campaign started with a strike wave on 1 May, but a worker was shot by a cop, so a protest rally was held on 4 May. At that rally, someone threw a bomb, a handful of coppers died and the police opened fire into the crowd with their guns. Eight Anarchists were arrested and falsely convicted over the bombing. Four were executed, one committed suicide and three were imprisoned. Years later, after a long campaign, the Haymarket Martyrs were exonerated.

International Workers Day

May Day, which grew out of the international campaign for the Haymarket Martyrs, is International Workers Day. It is the day when workers mobilise to demonstrate their strength and celebrate their cause. It is the day when workers show both their international unity and their separation from the capitalists. In Australia, most governments have been keen to erase May Day from public consciousness by establishing Labour Day on a different date in various States. Even where there is no separate Labour Day and May Day is technically commemorated, the holiday is on the first Monday in May.

The Working Class

After a long period of decline, the radical wing of the labour movement is gaining strength. This strength comes from the changing composition of the working class in advanced countries. Independent unions are springing up, while some established unions are tuning in to the demographic changes in their membership. The old days of unions being the preserve of white men in heavy industry are gone. Increasingly, blue collar jobs are more likely to be held by immigrant workers from the Third World, while women are becoming a majority of the union movement in many countries. For these workers, unions aren't vehicles for defending racial and gender hierarchies, but for challenging them. The MUA's motto of 'Touch One, Touch All' is as good a summary of intersectional class struggle as you're likely to find.

The Struggle

Capitalism in 2021 still hasn't defeated the coronavirus pandemic and the downward trend in wage rises in advanced countries hasn't changed. Social inequality continues to increase, while racism and misogyny are entrenched state policy. In many countries, capitalist democracy is crumbling. The radical workers' movement which is being born is still young and weak, but the material conditions are helping it develop. This workers' movement needs to unite internationally in order to overthrow capitalism and end all oppression worldwide. Anarchists need to be part of this movement, for it is our home.

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